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A Pesar de Todo: A Phenomenological Study on Latinx Undergraduate Students Choosing Their Academic Majors

Flor E. Carabez

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
Higher Education Leadership

National College of Education
National Louis University
June 2023

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Higher Education Leadership

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06/14/2023

Date Approved

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Abstract

The Latinx population is the largest non-White group in the United States (U.S.) (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.; Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Nonetheless, members of this community still experience adversity in a myriad of areas, including college degree attainment (Blankenberger et al., 2017; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Flores, 2021; Garcia, 2020; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2015; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Mora, 2022; Moreno, 2021; Seider et al., 2019; Suwinyattichaiorn & Johnson, 2020; Vásquez, 2013). Stifling college degree attainment is problematic as Americans consider it a tool for upward economic mobility (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2012; Patton et al., 2016; Patton, 2016). This phenomenological study explores whether socioeconomic status (SES) and class influence Latinx students' career aspirations at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Illinois. The intent behind focusing solely on the Latinx population is not to disregard or minimize the experiences of other racialized groups. On the contrary, this study acknowledges that, although similar, racialized groups experience unique forms of oppression (Young, 2014). Therefore, acknowledging their unique forms of oppression and using their skills to transcend oppression ensures that all their stories are elevating.

Acknowledgments

The colonizers did not make the American education system for me to thrive. I attribute my educational success to the tenacity instilled in me by the lived experiences of my ancestors and me, and the support I have received from educators and peers who validated my oppressive experiences and have done their part to challenge the status quo. Without their support, I would have undoubtedly surrendered to the overwhelming weight of being a Latina student dismantling racism.

To my *abuelito*, Elias Carabez, you passed away right after I completed my first term in this Doctoral program, and I have been devastated since then. The memory I have held onto to push me forward in this doctoral journey is our conversation during your last birthday on this earth. You initiated a conversation with me about the Black Lives Matter movement and shared the documentary you watched about the Central Park Five. I carefully listened as you expressed how upset you were learning about the injustice of that case and the continuous injustices the Black community experiences. I then shared with you the various ways I have been dismantling racism, including my work with this dissertation. You responded, “*Que bueno hija. Porque nadie se merece vivir una vida asi.*” You are no longer walking this earth, but you have made your presence known when I questioned my ability to complete this journey. Thank you.

To my *abuelita*, Esperanza Carabez, thank you for being the epitome of hope and tenacity. Since my grandfather’s passing, I have learned more about your story and the American history of our family. During one of our car rides to purchase groceries in *Zamora*, I shared my personal and professional goals. You responded, “*Ay hija, que bueno. Me da mucho gusto que seas ambiciosa y de que realices tus sueños.*” Hearing your response and learning about the sacrifices you and my *abuelito* made encouraged me to complete this dissertation. Your

sacrifices were not in vain. I am beyond proud to be named after you and to live up to our name.

To my *papi*, Ruben Carabez, thank you for constantly raising me to be myself and be brave. Your love and encouragement to push through all obstacles, including this program, fueled my desire to be unapologetic about my radical topic and complete this study. As a kid, I remember you would return home from work, kick off your steel-toe boots, and show my sisters and me your hands. You said, “You see these hands? You guys need to finish school so your hands don't look like this.” I am proud to have a hardworking father. You have been and always will be my hero. Thank you for leading by example and your unconditional love.

To my *mami*, Irma Carabez, thank you for instilling my love for learning. You arrived in this country from Guatemala with a sixth-grade education to work and send money back to your family. Still, at 63 years old, you earned your GED. Growing up, I helped you study for your citizenship, English language, and GED exams and watched you continue trying after failing various exams until you finally succeeded. I remember you would tell my sisters and me how, as a kid, you wanted to be a medical doctor. You said you would close your eyes and imagine yourself in the White robe, hearing over the intercom, “*Dra. Cabrera, por favor de repórtarse a la sala de emergencias.*” Although I am not a medical doctor, I hope you can live vicariously through me. Thank you for never quitting.

To my fiancé, Hernando Salazar Jr., thank you for filling my cup all the times you saw me depleted. Every time my self-doubt kicked in, you reminded me that I was worthy of taking up space and more than capable of succeeding. Thank you for continuously checking my well-being, providing nourishment while I read and typed away, and reminding me to rest. You are my rock and best friend. I love you.

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To my committee member, Dr. Lizette Rivera, thank you for your commitment to my success and mentorship. My high-school-self did not understand that you had higher expectations of me because you knew I could achieve greater success. Then, when I was academically dismissed as an undergrad and needed guidance the most, you came to the rescue. Thank you for expecting excellence since we first met. Thank you for your guidance. Thank you for your service to this country. Moreover, thank you for paving the way as a successful and bold Latina from Chicago.

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way for other bold Latina scholars.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Historically, higher education systems have been exclusive by socioeconomic status and race (Tatum, 2017). Colonizers created the higher education system to perpetuate the upper class (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Wilder, 2014). Anyone with funds, interest, and a few tuition-paying students could start a college. The Emergent Nation Era (1790-1869) sparked the notion that college is an excellent personal investment necessary for upward mobility in socioeconomic status (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 99). Although American higher education attainment continues improving, degree attainment gaps by race and socioeconomic status still exist (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

In recent decades, higher education institutions (HEIs) have faced challenges in enrolling and retaining students from marginalized communities (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Del Pilar & Elston, 2022; Gasman & Conrad, 2013; Hu et al., 2022; McClain, 2017.; Wilds, 2000; Zurita, 2004). Higher education professionals argue that the difficulties in enrolling and retaining students from marginalized communities stem from the exclusive and meritocratic culture of higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Burke, 2014; Cabrera et al., 2017; Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2017; Feeney & Heroff, 2013; McClain & Perry, 2017; Patton et al., 2016). College-going factors like cost (Cadaret & Bennett, 2019; Chevers, 2016; Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Kelchen et al., 2017; Macías, 2018; Soria et al., 2014; Taylor & Alsmadi, 2020; Tran et al., 2018), community (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; A. Gloria et al., 2016; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2015; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008), and academic rigor (Turner & Smith, 2015) make higher education accessible only to individuals with enough relevant economic, social, and navigational capital. Furthermore, society has

deemed education a tool for economic and social mobility (Eckel & King, 2004). Still, scholars argue that access to higher education requires resources that are only accessible to communities of middle-to-high socioeconomic status and class (Martin et al., 2018; Locke & Trolan, 2018; Williams, 2017).

Moreover, gatekeepers in higher education employ deficit-based models (e.g., remedial courses, GPA enrollment requirements, placement exams) that disproportionately benefit students from affluent communities (Peck, 2021). These models blame individuals for failing to meet specific academic standards rather than addressing the systemic barriers that prevented their success.

Terms to Note

In this dissertation, I used *Hispanic/Latinx/o/a* when referring to individuals with Latin American descendants regardless of language abilities. Historically, individuals have used "Hispanic " when referring to Spanish-speaking individuals, excluding those with Latin American roots whose language is not Spanish (García, 2020). Similarly, due to the Spanish language having a gender binary (e.g., Latino, Latina), I used the term *Latinx* or *Hispanic* when referring to the masses of Latin American descent to respect and include all genders (García, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ramirez & Blay, 2016; Salinas, 2020; Torres, 2018). Furthermore, I used the appropriate gendered term when applicable.

Statement of Problem

The Latinx population represents the largest non-White group in the United States (U.S.) (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.; Excelencia in Education, n.d.). However, members of this community continue to face adversity in various areas, including college degree attainment (Blankenberger et al., 2017; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Flores, 2021; Garcia, 2020; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012;

Gonzales et al., 2015; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Mora, 2022; Moreno, 2021; Seider et al., 2019; Suwinyattichaiporn & Johnson, 2020; Vásquez, 2013). The hindered degree attainment for Latinx individuals is problematic, considering that society perceives college education as a tool for upward economic mobility among Americans (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2012; Patton et al., 2016; Patton, 2016). However, this tool is not equally accessible to everyone.

Historically, higher education has primarily been accessible to White and wealthy communities (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Tatum, 2017), leaving others to rely on resilience. Contrary to the conservative notion of "pulling oneself up by their bootstraps" (Wildfire, 2021), researchers in stratification economics have found that race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status significantly impact individuals' life experiences and self-perception (Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Seider et al., 2019; Williams, 2017). Thus, it is essential to understand how intersectionality influences an individual's decision-making regarding choosing a major.

Existing research in the literature review addresses the barriers Latinx students encounter before (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Greenfield, 2015; Longerbeam et al., 2004) and during their college experience (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Crisp & Nora, 2012; Flores, 2021; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Huerta & Fishman, n.d.; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Macías, 2018; Moreno, 2021; Patton et al., 2016; Santiago et al., n.d.; Taylor & Galdeano, n.d.; Vásquez, 2013; Zurita, 2004). However, before this study, there was limited research focusing on the influence of adversity on Latinx students' career aspirations and its impact on their academic trajectory.

Furthermore, institutions are conferring degrees to Latinx undergraduate students at a slower rate than White students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(NCES), the Hispanic population holds only 14.9% of the Bachelor's degree distribution, while the White population holds 62.3%. Table 1 provides a detailed comparison of undergraduate statistics. Some scholars attribute the lower graduation rate to students not pursuing careers they are genuinely passionate about (Hossler & Bontranger, 2015). Educators and minoritized families often pressure young people to obtain a college degree, believing it will guarantee upward economic mobility for the entire family (Longerbeam et al., 2004; Suwinyattichaiyorn & Johnson, 2020). As a result, these communal expectations force students to make life-altering decisions very early, with the notion that if they fail, they fail their entire community.

Table 1

Associate's and bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity of student: 2018–19

DEGREE LEVEL	WHITE	HISPANIC
Associate's Degree	52.4%	24.4%
Bachelor's Degree	62.3%	14.9%

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of Latinx students when choosing their majors and examine the resources available to them during this decision-making process. The findings of this study contribute to the fields of economics and education by shedding light on the impact of exclusionary and oppressive systems in the United States on the Latinx community. The results further support the need for asset-based and inclusive resources that promote upward economic mobility within the Latinx community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the potential influence of socioeconomic status (SES) and class on the career aspirations of Latinx students. This study defined the essence of choosing a career as a career declaration. While existing literature has explored the college completion experiences of students from marginalized communities and the unique challenges they face compared to their White and affluent counterparts, little information exists regarding the impact of socioeconomic status and class during the stage of making decisions regarding their academic major. Additionally, most relevant research has tended to generalize its findings across Black and Brown communities, overlooking the distinct struggles faced by individual cultural groups (Patton et al., 2016).

Therefore, this study focused exclusively on members of the Latinx community. The intention behind this exclusivity was twofold: first, to bring attention to the unique experiences of the Latinx community during the transition from high school to college, and second, to contribute to scholarship within the community by one of its members. Both intentions aimed to challenge problematic ideologies such as meritocracy (Appiah, 2018) and White saviorism (Novak, 2022).

Significance

The significance of this study is evident in the gaps identified in existing scholarship on college completion. Much of the existing research either generalizes findings to all communities of color or focuses solely on the obstacles faced before or during college. This study fills a critical gap by examining the transitional stage between high school and college, highlighting the adversity experienced by participants that influenced their career decision-making.

Furthermore, the unique contribution of this study lies in the fact that a member of the

Latinx community conducted it. Historically, scholars have often studied communities they do not belong to, objectifying participants for publication. This study challenges that approach by leveraging the researcher's skills and lived experiences as a Latina to uplift the community through their stories (Calderón et al., 2012). It is important to note that while this study focuses on the Latinx community, it encourages researchers from other minoritized communities to replicate the study within their respective communities.

Overall, the results of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of oppression on Hispanic individuals seeking degrees, contributing to discussions on enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates. The underrepresentation of diverse leaders within higher education institutions (HEIs) is a consequence of the exclusive and meritocratic nature of the system. Recent studies indicate that most college and university presidents are White men around sixty (*The American College President*, 2023).

The dominance of wealthy White men in leadership reflects higher education's systemic barriers and exclusionary culture. The traditional culture of exclusivity and meritocracy within higher education fails to create an inclusive and supportive environment for students from marginalized communities to thrive (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Bastedo & Gumpert, 2003; Bender et al., 2019; Bettencourt, 2020; Blankenberger et al., 2017; Cerezo et al., 2013; Flores & Bike, 2014; Flores, 2021; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Greenfield, 2015; Huerta & Fishman, n.d.; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Locke & Trolan, 2018; Macías, 2018; Patton, 2016; Patton et al., 2016; Renn, 2019; Strunk & Betties, 2019). However, Americans still value higher education and perceive it to be a pathway to upward economic mobility despite the substantial commitment of time and financial resources it requires.

Research Question

This phenomenological study explored whether SES and class influenced Latinx students' career aspirations. Following the nature of phenomenological research, the central question of this study was open-ended and non-directional, providing an exploratory approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following central question organized the study:

- What are the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their majors?

I also asked additional questions to evaluate their understanding of the university's HSI designation and to explore their perspective on the intersectionality between their ethnicity and educational experience, particularly if they did not mention their ethnicity naturally.

Research Design

After considering various methodological approaches, I chose a phenomenological approach as the most suitable for this study. The aim was to explore whether SES and class influenced the career aspirations of Latinx students by examining the essence of their decision-making when choosing academic majors. The phenomenological approach provided a framework to investigate the everyday experiences of this historically marginalized population (Mora, 2022). Furthermore, phenomenology offered an opportunity to shed light on a significant milestone in the lives of American students—the process of choosing an academic major during the transition from high school to college.

Given my focus on the Hispanic community, I recruited participants from an Illinois Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). My personal and professional familiarity with the Illinois higher education system facilitated the participant recruitment process and ensured the study was community-oriented. I based my decision to narrow the study to an HSI due to the Hispanic enrollment requirement. Furthermore, my decision to narrow the study to Latinx students from

National Louis University (NLU) in Illinois was primarily due to the university's high Hispanic enrollment and accessible research collaboration. I provide more information regarding the institution in the next section. I used the following criteria to select participants:

- identified as Latinx
- Age: 18–24 years of age
- Degree level: currently enrolled full-time at NLU, pursuing their first bachelor's degree
- Socioeconomic Status: Must have been in a free or reduced-price lunch program in high school.
- Community: Must have been raised in Chicago
- English-speaking
- First-generation college student: parent(s) did not earn a college degree in the U.S.

Chapter Three provides more information regarding the research design.

Setting

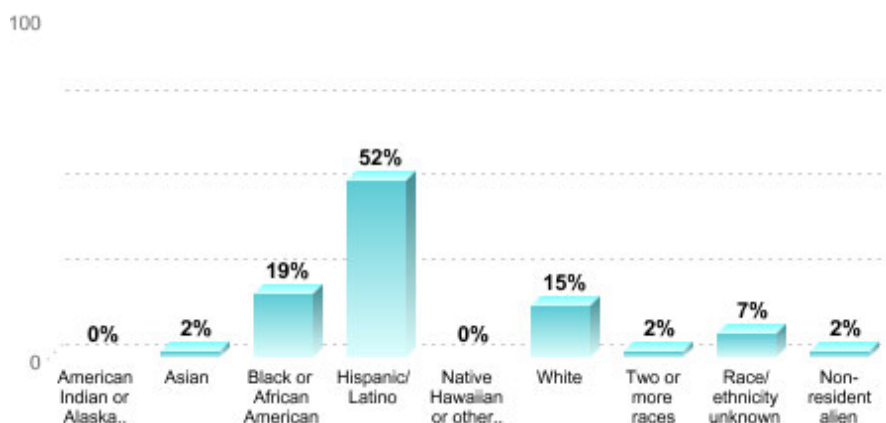
The setting I chose for this study is NLU's main campus in downtown Chicago. I chose NLU as the research site due to its high Hispanic enrollment, collaborative research environment, and accessibility to community members from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, NLU is a medium-sized, primarily nonresidential, private, not-for-profit university offering undergraduate and graduate programs. The institution falls under the Doctoral/Professional Universities category with a balanced arts & sciences/professions curriculum and a professional-dominant research Doctoral program. In 2016, NLU earned its HSI designation from the Department of Education, a recognition given to two- and four-year higher education institutions that serve at least twenty-five percent of full-time undergraduate Hispanic students (Laden, 2001,

p. 73). Chapter Two provides further details about the history of HSIs.

As of Fall 2020, the racial makeup of NLU's student body, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), was as follows: 35% Hispanic, 30% White, 20% Black or African American, 9% Race/Ethnicity unknown, 2% Asian, and 1% nonresident alien. Among these students, 5,772 identified as female, and 1,630 identified as male (NCES, n.d., para. 3). NLU's undergraduate profile, as classified by Carnegie, is a four-year medium full-time, inclusive institution with a higher transfer-in rate. According to the NCES data, undergraduate enrollment at NLU is 3,604, with 522 being transfer students. Of the undergraduate enrollment, 71% are enrolled full-time (15 quarter hours), and 29% are enrolled part-time (less than 15 quarter hours). Additionally, the data shows that the racial composition of undergraduate students at NLU in Fall 2020 aligns with the overall racial makeup of the university (refer to Figure 1).

Figure 1

NLU's Undergraduate Racial makeup



Data Collection

In this qualitative study, the data collection process did not involve using measurement instruments or surveys (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead, I used a recording device and semi-structured interviews to collect the data for me to analyze. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of Latinx students when choosing their majors and examine the resources available to them during this decision-making process. The findings of this study contribute to the fields of economics and education by shedding light on the impact of exclusionary and oppressive systems in the United States on the Latinx community. The results further support the need for asset-based and inclusive resources that promote upward economic mobility within the Latinx community.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis involves systematically examining language, actions, and documents to identify patterns, themes, and theories that describe and illuminate the research topic (Boudah, 2020; Patton, 2015). Qualitative data analysis can be time-consuming and meticulous, requiring careful attention to ensure accurate and meaningful results. For this study, I employed a five-step data analysis method proposed by phenomenologists (Groenewald, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). The steps involved in the data analysis process were as follows:

1. Bracketing: Setting aside any preconceived notions or biases that could influence the interpretation of the data.
2. Delineating: Identifying meaningful information units and categorizing them based on their relevance to the research questions.
3. Clustering: Identifying patterns and connections within the dataset.
4. Summarizing: Synthesizing the clustered data and identifying overarching themes and

sub-themes.

5. Composite Summarization: Creating a composite summary that provides a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the data, allowing for meaningful interpretations and conclusions.

Chapter Three provides more detailed information regarding the data analysis process.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides researchers with a lens through which they view the purpose and outcomes of their study (Boudah, 2020, p. 267). I used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as the guiding framework for this research study. Bronfenbrenner's theory proposes that various systems and their proximity to the individual influence human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; HQ, 2021). By employing this conceptual framework, the study examined the interplay between the individual Latinx participants and the multiple ecological systems in which they engage. These systems include the microsystem (immediate environments such as family and peers), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (external environments such as educational institutions), and macrosystem (cultural and societal influences) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; HQ, 2021).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics that shape Latinx students' career aspirations and decision-making processes. Chapter Two further describes the conceptual framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a comprehensive perspective for studying intersectionality, particularly in advocating for the liberation of marginalized communities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 251). In this qualitative study, I integrated two theoretical

frameworks, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), which offered a holistic and anti-deficit approach to explore the issue at hand. CRT and LatCrit focus on the lived experiences of people of color (POC) and acknowledge their oppression due to systemic racism in America. For instance, Macias (2018) employed CRT and LatCrit to examine how Ohio Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients of color navigate the financial barriers that hinder their college enrollment. He highlighted the various resourceful methods they employ to secure funds and pay their tuition upfront (p. 610). By employing CRT and LatCrit, this study avoided a colorblind approach to socioeconomic status (SES) discussions and acknowledged the impact of economic stratification (Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Williams, 2017). Chapter Two provides a more detailed description of these theoretical frameworks.

Definition of Terms

Below are definitions of terms frequently used in this dissertation:

- **Economic Stratification:** disparities among racial/ethnic lines (Bahn & Cumming Sanchez, 2022)
- **Class:** an individual's perception of where they stand in comparison to others regarding accessibility to resources that can contribute to their success
- **Higher education institutions (HEIs):** Academic establishments where students can earn, at minimum, an associate's degree.
- **Hispanic:** a gender-inclusive term referring to individuals with descent from Spanish-speaking countries (García, 2020)
- **Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs):** HEIs serving at least twenty-five percent of full-time undergraduate Hispanic students (Laden, 2001, p. 73).
- **Latino:** male-identifying individuals of Latin American descent (García, 2020; Ramirez

& Blay, 2016; Salinas, 2020; Torres, 2018)

- **Latina:** female-identifying individuals of Latin American descent (García, 2020; Ramirez & Blay, 2016; Salinas, 2020; Torres, 2018)
- **Latinx:** a non-binary term referring to individuals of Latin American descent (García, 2020; Ramirez & Blay, 2016; Salinas, 2020; Torres, 2018)
- **Meritocracy:** the ideology that all individuals can earn rewards (e.g., power, authority, status, wealth) through talent and effort (Liu, 2011)
- **Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs):** HEIs serving historically minoritized populations (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) (Gasman & Conrad, 2013)
- **Predominately White Institutions (PWI):** Colleges or universities with primarily White students.
- **Socioeconomic status (SES):** attainment of goods and services and access to social information and resources (apa.org)

Assumptions and Limitations

Based on the available relevant literature and my personal and professional experiences, I assumed that participants in this study would acknowledge choosing majors based on the expectation of high-paying and prestigious careers or majors that did not involve coursework they believed would be difficult. In both cases, I assumed that practical necessity rather than passion-driven aspirations drove their initial motivation for attending college.

It is important to note that the findings of this study should not be generalized to all

Latinx populations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I was mindful of my positionality, power dynamics, and insider status (Holmes, 2020; Patton, 2015). Traditional research culture has often urged insider researchers to adopt an empathically neutral stance to mitigate bias (Holmes, 2020). However, given that this study focused on a historically oppressed group and I am part of that group, I recognized that employing empathic neutrality was impossible. Instead, I drew upon cultural intuition from Chicana epistemology.

Chicana epistemology emphasizes that personal experiences, existing literature, professional background, and the analytical research process shape an insider researcher's unique sensitivity (Bernal, 1998). In other words, my lived experience was significant, along with the experiences I documented within the framework of this study (Bernal, 1998; Calderón et al., 2012). Furthermore, some practical constraints related to location, timing, and funding impacted the study's scope and implementation. Chapter Three provides more information regarding the assumptions and limitations.

Delimitations

I designed this study to focus on and explore the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when selecting their majors. This study aimed to generate something other than generalized conclusions about the broader Latinx student population. Instead, this qualitative research addressed the unique aspects of Latinx students' decision-making process to inform other students and practitioners about these realities.

The study included only Latinx first-generation college students enrolled full-time at NLU in Chicago. Therefore, I excluded students from other ethnic and racial backgrounds from the study. Additionally, I did not include Latinx students who were natives of Chicago but attended institutions other than NLU in the study. Furthermore, participants who did not

participate in free or reduced lunch programs during their high school education were not part of this study. I implemented these delimitations to focus the research on a subset of Latinx students with similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Dissertation Overview

This chapter provided a concise overview of the problem statement, research purpose, significance, theoretical frameworks, and methodological procedures related to Latinx students in Illinois who had selected a major that NLU enrolled. Chapter Two dives into a comprehensive examination of the literature that supports this qualitative study. Chapter Three outlines the specific methodology employed in this research. Chapter Four presents the study's findings, while Chapter Five offers a detailed discussion.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of existing literature, focusing on the experiences of first-generation Latino college students in the United States and the factors that influence their career interests. The literature encompasses diverse sources such as online databases, scholarly journals, dissertations, workshops, books, and online resources. While the literature contains numerous studies, theories, and historical perspectives, this review focuses on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and five key themes: higher education, access to higher education, college preparation, financial aid, and challenges to college completion. Within these themes, I focused on the unique perspective of the Latinx community.

History of Higher Education

The history of higher education in the United States has been influenced by race and socioeconomic status, impacting access to education (Tatum, 2017). Understanding the violent and oppressive history of racism is crucial for comprehending the present-day realities of racism and white supremacy within educational institutions (Patton, 2016). This section of the literature review focuses on the evolution of higher education, following the chronological order outlined by Cohen and Kisker (2009). Figure 2 provides a visual timeline of this progression.

Figure 2

Higher Education Timeline



Colonial Period: 1763-1789

During the Colonial Era, English colonists established settlements in the United States. The emphasis during this period was on religious and land-based pursuits (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). As the colonists could not persuade or coerce Native Americans into labor, they imported enslaved Africans (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). Colonizers established schools with the aim of training ministers and promoting social development. The forced labor of Native American and enslaved Africans perpetuated the growth of Ivy League institutions during this era (Wilder, 2014).

At these institutions, the majority of stakeholders were white, upper-class men. The financial support for the educational system primarily came from wealthy families, which limited access to education for working-class families who needed their children to contribute to farm labor for economic reasons (McAnear, 1955). The college curriculum of this time centered around liberal arts and language studies, with subjects like German, Greek, French, or Latin. They modeled this curriculum after the German educational system (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). Studying various subjects aimed to develop well-rounded individuals across different cognitive domains (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). As colonization expanded, the number of universities and curricula also grew.

Emergent Nation Era: 1790-1869

The Emergent Nation Era (1790-1869) recognized attending college as a significant investment for societal advancement (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 99). However, barriers to admission at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) persisted for people of color, and this challenge still persists today (Hess, 2019). During this period, HEIs began hiring full-time faculty members to teach specialized courses in engineering, agriculture, mechanics, and manufacturing

(Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 81). Governance within these institutions also changed. Governing boards, comprised of politicians and business figures, gradually replaced church control over the curriculum and the board itself (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Wilder, 2014). Additionally, the emergence of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) emerged as a response to the establishment of racially segregated campuses (Brown & Davis, 2001).

Transformational Era: 1870-1944

The Transformational Era followed the Emerging Nation Period from 1870 to 1944. Significant developments in higher education characterized it. This era commenced after the Civil War with the enactment of the College Land Grant (Morrill Act) and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill). As a result, new types of colleges emerged, including junior colleges, specialized colleges, ethnic colleges, and universities (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). The university landscape expanded to include graduate schools, professional institutions, undergraduate colleges, and service-oriented departments. Before 1900, thirty states received funding from the initial Morrill Act to establish institutions (Archibald & Feldman, 2011, p. 74; Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 115).

Despite the expansion of higher education facilitated by the College Land Grant, various barriers continued stifling the enrollment of people of color. Only with the enactment of the second Morrill Act did significant numbers of people of color begin to enroll in higher education. The second Morrill Act stipulated that only states that did not discriminate against students of color in admissions would receive the additional funding (Brown & Davis, 2001; Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 119).

During this period, competitive faculty hiring procedures emerged. Universities such as the University of Chicago introduced unique pay structures and contracts for academics,

allowing them to conduct research while teaching (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Geiger, 1985). The growth of faculty numbers had a profound impact on institutions nationwide. In 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) emerged to safeguard faculty tenure and academic freedom (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 138).

Mass Higher Education Era: 1945-1975

The mass higher education era, from 1945 to 1975, marked an essential period for increasing access to college education for people of color. This era also comprised the visibility of the Latinx community in the census. Before the 1970s, the U.S. Census did not include Hispanics as a category. Through the establishment of the Federal Interagency Committee on Education in 1973, Hispanics were recognized as one of the five permanent categories, along with Whites, Blacks, American Indians, and Asian Americans (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 314). Additionally, court decisions such as *Sweatt v. Painter*, *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education*, and *Brown v. Board of Education* played a significant role in desegregating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 195).

The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, enacted one year after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, aimed to enhance college accessibility by providing low-interest loans and grants to eligible students (Burke, 2014, p. 2). While the initial HEA enabled students from low-income families to attend college, Titles II and III of the HEA facilitated intentional enrollment and recruitment of minoritized populations. Title II granted funds to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges to enhance the quality of their teaching faculty. Title III, Part I, provided financial support to designated institutions (HBCUs and HSIs) simultaneously (Burke, 2014, p. 5). The diversification of higher education continued into the Consolidation Era (1976-1993), where the leaders of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and

Universities (HACU), an organization still active today, established the designation of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).

Consolidation Era: 1976-1993

During the consolidation era, two significant changes occurred in education: decreased tenured faculty positions and an increased emphasis on equality. Reducing tenure-track faculty positions poses a challenge as it jeopardizes academic freedom, which is essential for maintaining academic integrity (FAQs on Academic Freedom, n.d.). Simultaneously, the United States was undergoing significant societal changes. Government entities passed various acts to address unfair hiring practices, voting rights, and education practices. Many of these acts were made possible through the Civil Rights Movement, which pioneered affirmative action (Cohen & Kisker, 2009).

Several financially supported legislations influenced the diversification of higher education. The Higher Education Act of 1965 played a crucial role by providing federal funds for postsecondary education, enabling individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend college (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Fuller, 2014). The Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 made it illegal for federally funded programs to discriminate against individuals based on gender. Additionally, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protected the rights of individuals with disabilities in federally funded programs (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). These legislative measures aimed to promote equality and equal opportunities in education.

Contemporary Era: 1994-2009

The contemporary era, spanning from 1994 to 2009, also witnessed the implementation of various accountability measures for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Under the Obama administration, for-profit institutions with low performance could no longer receive government

funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). During this time, the Department of Education introduced executive actions and legislative proposals to enhance the transparency of accreditation processes and ensure greater accessibility of information for the public. Accreditation is essential for HEIs to access federal financial aid (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 521), and accreditation reviews play a critical role in monitoring the quality of higher education. Despite significant progress towards equitable and accessible matriculation, disparities still exist within the higher education system.

The legal and financial support provided during the Consolidation Era led to the growth of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) during the Contemporary Era. MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges (TCs), and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). The HSI designation explicitly supports institutions enrolling high amounts of Hispanic students (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 461). HSIs are two-year and four-year institutions with a minimum of twenty-five percent Hispanic full-time undergraduate enrollment (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Laden, 2001, p. 73). The HSI classification remains relevant and in use today.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

The belief that college education is a valuable investment for socioeconomic mobility persists today. However, people of color and under-resourced individuals continue to face disproportionate obstacles compared to their White and wealthy counterparts. Cohen and Kisker (2010) and Wilder (2013) argue that higher education in the U.S., established by colonizers, initially served the interests of the racially and financially privileged. Although later considered a "public good," higher education was primarily accessible to White and affluent men (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 249). In response to the historically unfair system and limited access to higher

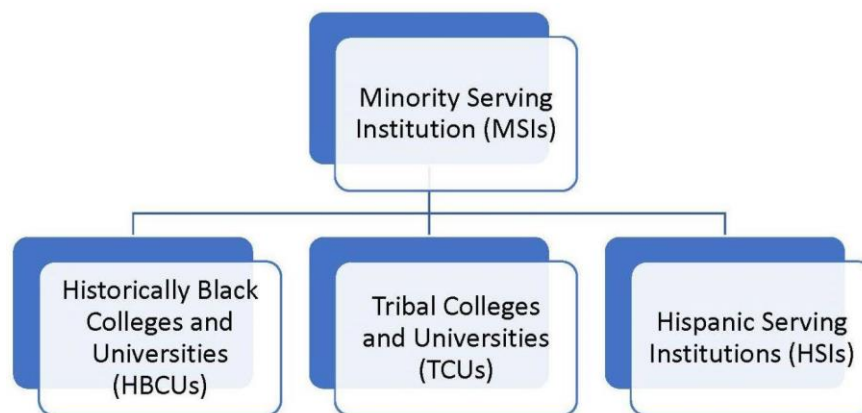
education, minority-serving institutions (MSIs) emerged (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

Today, more than a quarter of all college students in the United States attend an MSI, primarily serving low-income and underrepresented students of color (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). As previously mentioned, MSIs encompass Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (see Figure 3). The HSI designation emerged after the U.S. Census began including "Hispanic" as an ethnic category during the Contemporary Era (1976–1998) (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 537). The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) was crucial in establishing the HSI designation. Members who sought to garner national attention for colleges and universities with significant Hispanic student populations found HACU in 1986 (Laden, 2001).

While there are already 539 HSIs in the U.S. and another 352 on the horizon, the higher education system still needs to provide equal opportunities for historically marginalized groups (HACU, 2019). Physical representation is not enough.

Figure 3

MSI Umbrella



The HSI designation differs from the other two MSI designations in that it does not explicitly

state a mission to serve Hispanics. HBCUs, for instance, emerged to educate newly freed enslaved Africans, and TCUs emerged to address the cultural, economic, and educational needs of American Indians (Laden, 2004). Both HBCUs and TCUs serve distinct populations based on their respective institutional missions. In contrast, HSIs serve more than just students who identify as Hispanic.

In other words, the Department of Education does not mandate universities to use HSI designation funding solely for Latinx students (Developing Hispanic-Serving Universities Program - Title V, 2022). The primary goal of the HSI classification is to strengthen institutions with a growing Hispanic enrollment. Title V and the HSI designation provide funding to colleges with a Hispanic enrollment of 25% and a low-income enrollment of 50% (Hernandez, 2014). Therefore, predominantly White institutions (PWIs) can receive the HSI designation if they meet the established criteria.

Since establishing HACU, the number of Hispanic college students has more than doubled (Wilds, 2000). According to the HACU website (2019), 3.5 million Hispanics attended non-profit schools in 2017. Additionally, the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans continues to elevate HSIs. Laden (2001, p. 76) describes the White House Initiative as follows:

The White House Initiative is an interagency working group led by the Department of Education. Its goal is to raise awareness of the role that HSIs play in serving the community and to teach federal agencies and others about HSIs' important assets in research, development, and other services.

In 2020, 559 institutions met the federal HSI enrollment criteria, 30 of which were in Illinois (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). Below are the current two-

and four-year Illinois HSIs according to the HACU website:

1. Aurora University
2. College of DuPage
3. Concordia University- Chicago
4. Dominican University
5. Elgin Community College
6. Harold Washington College- City Colleges of Chicago
7. Joliet Junior College
8. Malcolm X College, City Colleges of Chicago
9. McHenry County College
10. Morton College
11. National Louis University
12. North Park University
13. Northeastern Illinois University
14. Roosevelt University
15. Saint Xavier University
16. St. Augustine College
17. University of Illinois- Chicago
18. University of St. Francis
19. Waubensee Community College
20. Wilbur Wright College, City Colleges of Chicago

Despite the growing presence of HSIs, Hispanic college enrollment and completion rates still lag behind White students. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 56% of

Hispanic students who completed high school enrolled in college, trailing behind the percentages of Black, White, and Asian students (see Table 2) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Additionally, in the 2018-2019 academic year, only 14.9% of conferred bachelor's degrees were awarded to Hispanic students, while White students accounted for 62.3% (see Table 3) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). These data points depict that financially influencing enrollment is not enough to encourage successful matriculation of minoritized students. What is preventing non-White students from graduating at the equivalent rate of their enrollment?

Table 2

Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in college by race/ethnicity: Selected years, 2016 through 2020

Ethnicity	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
White	69.7	69.1	70.9	68.0	65.0
Black	57.3	59.4	64.5	49.8	57.5
Hispanic	72.0	61.0	65.4	63.4	56.2
Asian	91.9	82.7	73.6	89.8	82.7

Table 3

Percentage distributions of Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity: 2018-19

Ethnicity	2018-2019
White	62.3
Black	10.3
Hispanic	14.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.2

Accessing Higher Education

Today, higher education institutions continue facing challenges enrolling and retaining students from marginalized communities. Scholars often attribute these challenges to the exclusive and meritocratic culture prevalent in higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Burke, 2014; Cabrera et al., 2017; Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Feeney & Heroff, 2013; McClain & Perry, 2017; Patton et al., 2016). Factors such as legal status, cost, community support, and academic preparation hinder the accessibility of college education. Despite the societal perception of education as a means to upward mobility (Eckel & King, 2004), some individuals encounter obstacles in obtaining their degrees. Notably, access to higher education is often limited to individuals with sufficient economic, social, and navigational capital, primarily found in middle- to upper-class communities, as identified in academic research (Kim et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2018; Locke & Trolan, 2018; Williams, 2017). This

literature review section dives into the impact of academic preparation and the financial implications of earning a college degree.

College Preparation

The ongoing debate surrounding the college enrollment and completion gap revolves around identifying the responsible party (Leonhardt, 2018). Higher education institutions often point fingers at students or their high schools, claiming that they are not adequately preparing them for the academic demands of higher education. Conversely, high schools blame students, parents, or legislators for lacking resources or interest (Mintz, 2022). However, the truth is that racism and classism are the blame for the persisting disparities in the success of marginalized individuals to racism and classism. Tatum (2017) defines racism in the United States as a system that benefits Whites while inflicting harm upon people of color (p. 86). For example, when considering the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs, it becomes evident that Black and Latinx children are significantly more likely than White students to attend schools where at least 60% of their peers live in poverty (Tatum, 2017).

Moreover, gentrification and other unjust political decisions continue to harm people of color, resulting in a depletion of school resources (Haynes, 2016; Tatum, 2017). The segregation of communities based on race and class remains unjust because schools with high concentrations of poverty and racial segregation tend to have less-experienced teachers, higher teacher turnover rates, inferior facilities, and fewer classroom resources (Locke & Trolan, 2018; Sugrue, 2016). Consequently, students from marginalized communities do not receive the same educational experience as their affluent counterparts. Recognizing the negative influence of racism on marginalized individuals' personal and academic growth, several higher education institutions have recently implemented test-optional admissions policies (Elias, 2022; Feder & Schaeffer,

2022).

As a response, some states have developed policies to support the high school-to-college pipeline. For instance, Illinois incorporated the Common Core State Standards into its preschool through 12th-grade learning curriculum to better prepare students for the expectations of college (Blankenberger et al., 2017, p. 520). Nevertheless, universities still require assistance in admitting and graduating students of color. According to a report from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE, 2022), the number of 2019 Illinois public high school graduates who pursued higher education experienced a slight decline (line 1). The gap between high school and college enrollment widens when examining the data by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Pendakur, 2016). Only 50% of African American and 56% of Latinx high school graduates enrolled in college during the fall semester following graduation, compared to over 70% of White high school graduates in 2019 (IBHE Data Points, 2022).

Furthermore, only approximately half of low-income high school graduates proceeded to college compared to the 75% of mid-to-high income students (IBHE Data Points, 2022). Additionally, despite statutory curriculum requirements, some students cannot gain admission to college due to admissions standards. Admissions criteria such as test scores, class rank, and GPA standards perpetuate the idea of meritocracy and, consequently, the exclusivity of higher education (Gomez, 2022).

Financial Aid

As higher education institutions (HEIs) and enrollments expanded in the United States, so did the range of financing options available. Fuller (2014) traces the evolution of financial aid from the Harvard endowment scholarships in 1643 to today's Pell Grant and Federal Loan programs. Before touching on the numerical data, it is essential to establish clear definitions for

the terminology used in this section, as academics often employ specific terms interchangeably in this field. For instance, financial aid encompasses federal and state loans, grants, and scholarships (see Figure 4). Although scholars debate whether loans should be categorized as financial aid since they require repayment (Konczal, 2012), this review includes them due to the Department of Education's requirements for citizenship to access federal funds and grants. The cost of attendance (COA), also referred to as the "sticker price," encompasses tuition and fees, books and supplies, transportation, and other living expenses (Goldrick-Rab, 2016, p. 40) (see Figure 5).

Figure 4

Financial Aid Breakdown

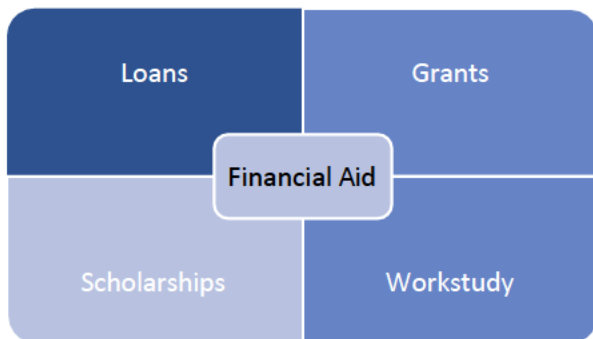
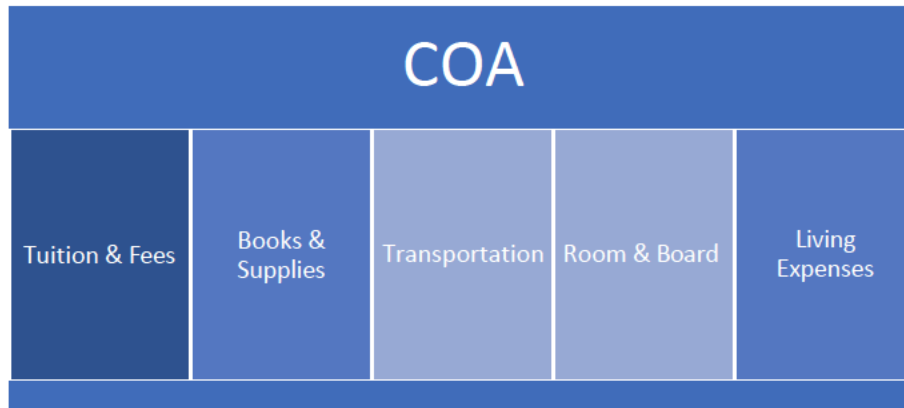


Figure 5*Cost of Attendance Breakdown*

As stated on FAFSA.gov, the Department of Education mandates that individuals seeking federal or state financial aid must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA utilizes information from the previous two years' tax returns to calculate the "expected family contribution" (EFC), which determines the amount of financial aid students are eligible for based on their ability to contribute to their education. When higher education institutions (HEIs) admit students, they consider their EFC calculations to create award letters. Consequently, financial aid packages comprise federal, state, and sometimes institutional aid, determined by students' EFCs. In any case, students typically apply for need-based financial aid through the FAFSA.

Challenges to Financial Aid. Federal and state financial aid is not accessible to everyone due to the citizenship requirement imposed by the Department of Education. To complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), applicants must be American citizens or permanent residents. This requirement creates complications and limitations in accessing financial resources for individuals who are not American citizens or permanent residents, such as DACA recipients. The DACA program, initiated in 2012 by President Obama, allows

approximately 790,000 immigrant youth to receive temporary protection in the United States (Krogstad, 2017). DACA provides eligibility for in-state tuition at some American public colleges and universities. However, the program is at risk of being shut down by government officials annually. As a result, these students face additional barriers in obtaining the necessary financial support to pursue a college education.

FAFSA ineligible students often receive no institutional aid and are charged out-of-state tuition rates. Twenty-three states offer in-state tuition to resident students regardless of citizenship status (*Basic Facts About In-State Tuition*, 2022). Scholars have dedicated their careers to exploring the various tactics individuals ineligible for financial aid employ to earn their undergraduate degrees. Macias (2018) introduces the "scheme game" as an epistemological lens to understand the measures some DACA students take to afford a college education, shedding light on their experiences of financial exclusions.

Macias' study highlighted the ramifications of the 'grind culture' his participants subscribed to to finance and earn their college degrees. The results included prolonged degree completion, personal lending, and exhaustion to the point of mental and physical illness (Macías, 2018). The vicious cycle of grind culture impacts the ability of DACA recipients and the Hispanic community to address the racial wealth gap, as many DACA recipients belong to the Hispanic community (Bruno, 2021). Additionally, DACA recipients and non-U.S. citizens face limited career options due to citizenship requirements for most American jobs. In summary, although DACA recipients and students without U.S. citizenship or permanent residency may earn college degrees, their degrees do not grant them legal status to secure employment (*Civil Rights Division / Reminders for DACA Recipients and Employers That Work Authorization Continues After the Latest Decisions in the DACA Litigation*, 2021).

Similarly, a study by Cabrera et al. (2017) shed light on the impact of changes made to the Arizona Assurance Scholars Program (AASP). The University of Arizona (UA) created the AASP in 2008 to cover the cost of full tuition and fees, books and supplies, and on-campus housing for up to four years to in-state, low-income, first-generation students (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 1). The UA launched the AASP to increase enrollment and retention within underrepresented communities. In addition to financial assistance, the program also provides mentorship, career preparation, networking, and customized success planning.

Due to cost inflation, the UA changed its AASP eligibility requirements to:

- 3.0 or higher high school GPA;
- the submission of the FAFSA; and
- Admission paperwork by March 1 (Cabrera et al., 2017).

The AASP's new eligibility requirements reduced the diversity and created attrition within the program. Students who were ineligible to complete the FAFSA due to arbitrary institutional requirements were ineligible for the AASP program. In addition, students eligible to submit the FAFSA that did not do so on time were denied access to the need-based program. These changes resulted in the reduction of students served compared to previous years.

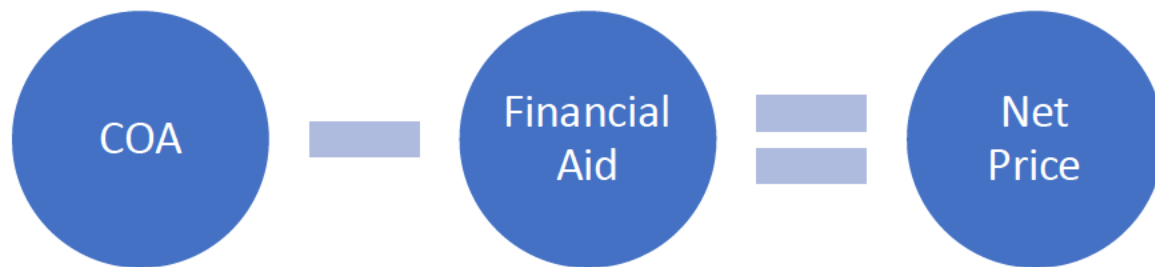
Challenges to Cost

The rising financial burden associated with higher education hinders access for many individuals as institutions and related systems continue to increase the cost of earning a degree. The economic cost of obtaining a degree encompasses factors such as the net enrollment cost, mandatory paid or unpaid internships, and the time commitment required, often preventing individuals from pursuing employment. Net price refers to the amount students are responsible for after accounting for financial aid, whether in loans or grants (see Figure 6). Unfortunately,

the persistently high net price of college education in the United States is a barrier for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Figure 6

Net Price Equation



Calculating the net price for one year can be misleading, let alone for a whole undergraduate career. First, the COA excludes opportunity costs. Goldrick-Rab (2017, p. 40) states:

Students miss opportunities to do other things when they spend time in class, studying, and going to and from school. Most obviously, when students choose to go to school instead of working full time, they pass up short-term wages hoping that their investment in college will bring much more significant lifetime gains. They would have used those wages to cover living costs (included in the COA calculation) and other essential

expenses, including those incurred by their families (not included in the COA calculation).

Second, the COA can change after the student's first year.

Goldrick-Rab (2016) explains that changes in the COA typically arise from factors other than tuition. For instance, Northern Illinois University (NIU) implemented a tuition freeze for students who enrolled during the 2019-2020 academic year (*NIU Freezes Tuition And Room And Board For 2020-2021 Academic Year*, 2019). Per the institutional agreement, the tuition freeze ensures that students pay the same rates for nine consecutive terms, roughly equivalent to four academic years plus one term. However, the cost of living and institutional fees may vary throughout a student's undergraduate journey. Many states regulate student fees to be lower than tuition and may rely on them as a substitute for state appropriations when instructional resources are insufficient (Goldrick-Rab, 2016, p. 45).

Thirdly, financial aid recipients must renew their FAFSA annually, making them susceptible to changes in their financial aid packages due to fluctuations in income and assets. As mentioned, the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) considers income and asset information to determine the student's eligibility for financial aid. Consequently, if a student (and, in most cases, their family) experiences an increase in income after the first year, they may become ineligible for need-based aid. Although there is no maximum EFC, the lowest possible value is zero, despite some students technically falling below zero if the EFC formula allowed.

Affordability without loans presents a significant challenge for economically disadvantaged students pursuing college degrees (Del Pilar & Elston, 2022). Goldrick-Rab (2016) emphasizes the importance of a college education in attaining well-paying job opportunities, safe neighborhoods, and secure futures for children (p. 238). However, studies

indicate that student loan debt adversely affects these aspects of borrowers' lives (Cadaret & Bennett, 2019; Doebling, 2018; Dwyer et al., 2012; Soria et al., 2014; Tran et al., 2018).

Therefore, maintaining financial accessibility to higher education without loans is crucial for promoting upward economic mobility, especially for individuals ineligible for federal and state financial aid.

The escalation of net prices disproportionately impacts low-income communities, creating additional challenges in bridging financial gaps and limiting their choices of institutions. This phenomenon perpetuates economic stratification in the United States (Destin et al., 2021). Notably, research from the Pew Research Center highlights that among individuals without a bachelor's degree, Hispanic adults (52%) are more likely than White (39%), Black (41%), or individuals of other races to identify cost as the primary barrier to completing a four-year college education (Parker, 2021). These economic disparities hinder financially disadvantaged students from affording a college degree (Del Pilar & Elston, 2022). Consequently, the increasing net price further exacerbates the challenges faced by impoverished communities, as it adds stress to covering financial gaps, limits their options for institutions, and perpetuates economic stratification in the United States.

Douglass and Thomson (2012) shed light on the economic stratification in college enrollment between low-income and high-income families. Their research emphasizes that students from affluent backgrounds can complete their college degrees without concerns about filling financial gaps, as elite institutions often provide generous financial aid packages. This study also highlights the limited access that low-income students have to these resources, exacerbating funding inequities between elite schools and institutions serving low-income students.

In many cases, students are eligible for financial assistance, even in the form of federal loans. While loans may help reduce the net price of education, they also create significant stress for students. Dwyer et al. (2012) explore the impact of student loans on first-generation college students who rely on them to finance their education. Their study reveals that once considered a last resort, student loans have become necessary to cope with rising costs and stagnant gift aid. The findings highlight how student loan debt can act as a barrier to wealth accumulation, irrespective of degree completion. Repayment expectations from lenders can create stress and hinder access to other forms of capital, such as mortgages and car loans, especially for individuals from minoritized communities.

Hispanic students are disproportionately represented among low-income families and communities (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Limited financial resources further contribute to the challenges faced by these students, including the need to work and the reliance of parents on them for additional support. Soria et al. (2014) conducted a study investigating the college experiences of low- and working-class students compared to middle- and upper-class students at multiple public research universities. The findings indicate that low- and working-class students are likelier to accumulate high credit card and loan debt levels, skip meals, enroll in heavier course loads, and work long hours. These behaviors increase the risk of taking a leave of absence or not completing their degrees. The need to prioritize income over degree completion arises from the substantial gap between available financial aid and the cost of attendance.

Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) also conducted a study exploring the challenges and sources of support perceived by Latino college students in a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) using a community cultural wealth model. The study participants identified several obstacles, including a lack of financial aid, insufficient personnel to guide class selection and career advising, and a

shortage of faculty members. Students also highlighted the difficulties arising from family obligations, romantic partners, and other distractions, making it challenging to focus solely on schoolwork. Notably, the study included both first and second-generation college students, dispelling the misconception that having college-educated parents diminishes the challenges experienced by Latinx students.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theoretical Frameworks

I selected Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) as the most appropriate frameworks for this study. These theories combined offered me a lens that shaped the interview questions and analyses of my study's results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 49). The utilization of CRT and LatCrit frameworks in this dissertation was instrumental in challenging the prevailing norms and directly confronting racism. LatCrit, in particular, proved especially relevant to addressing the specific issue examined in this study, as it centered on the experiences of the Latinx community and shed light on aspects that traditional CRT perspectives may have overlooked (Bernal, 2002; Contreras, 2021; Valdes, 1998). Despite originating from the field of law, both frameworks have found increasing application across various domains, including education (Bernal, 2002; Contreras, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Fernández, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Montoya, 1994; Valdes, 1998). Furthermore, these frameworks facilitated a nuanced exploration of the intersectionality between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status/class among current Latinx college students in Illinois. The following subsections describe each of the theories.

Critical Race Theory. CRT sheds light on the significance of race and racism, aiming to challenge and dismantle the normative frameworks that perpetuate racial inequality (Lynn &

Dixson, 2013). DiAngelo (2018) underscores the reality of racism, which has shaped societies, rights, resources, and privileges. CRT emphasizes the privileging of White identities and marginalization of people of color in contemporary conceptions of race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars within CRT highlight the neglect and invisibility of people of color in mainstream research (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Adopting a CRT approach requires researchers to critically examine their own racial identities, the racial identities of study participants, and their intersecting social identities (Patton et al., 2016).

Latino Critical Theory. Over time, a growing body of literature has focused on marginalized groups, including the Latino population. However, specific gaps still exist within the literature. Many research studies tend to group and generalize the experiences of Black and Hispanic students or attempt to understand them without adequately considering the influence of intersectionality on their academic journeys. According to Patton et al. (2016), adopting an intersectional lens enables us to recognize how individuals' intersecting identities shape their development and how experiences within minoritized communities may overlap while remaining distinct and unique.

LatCrit emerges from CRT with a focus on dismantling White supremacy by exploring the Latinx community's experiences of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). LatCrit challenges the limitations of the Black and White racial paradigm, acknowledging that racism is a power struggle that extends beyond this binary (Contreras, 2021; Valdes, 1998). Valdes (1998) defines LatCrit as a developing discipline within legal studies that critically investigates the social and legal positions of Latinas/Latinos, particularly in the United States, aiming to address the deficiencies in current social and legal circumstances. LatCrit serves four essential purposes: the production of knowledge, the advancement of transformation, the expansion and connection

of struggles, and the cultivation of community and coalition (Valdes, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for this study was Bronfenbrennder's Ecological Systems Theory. I chose this particular framework to support an overall depiction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 52) of whether socioeconomic status and class impacted the participants' decision making. Below is more information regarding this theory.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, developed in 1977, emphasizes the influence of an individual's environment on their development over time. Bronfenbrenner divides the environment into four systems relevant to understanding the factors impacting individuals' daily engagement and development. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of these systems and examples of factors associated with each system.

1. A microsystem is the set of relationships between a developing person and their immediate surroundings, such as their home, school, place of work, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). Bronfenbrenner (1977) defines a *setting* as "a location with specific physical characteristics in which participants engage in specific activities in specific roles" (p. 514). Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 514) says that a setting comprises a place, a time, physical traits, an activity, a participant, and a role.
2. A mesosystem encompasses the synergy between the microsystems and the individual (HQ, 2021). The mesosystem includes interactions such as the individuals with their parent(s) and the individuals with their peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).
3. An exosystem comprises links between two or more microsystems that may or may not involve the person directly but still affect the person (HQ, 2021). Among these are critical institutions of society that operate at the local level and are planned and

organically grown. They include the workplace, the neighborhood, the mass media, local, state, and federal government institutions, and the distribution of goods and services (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

4. Macrosystems are the overarching institutional patterns of a culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems are tangible components of macrosystems. While macrosystems are studied in terms of their structures, they are also recognized as carriers of information and ideology that give meaning and motivation to specific agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and connections (Anfara, Jr. & Mertz, 2014).

For instance, a phenomenological study using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory depicted how a student's experience with math and science influenced their academic self-efficacy (Ozaki et al., 2020).

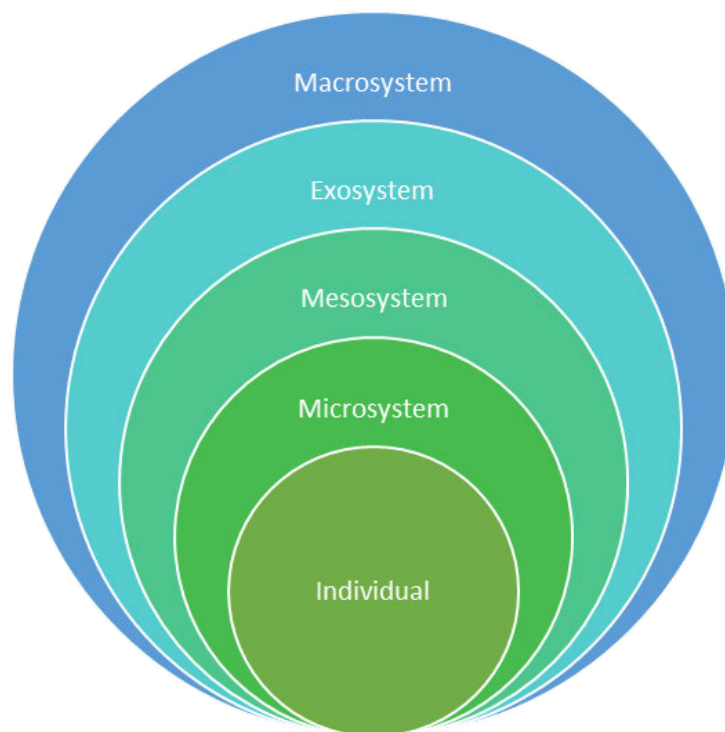
I guess with me changing my major so many times, especially the initial time just engineering wasn't a good fit for me. Math and the natural sciences was never just an aptitude for me. My fit was more so towards English and later in college once I got towards my major—social sciences. Those were classes that were a better fit for me and I saw that I did well in those classes, but I guess a major factor for me too was my grades and I guess just—I mean not getting the grades I just felt that maybe I wasn't good enough for those types of majors. So that's partly why I kept changing my major as well, 'cause some of the courses I had to take—like I had to take chemistry three times.

The personal narrative shared reflects the influence of the microsystem and mesosystem on an individual's decision-making process regarding their choice of academic major. Factors such as

aptitude, grades, and personal fit with specific subjects played a role in the participant changing majors multiple times. This example highlights how individual experiences within the microsystem and mesosystem can shape academic choices and self-perceptions of academic competence (Ozaki et al., 2020).

Figure 7

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory breakdown



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a valuable framework for conceptualizing the impact of racism and classism on human development. In American culture, racism and classism are deeply ingrained and normalized (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; DiAngelo, 2018; Tatum, 2017), making it difficult to challenge these systems. Tatum (2017) describes racism as a system that provides advantages based on race, highlighting the inherent injustice of America's meritocratic ideals. Meritocracy suggests that hard work alone can overcome all

obstacles and lead to success, disregarding the fact that the playing field is different for everyone (McNamee, 2018).

For example, while society sees education as a pathway to upward mobility (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), it is crucial to recognize that college degrees remain a privilege primarily accessible and achievable to White individuals from upper-class backgrounds. The concept of meritocracy heavily influences American culture, particularly within the educational system, where grading policies and admissions practices act as gatekeepers determining who deserves a quality education (Carnevale et al., 2020).

Combined

By employing CRT and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks alongside Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework, this study provided a comprehensive lens to explore the potential impact of racism on the development of Hispanic individuals from the early stages of life. The frameworks shed light on how access to essential resources such as clean water, healthy food, medical care, supportive family networks, and quality education are privileges that often vary based on classism and race, influencing individuals' self-perceptions and potentials.

For example, Seider et al.'s (2019) study revealed that young individuals facing adversity tend to internalize blame, attributing their struggles to personal shortcomings rather than recognizing the existence of structural barriers designed to maintain their marginalized status. Remarkably, even children as young as five can differentiate between individuals based on wealth or poverty, primarily focusing on observable traits. As they grow, their classifications become more critical of individual characteristics while downplaying the significance of systemic factors. This phenomenon highlights how young people of color tend to blame

themselves and each other instead of attributing their adversities to systems of oppression they encounter daily.

Similarly, Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) conducted another study focusing on intersectionality, which involved 357 Latinx college students from diverse two-to-four-year institutions. The researchers focused on exploring the perceptions of career barriers among Latinx students based on their intersectionalities. The findings indicated that the participants' positive affiliation with their ethnic group directly influenced their beliefs regarding their capabilities in career-related activities (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). However, the study did not specifically address whether the ethnic group or social class of the participants had an impact on their career or academic goals.

Furthermore, Carey (2019) conducted a study revealing that Black and Latino high school males often do not perceive themselves as "college material" due to their elementary and secondary school grades. This perception can discourage students from pursuing higher education, and it is particularly prevalent among low-income communities, as they tend to face significant academic setbacks (Destin et al., 2021; Seider et al., 2019; Sólorzano et al., 2005). The severity of the American evaluation system plays a role in this discouragement, as it disproportionately affects academic progress among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Chapter Summary

This literature review acknowledges the presence of racism as a systemic force that perpetuates racial inequalities, with White individuals benefiting disproportionately compared to Black and Hispanic communities. While recognizing the shared experiences of oppression

among Black and Hispanic populations, this review also emphasized the importance of understanding each community's unique forms of oppression. Intersectionality, particularly within the Latinx community, is highlighted as a lens to explore the complex dynamics of individuals' identities and their impact on personal growth (Patton et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this review sheds light on the influence of racism and economic stratification on individuals' environments and how these factors affect individual development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, encompassing the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, provides a framework to understand the interconnectedness of these systems and their differential impacts based on intersectionality (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; HQ, 2021; Patton et al., 2016)). Given that impoverished communities in the United States predominantly consist of Black and Latinx individuals (Blankenberger et al., 2017; Douglass & Thomson, 2012; Pendakur, 2016; Tatum, 2017), it is evident that racism hampers access to resources, thereby hindering the development of these communities.

As a result, many Hispanic individuals may grow up without adequate college preparation and may not pursue higher education. Enhancing academic self-efficacy among these individuals requires a multifaceted approach. First, it is essential to recognize that the lack of access to quality education and a supportive community is not the individual's fault. Second, the accessibility and achievability of higher education impacts the opportunity for upward economic mobility (Eckel & King, 2004; Cohen & Kisker, 2009). Finally, when Hispanic students decide to attend college, their experiences of oppression may influence their choice of academic major.

While this literature review covers various topics related to Latinx students and college, including the history of higher education, access, college preparation, financial aid, and challenges related to cost, it is worth noting that there is a gap in the literature regarding the

phenomenon of selecting an academic major among Hispanics. The review excluded literature on Hispanics' experiences in the workplace or their presence in corporate America, as those topics extend beyond the scope of a bachelor's degree level.

Overall, this literature review contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of racism, intersectionality, and their impact on marginalized communities' educational experiences and opportunities, particularly within the Latinx population. Further research is needed to address the gaps in the literature and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by Hispanic individuals pursuing higher education.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology used to explore the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their academic majors. I used a phenomenological scholar-activist approach for this research.

Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions (Smith, 2003).

According to Strunk and Locke (2019), the scholar-activist approach entails:

1. Working with and for our people;
2. Highlighting lived experiences grounded in struggle and hope; and
3. Recognizing the complexities of how educational institutions hold the power to both liberate and oppress.

The following section will consist of a discussion on the conceptual framework, followed by the research question and the design, which includes the methodology, data collection, and analysis. The chapter will finish with the study's delimitations, researcher positionality, and a chapter summary.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research is a powerful means to understand individuals' experiences through their lived and narrated stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 110). This research approach focuses on the perspectives and narratives of individuals, capturing a deeper understanding of their

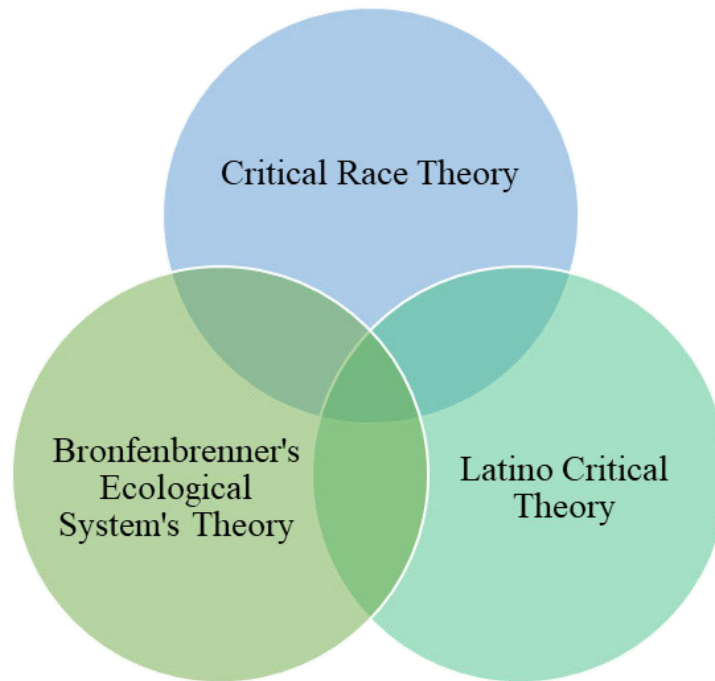
unique experiences (Patton, 2015, p. 47). Historically, the Latinx community in the United States was overlooked, with its population only being officially documented by the U.S. census in 1970. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it was not until 2005 that the Latinx designation was added to the American Community Survey (ACS) by the U.S. Census Bureau (United Census Bureau, n.d.).

The advocacy efforts of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) in obtaining the HSI designation made studying HSIs and gathering information on Latinx matriculation experiences possible. This phenomenological study aims to explore and comprehend the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students, during the timeframe in which they chose their academic majors; thereby supporting their academic pursuits and economic mobility. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 84) assert that qualitative research is instrumental in investigating problems or issues, particularly when studying specific populations, identifying hard-to-measure variables, or amplifying historically marginalized voices.

As discussed in Chapter Two, this study utilized CRT and LatCrit as the primary theoretical frameworks, along with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the conceptual framework. The integration of these three frameworks offered a comprehensive lens through which to examine the potential influence of racism on the developmental trajectories of non-White individuals from the early stages of life. By employing these frameworks, I aimed to gain insights into how educational experiences may vary based on individuals' access to resources, a factor heavily influenced by socio-economic status (SES), which, in turn, can be impacted by racism. Figure 8 offers a visual of the combined theoretical and conceptual framework.

Figure 8

Study's Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks



Research Question

While there is existing literature on Latinx college completion, more qualitative research is needed to focus on their individual experiences, particularly when choosing their major. In-depth qualitative inquiry can shed light on systemic issues and suggest possible solutions (Patton, 2015, p. 47). Consistent with the essence of phenomenological research, this study adopted an exploratory approach, adopting an open-ended and non-directional central question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central question that guided this research is as follows:

- What are the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their majors?

I also asked additional questions to gauge their knowledge on HSI designations and perspective on the intersectionality between their ethnicity and educational experience, especially if they did not mention their ethnicity organically.

Design

Having carefully considered various methodological approaches, I selected a phenomenological approach most suitable for this study. The primary objective was to investigate the potential influence of socio-economic status and social class on the career aspirations of Latinx students, specifically by exploring the essence of their decision-making process when selecting academic majors. The phenomenological approach offered a robust framework to explore the everyday experiences of this historically marginalized population (Mora, 2022). Moreover, phenomenology presented an opportunity to shed light on a significant milestone in the lives of American students—the process of choosing an academic major during the transition from high school to college.

In alignment with the research focus on the Hispanic community, I recruited participants from NLU, an Illinois HSI. I based the decision to narrow the study to an HSI on the institution's Hispanic enrollment requirement and my personal and professional familiarity with the Illinois higher education system. Conducting the study in a community I belong to ensured the study was community-oriented. Specifically, I limited the study to Latinx students from NLU in Chicago, Illinois, given the university's high Hispanic enrollment and the availability of accessible research collaboration.

Participants

In a phenomenological study, the researcher looks deeply into the ordinary meaning of a concept or phenomenon as experienced by multiple individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To

ensure accurate results, I employed several strategies. The first strategy was purposeful sampling, which intentionally selects individuals who can provide the most informative insights into the research problem under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 213). The second strategy was stratification, where the sample includes individuals with specific traits, accurately reflecting the proportion of that population possessing those characteristics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150; Ritchie et al., 2013). Therefore, I recruited participants who met all the following criteria:

- Identified as Latinx
- Age: 18–24 years old
- Degree level: Currently enrolled full-time at NLU, pursuing their first bachelor's degree
- Socioeconomic Status: Must have been eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch program during high school
- Community: Must have been raised in Chicago
- English-speaking
- First-generation college student: Parent(s) did not earn a college degree in the U.S.

Once I obtained approval from NLU's internal review board (IRB), I utilized my network connections within the university. I employed various communication channels, such as social media, text messaging, and email, to recruit participants for the study. Subsequently, I recruited my first participant and then proceeded with snowball sampling to identify the remaining nine participants. Snowball sampling relies on current participants in the study to refer and recruit new participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2013; Trotter, 2012).

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB), I initiated participant recruitment through social media accounts by posting a flier containing the study's criteria and questionnaire link. The questionnaire allowed participants to self-identify their eligibility and self-select pseudonyms. Appendix C contains the social media post for reference. I also set the questionnaire (Google form) to automatically alert me once potential participants completed the form, facilitating immediate scheduling of interviews for those meeting the criteria. Once a participant agreed to a date and time, I sent a calendar invite, a thank you note, a reminder of the study's purpose, and the consent form.

Most participants submitted a copy of their signed consent form via email before the interviews. For those who did not, I had a physical copy prepared for their signature before the interview, which I scanned and uploaded to a folder containing all signed consent forms. Regardless of the consent form's submission method, I thoroughly reviewed each participant's consent before the interview, allowing time for any questions or concerns they might have had. I conducted all interviews in person at the university's campus, ensuring privacy by closing the office door, and displayed a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the office's dry-erase board to minimize interruptions.

I interviewed all participants individually except for two who requested a joint interview. To respect their comfort level, I honored their request and interviewed them together. However, I noted that if their responses were not honest, I would exclude their interview from the study, which was not the case. I initiated the interview recordings after reviewing the consent forms and answering questions. To initiate the recordings, I signaled the start by announcing, "I hit record."

Furthermore, I used my cellphone to record the interviews in airplane mode to prevent disruptions. Throughout the interviews, I used a notebook to capture any pertinent thoughts. While I knew four participants beforehand, no pre-existing rapport influenced the data collected, and I followed the same protocol for all participants. Some participants volunteered to participate upon seeing the recruitment post on social media, while others learned about the study through forwarded posts from university staff, professors, advisors, or friends.

Individual interviews lasted up to sixty minutes, while the group interview with the two participants lasted up to an hour and a half. I encouraged participants to ask questions towards the end of each interview and concluded the recordings with gratitude for their participation. Given that the interviews evoked emotional responses, the office was equipped with items such as Kleenex and fidget toys to offer comfort during such moments.

Procedures

For data collection, I recorded all interviews using a phone and used participant self-selected pseudonyms to protect their identities. After conducting the interviews, I uploaded the audio recordings to Otter.AI for automatic transcription. I chose Otter.AI for its cost-accessibility, user-friendly interface, and positive user ratings. Furthermore, I had previously used a free trial of Otter.AI. Once the transcription process was complete, I cross-referenced the transcriptions while listening to the recordings simultaneously to make minimal corrections.

The corrections primarily involved ensuring the correct spelling of Spanish words or terms used by participants to describe their experiences. Additionally, I ensured the software accurately transcribed English words and phrases, as the software occasionally struggled with accents, stutters, or lisps. To maintain the integrity of the interviews, I did not remove "ums,"

"likes," curse words, or repetitions from the transcripts, preserving the authenticity of participants' responses.

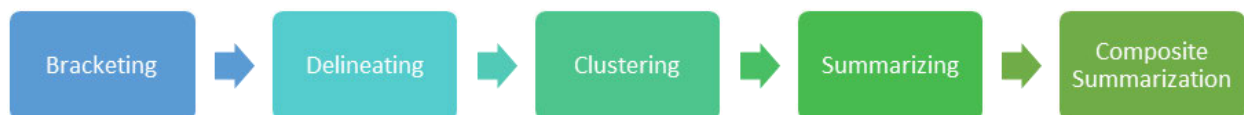
After the necessary revisions, I uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose for analysis. Dedoose is a versatile data analysis software suitable for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods analysis. After exploring other recommended analytic software options, I found Dedoose to be cost-accessible and efficient for the study's specific needs.

Data Analyses

After uploading the transcripts to Dedoose, I familiarized myself with the software's functionalities by reading a few forum posts on how to use it effectively. Subsequently, I commenced the data analysis, adhering to the five-step analytical process recommended by phenomenologists (Groenewald, 2003; Moustakas, 1994):

Figure 9

Analysis Process



Bracketing

The phenomenological analysis necessitates researchers to surpass typical positionality statements and genuinely acknowledge any biases or triggers that may arise from their interactions with the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). I acknowledged my position as a Latina higher education professional working with minoritized students, a product of the Chicago Public School system, a first-generation American, a first-generation high school graduate, and a first-generation college graduate. To initiate my bracketing process, I reflected

on my experiences as a first-generation American and college student. I grew up as the oldest among three younger sisters in a family where my parents, both born in Latin American countries, emphasized the importance of education to rise above poverty.

I vividly recall moments with my father, showing me his calloused hands after a long day's work, urging me to excel in school to avoid a similar fate. Similarly, my mother shared her childhood dreams of becoming a doctor and hearing her name announced over a hospital intercom. These experiences instilled an innate expectation to graduate from college and pursue a medical career, specifically as a pediatrician, to help sick children and youth facing adversity.

However, my journey towards earning a degree could have been more straightforward. After facing academic dismissal in my first year of college, I realized that I could not solely rely on my parents for financial or academic support (Carabez, 2022). I sought guidance from friends and past advisors, learning to self-advocate and eventually earning my Associate's degree from a community college before returning to my initial institution. Although I initially pursued a biology major, I soon realized I needed to find a better fit, as math and science were not my strengths. After much contemplation, I changed my major to Community Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE), where I thrived.

This period of my life was challenging and isolating. As the first in my family to attend college, I felt the weight of setting an example and navigating the college-going process independently. Despite my parents' best efforts to support me, I persisted independently, driven by the fear of disappointing them.

As a Latina educator at NLU, I anticipated finding echoes of my experiences within the participants' narratives, given the criteria established for this study. I expected to hear stories of participants feeling compelled to choose their major due to parental influence or the perception

that they would not excel in another field. I also anticipated encountering various factors that hindered them from pursuing their true passions. Past conversations with NLU students and my awareness of marginalized students' ongoing challenges in pursuing certain professions shaped these expectations.

Delineating

After utilizing Otter to transcribe the audio data automatically, I meticulously reviewed the transcripts while listening to the audio to ensure accuracy and comprehension. Subsequently, I initiated the coding process, identifying and categorizing excerpts related to the participants' experiences in selecting their academic disciplines. This coding process involved multiple review cycles, coding, and decoding to eliminate redundancies. The primary objective was to discern common themes and patterns among the nine participants (Groenewald, 2003, p. 50).

To ensure that my coding was based solely on the participants' experiences and not influenced by my own biases, I kept a copy of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the central question, and the bracketing statement close at hand during the coding process. This practice served as a constant reminder to maintain objectivity and align the coding with the research's overarching objectives.

Clustering

After removing any repetitive excerpts, I carefully examined the remaining passages to comprehensively understand how the participants experienced the phenomenon. During this review, I discerned common essences that contributed to their experiences. To facilitate later analysis, I color-coded these identified essences. As a result of this process, I identified five distinct themes that together constituted the phenomenon of Latinx undergraduate students when selecting their academic majors.

Summarizing

Upon identifying the five themes, I ensured the validity of the analysis by summarizing each participant's experience and cross-referencing it with the themes to confirm whether the themes accurately captured the essence of what each participant had shared. This process was essential to validate the robustness and reliability of the identified themes in representing the participants' lived experiences.

Composite Summarization

After summarizing each participant's experience and validating the themes, I conducted a holistic review to capture the phenomenon's overall essence. Chapter Four presents the study's results, showcasing the identified themes in detail.

Delimitations

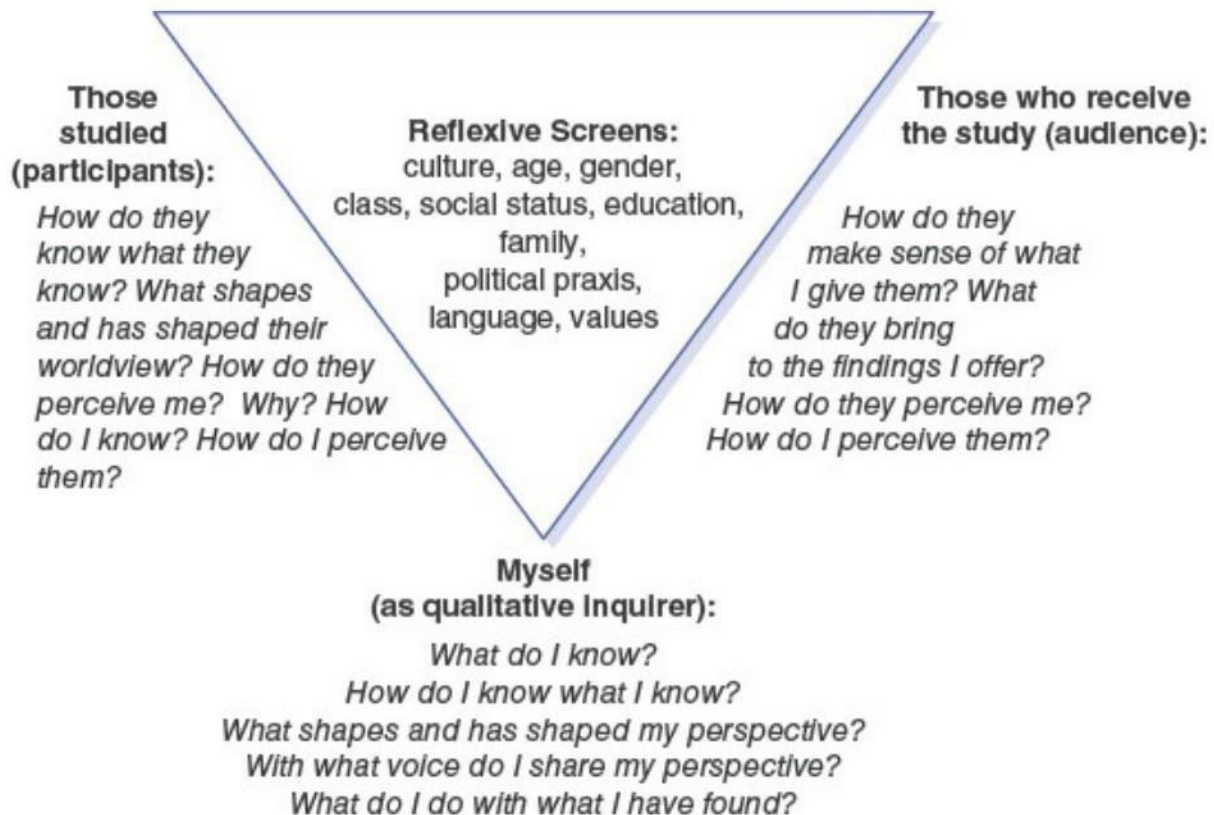
This study specifically focused on exploring the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their majors. It did not aim to draw generalized conclusions about the broader Latinx student population. Instead, the qualitative research sought to gain in-depth insights into the unique aspects of Latinx students' decision-making processes to inform other students and practitioners about these realities. I limited the study to first-generation Latinx college students enrolled full-time at NLU in Chicago. Consequently, I excluded students from other ethnic and racial backgrounds from participating.

I did not include Latinx students native to Chicago who attended institutions other than NLU in the study. Furthermore, I excluded participants who did not participate in free or reduced lunch programs during their high school education. I established these delimitations to concentrate the investigation on a subset of Latinx students with similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative studies, the researcher plays a crucial role as the instrument. While conventional White qualitative norms advocate for non-biases and neutrality (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015), I know that complete detachment is unattainable as an insider and researcher. As a Latina higher education professional with experience working with minoritized students, a product of the Chicago Public School system, a first-generation American, a first-generation high school graduate, and a first-generation college graduate, I cannot adopt a stance of empathic neutrality. Instead, I embraced the potential resonance between my experiences and those of the participants (Bernal, 1998; Calderón et al., 2012; Montoya, 1994).

Additionally, I engaged in reflexivity to acknowledge how my experiences with the phenomenon may influence my interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton (2015, p. 133) outlines a triangulated inquiry of reflexive questions, as illustrated in Figure 10, to facilitate a thoughtful examination of my positionality and its impact on the research process. As I interpreted the data, I engaged in reflexive questions to ensure organic resonance.

Figure 10*Reflexive Questions: Triangulated Inquiry***Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented an overview of the methodologies I employed in this study, which aimed to explore how Latinx undergraduate students in Illinois choose their majors based on their lived experiences. The data collection process involved conducting documented, analyzed, and coded interviews with Latinx undergraduate students at NLU. Additionally, I provided a positionality statement, acknowledging potential biases stemming from my insider status and detailing how I managed these biases throughout the study.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students in selecting their majors. The insights gained from

this study are valuable to educators, parents, policymakers, and other Latinx students contemplating a college education, as they offer a deeper understanding of the factors influencing academic and career decisions within this specific demographic.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This study dove into the experiences of undergraduate Latinx students enrolled in an Illinois HSI as they made decisions about their academic majors. The existing gaps in the literature prompted the research, which led me to investigate the factors influencing the academic major choices of first-generation Latinx students from Chicago who had received free or reduced-price lunches during high school. To gain insights into their lived experiences, I collected data through qualitative in-person interviews with students who self-identified as meeting all the specified criteria. I carefully crafted the interview protocol to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences from their perspective while considering the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in this research. Ultimately, this study aimed to answer the research question:

- What are the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their majors?

This chapter focuses on exploring the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduates using a phenomenological approach. I integrated CRT, LatCrit, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to enrich the analysis and data-gathering process. It is important to note that this chapter solely presents the results, while Chapter Five focuses on the interpretations of these findings (Boudah, 2020, p. 245). The next section provides a detailed description of the study, including information about the participants and the context in which it took place. Following this, I present the findings derived from data analysis, where five significant themes emerged: 1. "Helping People," 2. Pivotal Experience, 3. Parent Input, 4. School Role, and 5. Emotion. These themes capture the participants' lived experiences during their decision-making process regarding

academic majors. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and how they address the research questions guiding this study.

The Study

This research aimed to examine the potential influence of socioeconomic status and class on the career aspirations of Latinx undergraduate students at an Illinois HSI when they selected their academic majors. The study primarily focused on the lived experiences and decisions of the participants. The interview protocol consisted of questions that focused on the participants' experiences, including exploring whether the HSI designation or ethnicity played a role in their decision to choose their academic paths at the institution. The interview questions covered family dynamics, educational experiences leading up to selecting their academic major, and the support and relationships that influenced their decision-making process. The limited number of questions about the decision to attend the HSI and the participants' awareness of the HSI designation was significant to the research scope. This significance arises because most HSI-related research has historically focused on institutions in Texas and California, while Illinois is emerging as a notable player in this context. Finally, I clearly explained the purpose of the study at the beginning of each interview. I steered the conversation back to the relevant topics whenever participants veered off into unrelated tangents to maintain focus and relevance.

The Participants

Below is a brief overview of the participants and their self-identified characteristics:

Table 4*Participants and their characteristics*

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	MAJOR	CAREER ASPIRATION	YEAR IN COLLEGE
Anastasio	Female	Criminal Justice	Detective	Senior
Bella	Female	Early Childhood Education	Special Education Teacher	Senior
Julio	Male	Secondary Education	Math Teacher	Junior
Maria	Female	Psychology	Not specified	Sophomore
Richie	Male	Psychology	Therapist	Senior
Snoopy	Female	Social Work	Social Worker	Senior
Tiffany	Female	Criminal Justice	Homicide Detective	Junior

V	Male	Criminal Justice	Police Officer	Not specified
Vanessa	Female	Computer Science and Informational Systems	Not specified	Junior

The Context

Despite the growing list of HSIs in Illinois, this study only invited students from NLU who self-identified as meeting the formerly listed criteria. The decision to work only with NLU stemmed from the university's accessibility to researchers and commitment to matriculating minoritized students. Accessing the IRB applications was easy, and the IRB was communicative with my questions. Unfortunately, I did not have the same luck with the two other institutions I had initially considered. Nonetheless, moving forward with only NLU did not threaten the integrity of my study as my study did not assess HSIs. I opted to collaborate with HSIs to have a higher probability of recruiting Latinx participants since HSIs have at least 25% Latinx enrollment.

As mentioned in Chapter One, NLU has been experiencing growth in its Hispanic student population within the undergraduate college and is dedicated to fostering the overall success of all its students. The institution introduced its 2030 Strategic Plan during the Fall term of 2020, which involves updates to its mission, vision, and values and an entirely new strategy to achieve these updates. The modified mission statement emphasizes NLU as "an inclusive, innovative community providing educational opportunities that inspire and empower all learners as they

prepare for and advance in meaningful lives and productive careers" (NLU, 2020, p. 4). The revised vision statement envisions NLU as a contemporary, comprehensive university that equips diverse students for sustained professional success (NLU, 2020, p. 6).

Furthermore, NLU has redefined its core values (2020, p. 5):

- **Innovation:** As we work to understand and address urgent educational challenges in a diverse and dynamic global era, we refuse to be bound by existing structures or traditional thinking. We apply research and evidence to create forward-looking, sustainable solutions to these challenges.
- **Access:** From its founding, NLU has strived to expand access to higher education, especially for those who have historically encountered barriers due to geography, marginality, or economic status. We embrace and build upon the strength that comes from a diverse student body, faculty, and staff.
- **Excellence:** At NLU, we hold ourselves accountable for bringing each student to a high academic achievement level and career success. This means we are committed to providing the highest quality academic experience and support services to each student. We continuously work to improve our processes and outcomes.
- **Equity:** We believe everyone should have a fair and equal chance at succeeding.

For this study, I chose the main campus of NLU, located in downtown Chicago, as the research setting due to its accessibility to students across the Chicagoland area.

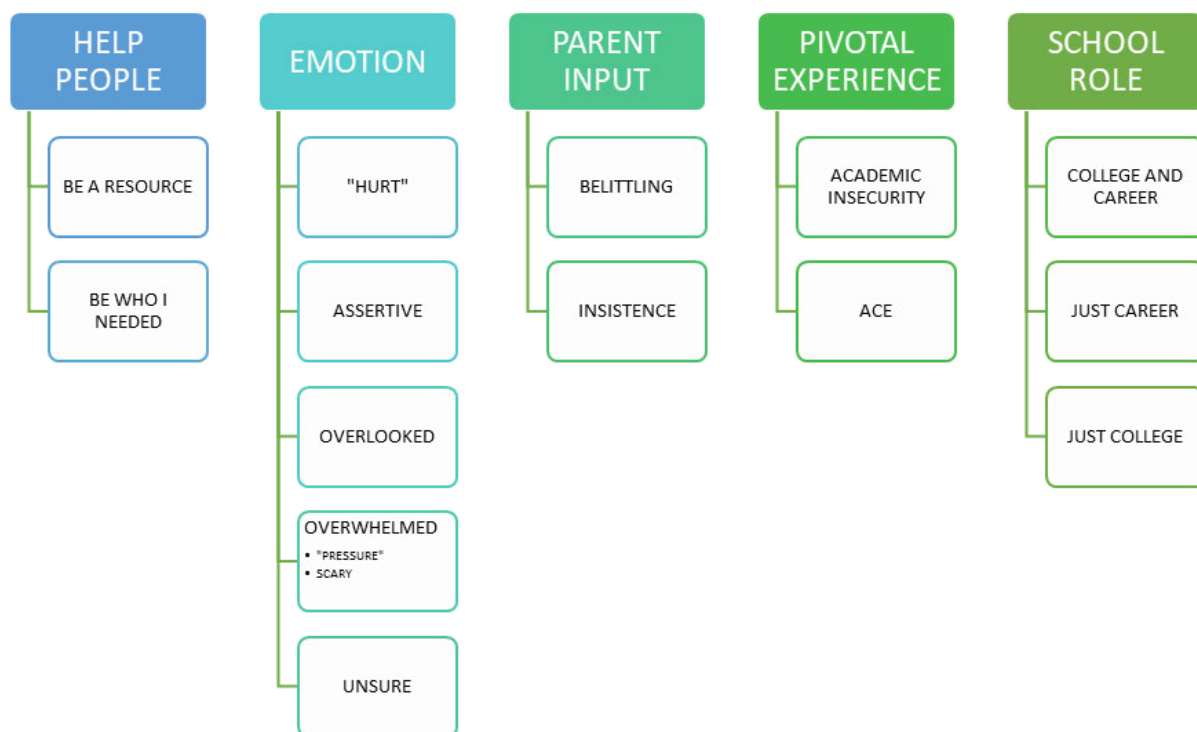
Themes

During the data analysis phase, I performed two rounds of open coding. Initial and line-by-line coding were integral to the delineating stage of the analytical process. In the clustering stage, I identified 21 principal codes after merging and eliminating redundant codes (see Figure

11). Subsequently, I carefully examined the remaining codes to identify themes aligned with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and research questions. This analysis identified five themes: helping people, pivotal experiences, parent input, school role, and emotion. The upcoming sections present the findings for these themes, incorporating concise narratives shared by the participants.

Figure 11

Themes and codes



Helping People

The theme of "Helping People" revolves around the participants' aspiration to look out for the well-being of others, regardless of their backgrounds. This theme emerged from two distinct qualities: "be who I needed" and "be a resource." The first quality, "be who I needed," is illustrated by the following excerpts:

“Because especially with special education, I want to make a difference with those kids because I don't want them to go through what I went through and feel like no one hears them out.”

“And I always remember telling my mom like, hey, like one day, I want to do that. Like, I want to pay homage to like everything that they did for me.”

So I ultimately decided high school, mainly because I feel like that's the age where I personally probably needed somebody the most that looked like me to tell me, like, Hey, you're enough. like, you do whatever you want to do.

The second quality, "be a resource," is reflected in these excerpts:

I guess I just always wanted to be like a supporting character, like, Hey, you can do this; we can get you out. But now you need to start doing things on your own, you know? The whole, I can probably change this person's life just by being there.

“I just want to help people, whoever they may be.”

Anyone's need, basically, because I feel that it would be playing my part into law enforcement. Okay, so I think that playing my part into law enforcement rather than trying to follow a passion that would just benefit me or that would maybe influence people, although that is not bad. But it's not; it doesn't give a sense of community into what the role of being in law enforcement and those types of agencies would.

Pivotal Experience

I defined this theme as "an experience a participant encountered before definitively choosing their major, which could have influenced their major aspirations or selection." Most

participants faced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) that substantially shaped their career goals toward fields where they could support those undergoing similar circumstances. The definition of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), as outlined in a report by the Department of Health and Social Care Reviews Facility, includes traumatic events during childhood that can cause harm or negatively impact a child's living environment (Lester et al., 2019). These experiences encompass physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, instances of homelessness or foster care, parental struggles with mental health or substance abuse, and parental absence due to incarceration, separation, or death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2018). Numerous studies have correlated ACEs with adverse outcomes later in life (Lester et al., 2019).

Below are excerpts highlighting the ACEs disclosed by participants:

Because I had, again, it just comes back to the whole, I had no idea I was even gonna finish, I was gonna live, like, my whole thought was I'm gonna die before I turned 15. And even through high school, I was still exploring, experiencing the same levels of trauma that I had, and still experiencing a lot of the abuse that I had.

“And I also grew up with divorced parents, so I have a lot of anxiety.”

“I wanted to be part of a gang.” I wanted to, you know, I wanted to hurt people. “I wanted to hurt myself at one point.”

The remaining participants reported negative academic experiences that deterred them from pursuing certain careers. The following excerpts capture the essence of “academic insecurity”:

I would try to compare myself according to the results that we had. If I wasn't fast enough and I can't crunch these numbers, maybe I wouldn't be the best with math, you know. []I guess I didn't feel confident enough to go through with the studies [to become a doctor].

[Y]ou're not as good as him. or you're worse than him. Like, why aren't you as, why can't you just like, be him? And it definitely made me like, not like him. Because again, like, why, why do they say all this? Why do they gloat about you so much, and what's so wrong with me? So I definitely felt like bad about myself. and I definitely felt like I wasn't as capable as him.

Parent Input

This theme encompasses descriptions of participants' parents' verbal contributions to their choice of major or career aspirations. Despite all participants in this study being first-generation students and lacking navigational guidance from their parents, they engaged in discussions about their career objectives with them, whether through direct inquiry or not. Most participants disclosed experiencing parental expectations to pursue careers in the medical field or, at the very least, to choose paths that offered more comfortable lifestyles than their parents' situations. The following excerpts highlight this theme:

“Yeah, my parents have always been a little hesitant with my major because they've always wanted me to get into like some sort of like medical profession. So, like, nursing, doctors, dentists, like any type of medical program.”

“They were just like, okay, as long as you get like a good job or like, do better than us. "And as long as you're happy, then we're happy.”

“Maybe you could do something else, like be a nurse assistant, or be maybe a doctor if you can.”

Two participants experienced either belittling of their potential to flourish in their desired career or belittling of the career itself. Below are two excerpts illustrating each.

“Why would you get into a trade?”

Well, well, first, she was very against me being a surgeon, because she told me that if I can't focus on, like, my classes, how am I going to focus in the surgery room? And she was a little skeptical about me becoming a therapist.

Although the parents' intentions might not have been malicious, their comments left a lasting impression on the participants, requiring them to show resilience in pursuing their desired careers.

School Role

In many educational systems, students are encouraged to define their academic or career path during high school, often as a prerequisite for postsecondary planning. Some educational institutions now require students to demonstrate evidence of such plans to graduate from high school. For instance, within the Chicago Public School system, high school students must exhibit proof of postsecondary intentions (such as college, military, employment, job training, apprenticeship, or gap year programs) during or before their senior year (Friedman, 2019).

This theme encompasses three aspects: college and career considerations, exclusive college focus, and exclusive career focus. The provided excerpts exemplify all three components, illustrating participants' diverse experiences when choosing their academic pursuits.

“No, not really. I think they were more concerned about filling out applications for college.”

“I was working with my choir teacher when I was doing the services I needed.”

“We went to, like, a college fair.”

I remember, like, one time, my old like, advisor told her how I wanted to, you know, go into cosmetology after my Associate's, and she kind of made it seem like, oh, like, why are you gonna go if you already have an Associate's? Or you're gonna get an Associate's. Like, she was kind of saying, How, why did I, you know, put so much effort into my associates if I'm just you know, gonna do a different job that has nothing to do with it?

I don't think so, like at school. Okay, so I had obviously told them like, Hey, these are the three things that I want to do. But I would definitely say that they were more understanding, like, especially when I brought up the teaching. mostly, like, almost everybody was like, Yeah, you should absolutely become a teacher. And it's mainly because I'm surrounded by teachers.

We had a program called IMentor, and we were all required to take it. My mentor actually studied here, said that she knew you. And I was like, Okay, bet, so she brought me here and told me like the layout of everything inside and outside how things were, and I was like, Okay, and she was like, And they have a criminal justice one, and I was like, Yeah, but what if I want forensics specifically? She was like, Well, you can still do that. But I say it's best to weigh all your options first, and I was like, Wise, okay. I came here, and I took criminal justice. That's it.

Emotion

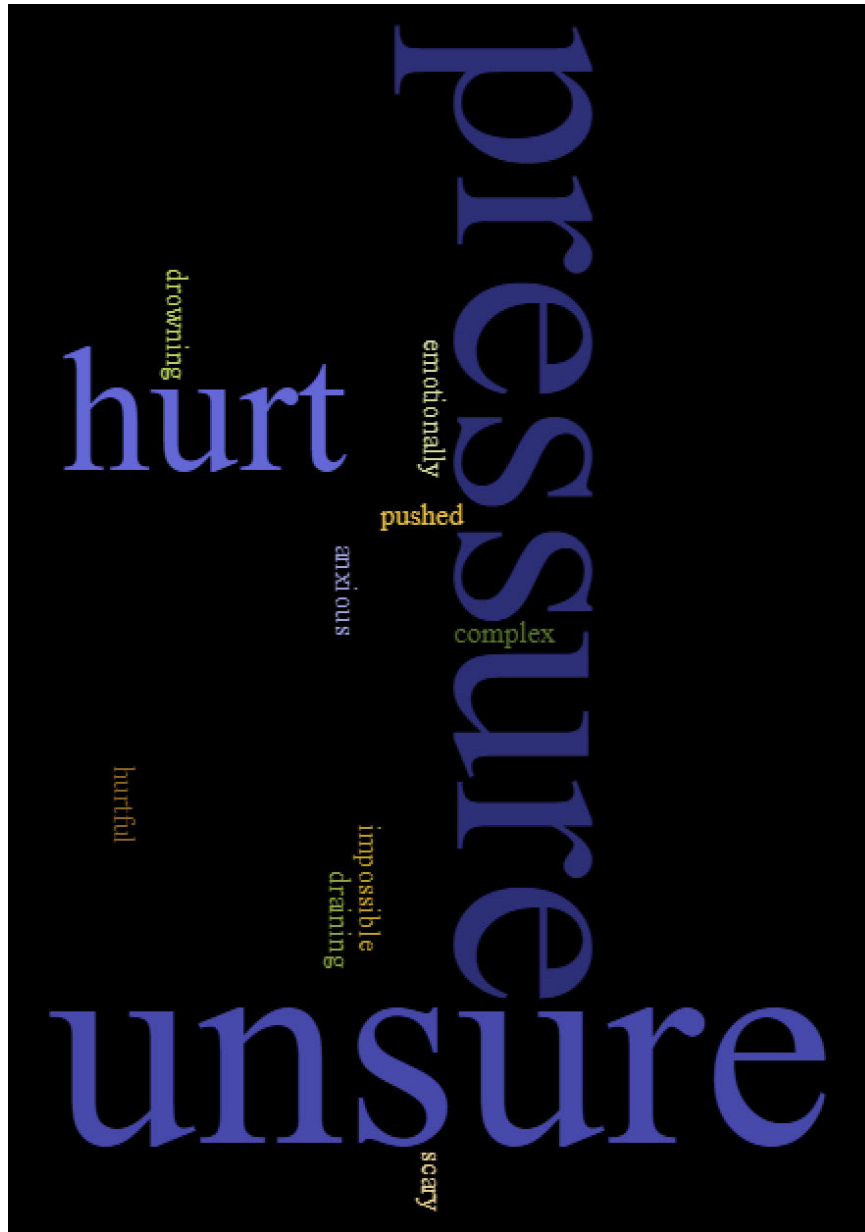
While recounting their experiences, participants stirred a range of emotions. During this

study, I noted participants' emotions regarding the pivotal moment of choosing their major. This examination identified five distinct codes—hurt, assertive, overlooked, overwhelmed, and unsure—which collectively form the overarching theme of "emotion." These codes articulate the diverse emotional responses individuals expressed through their narratives (see Figure 12).

It is essential to acknowledge that NLU's admissions policy mandates students to declare a major during their application process, unlike other institutions that offer exploratory majors. While NLU's policy may have influenced specific emotional responses shared by participants, it is noteworthy that none attributed their emotions solely to this requirement.

Figure 12

Emotions Theme Word Cloud



Composite Summaries

Throughout the analysis, I maintained a solid connection to the participants' narratives by consistently reviewing the transcripts and recordings. My approach to coding varied depending on the situation. Sometimes, I employed in vivo coding, capturing participants' exact words. In other cases, I utilized descriptive terms highlighting their experiences' essence, as Saldaña (2013) outlined. To offer insight into the participants' encounters with the phenomenon and to underscore the importance of the identified themes and codes, the following sections provide analysis summaries for each individual.

Anastasio

Anastasio's journey to select a major was significantly shaped by their parents' strong recommendations and a history of traumatic childhood encounters encompassing experiences of sexual violence, suicidal thoughts, physical and verbal abuse, and even suicide attempts. The dual influence of parental expectations and adversities contributed to an overwhelming sense of pressure when they were choosing their academic major. Consequently, these challenging life experiences steered Anastasio towards a path in Criminal Justice, a field they believe can enable them to be a valuable resource for others, potentially bringing about transformative impacts in people's lives through their contributions to the Criminal Justice field.

To navigate the college application process and explore potential career avenues, Anastasio actively engaged with a mentor within a program named IMentor, provided by their high school. This collaborative effort was pivotal in their academic and career development journey. Now, Anastasio is preparing to graduate with their undergraduate degree with aspirations of becoming a detective.

Bella

Bella's path to choosing an academic major was marked by uncertainty stemming from their diverse interests and the impact of adverse childhood experiences, including facing poverty and being subjected to bullying due to their need for extra learning support. Furthermore, their parents' undermining remarks further fueled Bella's sense of uncertainty, as their parents communicated low expectations due to Bella's learning support needs. Despite these challenges, Bella ultimately pursued a major in education with a specialization in special education, driven by their aspiration to advocate for children who, like them, require additional learning support.

During their Senior year of highschool, Bella engaged in meaningful career-related discussions with a teacher at their high school, shaping their academic direction. Additionally, the school organized a college fair during their Junior year, initiating the college application process and contributing to Bella's academic and career exploration journey. Now, Bella is working with children and preparing for their licensure exam.

Julio

Julio's journey toward selecting an education major stemmed from completing an Associate's degree during high school and his initial inclination toward entering a trade profession. Despite his parents' objections to him pursuing a trade, he gravitated towards education as a path to fulfill his aspiration of positively impacting others. He envisioned becoming the supportive figure he lacked during his high school years. Throughout his upbringing, his parents constantly compared him to his older sibling, instilling a sense of academic inadequacy as he struggled to understand why he fell short of their expectations.

Despite his parents' reservations, Julio decided to pursue a major in Education. Along this path, he sought guidance from teachers and high school staff who offered assistance in

navigating the college application process and provided valuable insights about the field. This decision marked a pivotal step in his empowerment and academic pursuit journey.

Maria

Maria's experience selecting her major was assertive because she knew she wanted to study Psychology, but she felt neglected by her parents, who were more concerned with her siblings. Due to her adverse childhood experiences, which included anxiety, depression, being bullied, and having divorced parents, she chose to major in Psychology. She chose Psychology to "be there for kids who are going through what she went through." Maria's high school provided a college and career class where she could discuss her "passions" with a teacher, and the teacher advised her to major in Psychology. In addition, she enrolled in Psychology courses in high school due to the college and career class discussions.

Richie

Richie faced significant challenges when choosing his major, particularly in securing admission to a college for Psychology. Despite his determination, obstacles arose that hindered his progress. Fortunately, his high school counselor supported him through this complex process, collaborating on a plan to ensure he could enter a college aligned with his career goals.

During this journey, Richie's persistence to major in psychology was fueled by his desire to be a resource to others experiencing the adversity he had experienced. He aimed to extend the same support he had received during times of adversity, including his involvement in a gang, parental neglect, struggles with suicidal thoughts, and even attempts at ending his own life. These experiences molded his determination to contribute positively to the lives of others facing similar challenges.

Furthermore, his mother's input also helped shape Richie's journey. Initially, she was nervous about his ambitions to become a surgeon or therapist due to his need for additional learning support. However, after seeing how well he did academically in college, she urged him to explore medical-related fields. Still, he stayed true to his passion and continued studying Psychology. Now, Richie is preparing for graduation with aspirations to continue his education with a Master's Degree in Psychology.

Snoopy

Both overwhelming challenges and emotional intensity marked Snoopy's path to choosing her major. The many requirements colleges placed during the application process made her feel overwhelmed by the decision-making process, not to mention the insistence from her parents that she study something related to medicine. Nonetheless, Snoopy discovered her calling. Drawing from her own experiences of overcoming childhood sexual abuse and facing numerous challenges, she decided to pursue a major in Social Work. She stated that this decision was a homage to the counselors, therapists, and mentors who had been instrumental in her life, providing crucial support during her most challenging moments.

Guiding Snoopy through this transformative journey was a high school program that offered assistance with the college and career decision-making process. This program provided her with valuable support and insights that empowered her to navigate the complexities of choosing a major and charting her future path. Now, Snoopy is completing an internship with a community-based organization that supports women with various needs.

Tiffany

Similarly, Tiffany felt immense pressure while applying to college and picking her major. She had no meaningful conversations about careers at school, which focused more on getting

into college. From what Tiffany said about her strong will and wanting to help solve crimes, her childhood experience of being raised by a single mom influenced her choice to become a police officer, a field mostly dominated by men. She also mentioned that her parents wanted her to surpass their achievements in her career.

V

V's decision to major in Criminal Justice stemmed from his desire to positively impact his community through a career as a police officer. His motivation to "play his part" in the betterment of society fueled his choice. Similar to the other participants, his journey also had its challenges. For example, his parents encouraged him to pursue medical-related careers growing up due to their assumptions of job and financial security. Nevertheless, V's interests and insecurities led him to Criminal Justice. Specifically, his experiences with math, where he perceived himself as "not as fast" as his classmates with multiplication tables, instilled a sense of academic insecurity. This insecurity influenced his consideration of math-related career paths, including Medicine.

Although V's high school seemed to have a structured post-secondary preparation process, he was still overwhelmed due to not having one-on-one time with an advisor to freely brainstorm his post-secondary options. His high school required him to complete assessments to determine his career interests, and then a guidance counselor helped him complete his college applications. However, V found the procedure complex and challenging due to the limited availability of advisors, making it difficult for all students to receive the support they needed. Despite these obstacles, V remained committed to studying Criminal Justice, determined to contribute meaningfully to his community through the police force.

Vanessa

Like Julio, Vanessa completed an Associate's degree during high school, which helped shape her experience when choosing her academic major. Her mother and grandmother also consistently encouraged her to do her best and achieve her fullest potential. After completing her associate's and high school diploma, though, Vanessa did not want to continue pursuing another college degree, although she was interested in computer science. For a moment, she even considered venturing into the trades for cosmetology because she has a passion for art and wanted to make her potential clients feel good by making them look pretty. However, her high school counselor discouraged her from pursuing cosmetology because "it does not make sense you already have an Associate's degree."

Vanessa's early life experiences also played a significant role in shaping her choices. Raised by her mother as a young, single parent, she learned the value of independence. This foundation of self-reliance likely influenced her major and career selection, leading her to gravitate toward a male-dominated field in STEM. Vanessa's pride in identifying herself as "a woman in STEM" throughout the interview hinted at her determination to overcome challenges and embrace her chosen path, driven by her desire to break barriers and make her mark in a field traditionally dominated by men.

Dedoose Analysis Results

Figure 13 showcases a code cloud generated using Dedoose to convey the frequency of themes and codes visually. The larger text size signifies a higher occurrence of the respective theme or code within the data. This graphical representation caters to visual learners and effectively highlights the prevalence of key themes such as pivotal experience, emotion, parent input, school, and help people across the dataset. Furthermore, the word cloud highlights the

varying frequencies of specific codes (e.g., scary, hurt, unsure), noting the distinctiveness of participants' experiences, a crucial aspect in phenomenological research.

Figure 13

Dedoose Code Cloud



Latinidad and HSI-Related Findings

In the latter part of the interviews, I directed participants to reflect on whether their ethnicity or the HSI designation played a role in their choice of major or decision to attend NLU. Below, you will find concise summaries for each participant:

V

During the interview, V's references to his Hispanic heritage were mainly in the context of cultural norms, such as how his parents raised him to greet guests and the tendency of parents to point out flaws rather than offer praise. When I asked about whether his ethnicity played a role in his career choice, he revealed that his exposure to the military and police force made him

aware of the underrepresentation of Hispanics in these fields. He explained that his exploration into various fields, including mixed martial arts, the military, and the police force, led him to realize the lack of diversity in positions of power, which created a lack of understanding of complicated issues (e.g., racism, poverty, police brutality, immigration). Recognizing this gap motivated him to pursue criminal justice to contribute to bridging this divide.

Interestingly, V was unaware of NLU's HSI designation and was unfamiliar with the term itself. As a result, the university's Hispanic enrollment did not factor into his decision to enroll. Only after he began attending classes did he notice the significant Hispanic representation within the university.

Bella

Throughout the interview, Bella did not naturally mention their Latindad. Their educational journey centered around the challenges they faced due to their learning needs and the need for additional support. When I asked about the HSI designation, Bella admitted they were unfamiliar with the term and unaware that NLU held that designation. Bella also explained that their high school counselor influenced their decision to attend NLU by highlighting NLU's history as an institution focused on education. This alignment with their interest in education made NLU seem the best option. Additionally, the fact that they received immediate admission further solidified their decision to choose NLU.

Maria

In the interview, Maria did not naturally bring up her Hispanic background. Like other participants, she was also unaware of the concept of an HSI. When prompted about the HSI designation, she revealed that her decision to choose NLU was influenced by her high school teacher's assurance that NLU's environment was reminiscent of her high school. This familiarity

and the prospect of being surrounded by peers who shared her identity comforted her. Maria explained that having other Hispanics in her classes creates a sense of security for her.

She referred to this shared identity as a source of strength, as it helps them collectively navigate challenges and pressures that could potentially affect their academic achievements. While she did not attribute her choice of major to her Hispanic heritage, she emphasized the value of having Hispanic classmates who provide support and accountability to persevere despite external obstacles.

Anastasio

Anastasio shared that her experience with machismo significantly shaped her decision to major in criminal justice. She explained that her paternal family held traditional beliefs that women should not pursue education but instead focus on serving their husbands and children while having limited say in important decisions. These ingrained perspectives heavily influenced her choice of major. Then, regarding NLU's HSI designation, Anastasio admitted to not being aware of the term or that NLU holds this designation. Her decision to attend NLU was based on advice from her high school advisor, who emphasized its cost-effectiveness. Her decision was also influenced by her father's negative view of community colleges, as he believed they were for academically challenged individuals.

Tiffany

Tiffany's choice of academic major was not initially linked to her Hispanic ethnicity. However, when asked, she revealed that the prevailing negative stereotypes surrounding suitable career choices for women influenced her decision to major in criminal justice. She further explained that her mother's strong and independent personality, characteristic of a Mexican

woman, motivated her to pursue a career in a male-dominated field. Tiffany's desire to challenge gender norms fueled her desire to study criminal justice.

Concerning NLU's HSI designation, Tiffany mentioned that she had heard discussions on campus about forming a student group but was uncertain about the specific implications of the designation. She also indicated that she only became aware of the Latinx population at NLU after starting her classes. Ultimately, her decision to enroll at NLU was guided mainly by financial considerations, as it was the best financial option available to her at that time.

Richie

His personal experiences influenced Richie's choice to major in psychology as a Latino individual living with mental illnesses. He openly shared that being a Latino with unique learning abilities contributed to his struggles with anxiety and depression, exacerbated by his parents' disbelief in the existence of mental illnesses and different learning styles. After seeking professional assistance, he realized his passion for psychology and decided to pursue it in order to provide support to other Latinx youth facing mental health challenges. Interestingly, Richie did not attribute his decision to attend NLU to the high Hispanic population at the university. Instead, he explained that his choice was shaped by his challenges in gaining acceptance into other schools.

Snoopy

Snoopy's choice to major in social work was partly influenced by her experiences with gender roles as a Latina. She expressed that her decision to pursue social work stemmed from her desire to support other women on their journey towards independence. She revealed that growing up, her mother placed the burden of household tasks on her, not her brother, which was frustrating due to the disregard of her other responsibilities. Her internship experiences, where

she mentored other Latinas to overcome adversities, solidified her commitment to this career path. Furthermore, Snoopy acknowledged being aware of NLU's status as an HSI, which played a role in her decision to choose NLU. She explained that the knowledge of a supportive community of students who shared her identity and experiences gave her a sense of comfort as she embarked on this new academic endeavor.

Vanessa

Vanessa's choice of computer science and informational systems as her academic major was not linked to her Hispanic heritage. Instead, she largely attributed her decision to her gender as a woman. When prompted, she shared that her experience of relocating from *La Villita* to a more diverse neighborhood exposed her to other cultures and lifestyles. She also recounted her participation in a program at the Museum of Science and Industry, where she noticed that most women participants were pursuing careers in biology rather than computer science. Vanessa highlighted that she met another female computer scientist only a year ago.

Moreover, she expressed happiness in witnessing more individuals from diverse backgrounds holding positions of influence, as it signifies community support and the ability to achieve significant milestones. While Vanessa had heard about NLU's HSI designation, she associated it primarily with organizations for Hispanic students and not the designation. She clarified that her college choice was primarily based on the institution's size and the assurance that it was not a PWI.

Julio

Julio naturally linked his choice to pursue a career in education with his identity as a Latino. He expressed that having a Latino teacher would have significantly contributed to his academic growth during his upbringing, but such representation was lacking until his second

year of high school. He noted that even in the present, he feels marginalized in his education classes due to the majority of his peers being women from diverse racial backgrounds. This motivates him to be a role model for other Latinos considering a career in education. Regarding his decision to enroll at NLU, he acknowledged being aware of the university's HSI designation; however, the primary determining factor was the cost.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the findings of this study, starting with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, participants, and context and ending with the themes, composite summaries, results' analysis, and findings specifically regarding the HSI designation and Latinidad. The coding process revealed five distinct themes: 1) helping people, 2) pivotal experience, 3) parent input, 4) school role, and 5) emotion. I explored these themes comprehensively through the lens of the theoretical frameworks, which provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when selecting an academic major. Additionally, the investigation examined the potential influence of socioeconomic status and class on their decision-making process.

This study included nine interviewees who participated in this investigation. The descriptions of the participants' experiences in selecting their major were not uniform. Nonetheless, each of their experiences reflected the essence of the five themes. Moreover, all participants reported that instances within the themes ultimately influenced their choice of major. I presented participant narratives per phenomenological methodology, summarizing the codes and themes of their experiences. I used Dedoose software to identify the five themes by coding and analyzing recurring concepts. These five themes cast light on the phenomenon of Latinx undergraduates choosing their academic major at an Illinois HSI. Even though all participants

have experienced a traumatic event that negatively impacted their self-esteem or well-being, they have chosen to continue their education persistently.

This chapter also encompassed the outcomes of the interview questions related to Latinidad and HSI designation. I observed that most participants did not naturally associate their academic major decisions with their ethnicity, and a significant portion of participants were unaware of the university's HSI designation or its implications before the interview. The following chapter will focus on discussions of the research findings, providing a more comprehensive investigation into the firsthand experiences of Latinx students as they navigate the complex journey of selecting their academic majors.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I examine and present the findings explained in the preceding chapters of this dissertation (Boudah, 2020, p. 246), focusing on the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students as they navigate the process of selecting their academic majors. The overarching objective of this research was to explore whether socioeconomic status, class, Latinidad, and the HSI designation impact the decision-making processes of Hispanic students regarding their academic majors and their pursuit of higher education. Moreover, this research also offers practical recommendations for educational institutions, educators, policymakers, and prospective research endeavors.

Summary of Research

This study investigated the impact of socioeconomic status and class on the career aspirations of Hispanic students within Illinois' HSIs. Latinx students represent the most rapidly expanding demographic in higher education (Mora, 2022), with HSIs playing a central role in educating this group (Garcia, 2020; Laden, 2001). Nonetheless, Latinx students encounter distinctive challenges when contemplating their career paths (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). Employing a phenomenological approach (Groenewald, 2003; Moustakas, 1994), this research involved comprehensive, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with nine participants enrolled at NLU, an Illinois-based HSI. These interviews aimed to uncover the lived experiences of Hispanic undergraduate students in Illinois as they navigate the complex decision-making process of selecting their academic majors.

This study strived to illuminate how socioeconomic factors and class backgrounds can significantly shape the career aspirations of Hispanic students (Garriott, 2020). I employed a

multidimensional analytical lens that combines LatCrit (Bender et al., 2019; Bernal, 2002; Contreras, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes, 1998), CRT (Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Novak, 2022; Sólorzano et al., 2005), and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (Anfara, Jr. & Mertz, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; HQ, 2021; Ozaki et al., 2020). This comprehensive framework provided a well-rounded perspective for analyzing the data's relevance to the higher education landscape.

To extract meaningful insights, I reviewed and coded the collected data several times, following methodologies proposed by Groenewald (2003), Moustakas (1994), and Saldaña (2013). The primary objective was to gain a profound understanding of the overarching experiences shared by participants as they made critical choices regarding their academic majors. The study's findings surfaced five core themes that captured how Hispanic undergraduates in Illinois make decisions regarding their academic majors. These themes included "Helping People," "Pivotal Experience," "Parent Input," "School Role," and "Emotion."

The study also investigated whether the participants' ethnicity or the HSI designation influenced their selection of a major or their decision to enroll at NLU. Notably, I observed that most participants did not instinctively link their choice of academic major to their ethnicity, and many were unaware of the university's HSI designation and its significance before the interviews.

Interpretation of Findings

This phenomenological study explored whether SES and class influenced Latinx students' career aspirations. Following the nature of phenomenological research, the central question of this study was open-ended and non-directional, providing an exploratory approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following central question organized the study:

- What are the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduate students when choosing their majors?

I also asked additional questions to gauge their perspective on the intersectionality between their ethnicity and educational experience, especially if they did not mention their ethnicity organically.

The following sections discuss the research findings categorized under four themes. Within each segment, the discussion addresses either the central research question or the central and additional questions regarding the interconnectedness of participants' ethnicity and educational experiences. The findings offer a comprehensive exploration of the academic, financial, and personal experiences described by the participants during their journey to select their academic majors. This exploration encompasses the following key aspects:

- Influence of family and cultural background
- Navigating identity and sense of belonging
- Influence of class socioeconomic status
- Educational pathways and institutional support

Additionally, these sections draw upon the conceptual framework that illuminates how oppression can impact human development. I also reference the theoretical frameworks, highlighting the unique experiences of the Latinx community in the context of oppression, particularly in comparison to other ethnic and racial groups. This theoretical foundation provides a unique perspective for interpreting the research findings within the broader context of social identity, educational experiences, and human development.

Influence of Family and Cultural Background

The findings of this study provide a unique perspective on the influence of family and

cultural background on the decision-making process of choosing an academic major among Latinx undergraduate students in Illinois. Contrary to the initial assumption that participants would primarily choose their majors based on their parents' desires, the results revealed that some participants made their decisions independently despite limited or no parental support. This unexpected finding highlights the agency and individuality of the participants in shaping their educational trajectories. Several participants shared stories of defying familial expectations or dealing with initial resistance from their parents when selecting their majors. For example, Julio and Snoopy's families were against their academic major decision because the careers these majors lead into are not known as high-paying careers. Similarly, Tiffany and Anastasio chose their respective majors and pursued higher education, defying cultural gender norms.

These decisions illustrate their decision-making process's complexity and highlight the dynamic interplay between cultural expectations, personal aspirations, and family dynamics. Furthermore, this finding adds a gap to current literature regarding familial support. Much of today's literature regarding additional support for first-generation students assumes parents do not understand how to support the students. However, little literature discusses the complexities of students pursuing higher education despite their parents' wishes.

Navigating Identity and Sense of Belonging

Contemporary literature on the resources required for the academic success of first-generation non-White students predominantly emphasizes academic and financial support and fostering a sense of belonging. Within the context of NLU, designated as an HSI falling under the MSI category, it is noteworthy that most of its undergraduate student body identifies as Hispanic. Therefore, participants not experiencing feelings of alienation in their classroom environment or on the campus made sense since they are part of the status quo in these spaces.

Moreover, most participants described their current learning environment as similar to their high schools in terms of ethnic representation in faculty and peers. Although I am happy to hear that these participants are comfortable in their learning environments, I am also concerned that the university is not preparing them to navigate the alienation they may experience in their respective work environments after graduation. Who should be responsible for preparing typically minoritized students to combat micro-and-macro aggressions?

Furthermore, what does it mean to be an HSI? As the designation currently stands at NLU, most participants needed to be made aware of the designation or that NLU had it. The three who knew about the designation assumed that NLU solely focused on enrolling Hispanic students. The students did not mention any specific additional resources tied to the designation or attributed any of their success to the designation. Based on these results, the designation seems transactional, only focusing on ethnic representation and not on the well-being and identity development of the population.

Influence of Class and SES

As mentioned in the previous section, most participants described their current learning environment as a reflection of their high school. Given that all the students in this study were of similar class and SES, they had similar resources in their educational trajectory leading up to college. Now that peers of similar backgrounds in college surround them, they have not experienced the “othering” that would make them realize where they stand in the social class and socioeconomic structure.

As a scholar, staff member, and adjunct professor, I recognize how the participants’ SES and class impacted the ecological systems they have been engaging in, ultimately leading them to choose their major and institution. The majority of the participants attributed their decision to

their adverse experiences. For example, Bella decided to major in special education because of their negative experience in elementary school with educators bullying them due to their learning abilities. Similarly, Julio decided to major in education and later teach in the high school setting because, growing up, he did not have any Latino educators. Had the participants not experienced this adversity, would they still have decided to study these disciplines?

Furthermore, none of the participants recognized the forms of systemic oppression they experienced that led them to the disciplines they are currently studying. Since all the participants have lived in the Chicagoland area and attended public schools, at minimum, since high school, this indicates to me that they have normalized their experiences. Had they lived in an affluent neighborhood, perhaps Vanessa would not have witnessed gang violence forcing her family to move, and V would have received additional support to strengthen his math skills, which may have encouraged him to consider medical school after all. Roberta Espinoza coins these “transformative experiences” in which a student’s educational trajectory is recalibrated, resulting in subsequent success and advancement in the school system as pivotal moments (2011, p. 5).

Educational Pathways and Institutional Support

An overwhelming amount of participants shared feeling lost and unsure during the time in which they were choosing their majors. As a higher education expert, I interpreted their experiences as being rushed by the school to decide on their next steps. None of the participants had a dedicated resource to explore their options and aspirations holistically. Deferring back to the influence of class and SES, the lack of resources makes sense.

The expectation for students to have a plan for their academic major or career by the middle of their senior year of high school became prominent between 1994 and 2009 when the Department of Education began assessing HEIs’ performance more heavily and threatened their

funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). At the start of higher education, students only went to college when they had a profession in mind (e.g., engineering, agriculture, mechanics, manufacturing, ministry) (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). Today, local mandates like the “Learn. Plan. Succeed” program mentioned earlier pressure high schools to fulfill post-secondary goals (e.g., college enrollment, gap years, trade school enrollment, military enrollment) (Friedman, 2019), which negatively impacts schools in underresourced communities. How will a 1:30 staff-to-student ratio provide enough wraparound support for a student to bravely think through their identity and how it aligns with career options to create a plan for success?

Significance of Study

This study changed my philosophy as a minoritized scholar in three main ways. First, I am delighted that my assumptions on this study were incorrect. I am proud that the participants developed resilience in various ways to pursue their respective career interests, *a pesar de todo*. Secondly, I realized that more than physical representation is needed to create change. Had I, a Latina scholar, used traditional research tactics that conform to Whiteness, I could have risked interpreting this data differently or gathered insufficient data, ending with useless results. Similarly, although NLU has a large Latinx student body, maintaining a high Latino enrollment rate is not enough. Latinx students need additional support. The additional funding from the HIS designation can be used to further support identity development. Finally, I realized that the high school-to-college pipeline is unjust in adding a layer of pressure to populations already living in survival pressures.

This study fills a critical gap in the existing literature by examining the transitional stage between high school and college, highlighting the adversity experienced by participants that influenced their career decision-making. Although more scholars are writing about the unique

experiences of marginalized groups, numerous studies combine and generalize the experiences of Black and Hispanic students, or they attempt to comprehend us by combining all of our experiences without considering how intersectionality impacts our academic journeys. Using intersectionality as a lens (e.g., intersectionality between ethnicity and socioeconomic status), according to Patton et al. (2016), can help recognize how individuals' intersecting identities contribute to their development and how experiences among minoritized communities may overlap but remain distinct.

Furthermore, the unique contribution of this study lies in the fact that a member of the Latinx community conducted it. Historically, scholars have often studied communities they do not belong to, objectifying participants for publication. This study challenges that approach by leveraging the researcher's skills and lived experiences as a Latina to uplift the community through their stories (Calderón et al., 2012). It is important to note that while this study focuses on the Latinx community, it encourages researchers from other minoritized communities to replicate the study within their respective communities. Overall, the results of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of oppression on Hispanic individuals seeking degrees, contributing to discussions on enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for practitioners in education and related entities. These practical implications can guide stakeholders in making informed decisions and improving their practices in four ways.

Reflexivity

For starters, all relevant leaders (e.g., federal, state, local, institutional, educators, and parents) should use a form of reflexivity to reflect on their identities (Diamond & Adam, 2002)

and accept that their realities differ from those of current and incoming generations pursuing education. In Chapter Three, I mentioned engaging in reflexivity to examine my positionality and its impact on the research process. Reflexivity can also be used outside of research to do the same thing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Engaging in reflexivity can assist people in recognizing their biases and understanding that despite sharing backgrounds with those they support, they have gained certain privileges through their education, abilities, and income. Additionally, everyone's experience varies. Engaging in reflexivity can help ensure that any decisions and interactions with students center on the student's reality and are not merely projections of one's insecurities or paternalism.

Similarly, students should practice reflexivity to build their authenticity. I was privileged to be part of two leadership groups in high school that guided me through understanding the various intersects of my identity. However, as an educator and consultant, I have encountered individuals between their twenties and sixties who have never explored the various intersects of their identities. Not knowing where you stand in comparison to the status quo is problematic as it can cause individuals to blame themselves for the oppression they experience (Seider et al., 2019) or keep individuals from taking risks (for example, being the first to go to college) (Cherry, 2022). In addition to the reflexive questions I mentioned in Chapter Three, I recommend using tools such as We Rise's Power Flower, which includes a template, instructions, and debriefing questions to explore the various identity pieces. Engaging in reflexivity will, at minimum, prompt curiosity as to why individuals are where they are compared to others.

Collaborate

A great takeaway from this study is that there needs to be more collaboration among the various power holders that impact the various higher education systems. As mentioned in Chapter Two, various conversations regarding college success focus on finding the culprit for students not completing their college degrees (Mintz, 2022) or plummeting college enrollment (Marcus, 2022). In reality, if higher education is a “public good” (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 249) and a tool for upward economic mobility (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2012; Patton et al., 2016; Patton, 2016), the responsibility falls on all of us.

Adrienne Brown explores the various factors of change and states that collaboration is the cornerstone for radical movements (Brown, 2017). Using my various lenses as a Latina scholar, student, staff, and educator, I attest that the various existing silos within an institution make it challenging to support students, not to mention the lack of communication across educational and government institutions. Reading literature like Emergent Strategy (Arnett, 2000) could help individuals and their respective organizations realize that our decisions impact systems beyond our control. Recognizing this significant impact could have opened the conversation about additional funding for CPS’ Learn.Plan.Succeed, for example. Alternatively, at minimum, the mandate would have looked different so as not to add as much pressure to already depleted schools and their students.

Lead By Example

Growing up, I constantly heard various leaders state, “Children are the future,” encouraging influencers to push as many resources as possible to develop children so these children can grow into adults capable of making radical changes. Today, individuals continue to use these combined four words in arguments regarding gun laws (Cooper, 2022) and child

healthcare (Darbyshire, 2019). However, no one has used this term to discuss how problematic it is to be a person of color and assimilate to Whiteness and its impact on the way younger generations of color follow our example. Moreover, with higher education's recent focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, leading by example with authenticity is crucial.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, NLU's undergraduate college is an anomaly in that its enrollment vastly comprises students of color, primarily students self-identifying as Hispanic. However, the full-time staff demographics do not reflect the student body. According to the College Scorecard provided by the Department of Education, 67% of the full-time staff identify as White, 18% as Black, 8% as Hispanic, and 6% as Asian; these numbers include full-time faculty. Nonetheless, as the university works towards creating a team of faculty and staff that reflect the students it serves, it is crucial to ensure that candidates' philosophies of education also align with the university's mission of innovation, access, equity, and excellence. Gauging a candidate's alignment with the student body's needs may lengthen the hiring process. However, at least the intentionality will strengthen the chances of students working with professionals who may share some of their lived experiences but, most importantly, support their development by leading by example.

Consequently, faculty and staff of color need to live in their truths. Due to racism, many professionals of color have had to assimilate to Whiteness to prove their professionalism to graduate from college and gain employment (Cooper, 2019, p.1). Therefore, we must question if our actions and beliefs perpetuate the very injustices we oppose. The internal dialogue also involves challenging existing norms in policies and curricula. This is where powerholders can employ reflexivity.

Practice with Integrity

As mentioned in Chapter Two, HSIs do not have a historical mission to serve Latinx students like HBCUs have a historical mission to serve Black students. The HSI designation merely grants funding to HEIs for meeting the enrollment requirements, making exploiting Latinx students' enrollment easy. In "Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Practice," Gina Garcia (2020) implores institutions to shift from *Latinx-enrolling* to *Latinx-serving* by inviting various HSIs to share their best practices of providing a culturally enhancing experience for all students. Some institutions may need more hands-on support, however.

Although most undergraduate students at NLU self-identified as Hispanic, most of the participants in this study were unaware that NLU is a Hispanic-serving institution. Most participants acknowledged feeling comfortable at the university due to their classmates "looking like them." Nevertheless, that was the extent of the HSI attribution at NLU. Most participants did not regard the university's dedicated space for Hispanic students, *Centro de Excelencia*, nor mention any culturally specific programs, events, or resources that may have supported their college experience. Furthermore, most participants did not acknowledge how they may struggle in their careers where they may be minoritized.

From these results, I recommend that NLU add the building of its HSI brand as part of its strategic plan. More than physical representation found in the high Hispanic enrollment is required to support the Latinx student body's development fully. Once the university agrees on its brand as an HSI, the rest of the university will be able to accommodate its policies and procedures accordingly. Additionally, current and prospective students will know what to expect.

Make No Assumptions

As mentioned in Chapter Three, as the researcher, I purposefully considered my biases prior to conducting and during the study. Acknowledging my biases made analyzing the data as close to its truth easier. I analyzed the data without projecting my biases onto what I had collected. How many individuals project their biases onto students? How many educators make assumptions about their students based on behavior or neurodiversity?

The results of this study showed how impactful biases and assumptions can be to individuals on the receiving end to the point of instilling academic insecurity. Some of the participants shared having to muster the courage to even apply to colleges because their parents or other authority figures had instilled fear into them due to behavior or neurodivergence. Due to their resilience, these participants have progressed in their academic journey, resilience that no one should expect from them.

Recommendations for Research

After reviewing the results of this study, I realized there are still several gaps in research that prevent relevant practitioners from making informed decisions. This section covers my recommendations for future research.

Holistic Approaches for Career Exploration

Most participants in the study chose their major based on recommendations from others, whether it was someone they looked up to, someone who had succeeded in that field, or a desire to work in a role benefiting their community. Most participants did not have mentors to guide them through their academic choices or challenge their preconceptions. Some participants even abandoned career aspirations due to self-doubt. With this in mind, further research on holistic

advising methods within this community could uncover valuable strategies to support its members better (Suárez & Beatty, 2022).

Impact of Adverse Experiences on Decision-Making

Most participants identified a correlation between the adversity they experienced and their chosen majors. Although choosing a career where you can “be who you needed” seems noble, I am curious if there are any adverse long-term effects of individuals immersing themselves in familiar trauma for long periods. Some researchers are beginning to explore these correlations (Saakvitne, 2002; Tosone et al., 2012). However, a gap still exists in the unique adversity the Latinx community experiences and the potential negative impact of allowing experienced trauma to be a contributing factor in deciding on a career (Bryce et al., 2021).

Adverse Childhood Experiences within the Latinx Community

In Chapter Four, the results showed that every participant encountered childhood adversity. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) revealed in this study spanned from sexual violence to emotional abuse, with some participants facing multiple adversities simultaneously. Moreover, many participants recounted inadequate parental support, worsening their already challenging experiences. The field of ACEs research is rapidly expanding. I urge researchers to incorporate a cultural lens when investigating ACEs in marginalized communities, such as the Latinx community. Focusing ACEs studies on specific cultural contexts can offer valuable insights to practitioners and parents, helping us develop more effective strategies to support the growth and development of individuals affected by ACEs.

HSI-ship in Illinois

While the number of HSIs has grown since establishing HACU in 1980, the existing research needs to capture this expansion fully. In my literature review, I discovered a need for

more literature addressing HSIs, specifically in Illinois. This gap presents a challenge for practitioners relying on literature that may not align with their communities. Each state and city possesses its own distinct culture and challenges, which current literature may overlook when it predominantly concentrates on the western and southwestern regions of the country (Marin & Aguilar-Smith, 2023). Furthermore, closing this gap in literature can support institutions' intentionality in further developing their status as HSIs.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter provided an overall discussion of the findings of this phenomenological study. This phenomenological study examined the intersectionality of socioeconomic status, class, and career goals within the Latinx community. This study aimed to solve the disproportionate graduation rates of Latinx students compared to White students (Hossler & Bontranger, 2015). This chapter comprised six sections. The first section provided an overview of the chapter. The second section summarized the study's key findings. The third section provided in-depth discussions and interpretations of the themes from the study's results. The next section elaborated on the significance of this study, followed by my implications for practice. Finally, this chapter concluded with my recommendations for future research.

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Appendix A: Participant Screening Questionnaire

Participant screening questionnaire used for interview recruitment

Participant Screening

Hello! My name is Flor Carabez and I am a Doctoral candidate and employee at National Louis University. I am conducting this study to complete my Doctoral program in Education. This phenomenological study explores whether socioeconomic status (SES) and class influence Latinx students' career aspirations at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois. At this stage in the research, the essence of choosing a career will be generally defined as a career declaration.

This qualitative study's results will add to literature regarding Latinx undergraduate students at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois. All information collected will be data-encrypted to protect individuals' identities, and participants will have the chance to review their interview information after collection.

Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

If you have additional questions or concerns, feel free to email me at fcarabez@nl.edu.

* Indicates required question

As of today, are you between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age?*

Yes

No

Are you comfortable reading and speaking in English?*

Yes

No

I am voluntarily completing this because I am interested in participating in this study. *

Yes

No

Name*

First and last name

Your answer

Pseudonym (choose an alias (or secret name) to protect your identity. I will be using this name instead of your government name in the published study).*

Your answer

Email*

Your answer

Phone number*

Your answer

Are you comfortable with text communication.*

Yes

No

You are currently enrolled full-time in an undergraduate program at National Louis University.*

Yes

No

Do you identify as Hispanic/Latinx/o/a?*

Yes

No

Do you identify as a first-generation college student? (Parent(s) did not complete a college degree in the U.S.)*

Yes

No

Did you graduate from a high school in Chicago?*

Yes

No

Did you receive free or reduced price lunch in high school?*

Yes

No

Are you comfortable meeting in person on campus for a 60 minute interview? *

Yes

No

Appendix B: Informed Consent Interview

Informed Consent Observation Interview

My name is Flor Carabez, and I am a Doctoral candidate and employee at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Dreams Deferred: A phenomenological study on Latinx Undergraduate students choosing their academic majors”, occurring from 03-2023 to 04-2023. This phenomenological study explores whether socioeconomic status (SES) and class influence Latinx students' career aspirations at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois. At this stage in the research, the essence of choosing a career will be generally defined as a career declaration. This qualitative study's results will add to literature regarding Latinx undergraduate students at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois.

This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Flor Carabez, Doctoral Candidate and employee, at National Louis University, Chicago.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore whether socioeconomic status (SES) and class influence Latinx students' career aspirations at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois, and *not* to evaluate resources or your academic abilities.

Participation in this study will include:

- 1 individual interview scheduled at your convenience in the Winter 2023 term.
- Interviews will last up to 60 min. and center around the question
 - What are your lived experiences as a Latinx undergraduate student in Illinois when choosing your major?
- Interviews will be recorded and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts
- Flor will take field notes before, during, and after the interviews to gain contextual understanding of participants' respective institutions and their reactions (e.g. body language, flyers, space selected for meeting, campus ambience)
- Participants may view field notes and have final approval on the content of field notes

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform best practices at other higher education institutions, but participants' identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a data-encrypted virtual folder. Only Flor will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to higher education practitioners looking to update their best practices and resources.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Flor at [REDACTED] to request results from this study.

In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Flor Carabez at [REDACTED]

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that has not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Jamal Scott at jscott51@nl.edu, the chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: (312) 261-3526; or Dr. Carla Sparks; email: csparks3@nl.edu; phone: (813) 928-6889.

Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

Consent: I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study *Dreams Deterred: A phenomenological study on Latinx Undergraduate students choosing their academic majors*. My participation will consist of the activities below during the *Winter 2023 term*:

- 1 interview lasting approximately 60 minutes

	
Participant's Signature	Date

	
Researcher's Signature	Date

Appendix C: Social media used for participant recruitment

 **CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS!**
for research study

QUALIFICATIONS:

If you:

- ☒ identify as Hispanic/ Latinx/a/o
- ☒ are between 18 and 24 years old
- ☒ are enrolled full-time in a degree-seeking undergraduate program at National Louis University
- ☒ identify as a first-generation college student
 - parent(s) did not complete a college program in the U.S.
- ☒ graduated from a high school in Chicago and received free/reduced priced lunch
- ☒ can speak and read in English

THEN YOU ARE QUALIFIED TO PARTICIPATE!

You may access the survey questionnaires via the QR code or through the link in the caption.



Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hey! Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study I am conducting; I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor Carabez, and I am a Doctoral candidate here at NLU; I'm one term away from graduation! The reason I am conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience I have noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from this study will help elevate students' stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out.

- To protect your identity, I will use the pseudonym you chose in the screening questionnaire. This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you.*
- I have one central question this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow-up questions for clarity. I want to ensure I am documenting and understanding your experiences the way you experienced them, not just by my perception.*
- As I am asking the questions, take your time responding, and feel free to ask me any questions.*
- You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question, or I might take note of your body language. Just know that I am giving you my undivided attention.*
- Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I am done with this assignment, I will discard the voice recordings.*

- *Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them; just email your request.*

Now that all the housekeeping stuff is out of the way, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Questions

1. Can you tell me your name?
2. How far are you in your undergraduate program, and how much longer do you have to go?
3. What's your major?
4. What was your experience in choosing your major?
5. Before today, has anyone asked you to share your story?
6. What essential items do you want folx to take away from your experiences?
7. What haven't I asked that you think I should know?

Potential Follow-up Questions

- I noticed you didn't mention your Latinidad yet. How did your Hispanic descendency impact your experience choosing your major, if at all?
- I noticed you haven't mentioned the Hispanic Serving Institution designation at your school.
 - Do you know about the designation?
 - Do you know what the designation means?
 - Do you feel that the designation impacts your experience at the university?
 - Did the designation influence your major experience?

Appendix E: Interview Transcripts

V

Thu, Mar 16, 2023 5:16PM • 53:52

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

V, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:01

All right, so thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study I'm conducting. I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor Carabez, and I'm a doctoral candidate here at NLU, and I'm one term away from graduation. The reason I am conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience, I have noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, excuse me, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from this study will help elevate students stories, and add to higher education

literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out. To protect your identity. I will use the pseudonym you chose in the screening questionnaire which you chose V, correct? This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. I have one central question. This conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow up questions for clarity. I want to ensure I'm documenting and understanding your experiences the way you experience them and not just by my perception. As I'm asking the questions, take your time to respond and feel free to ask me any follow up questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question. Or I might take note of your body language, just know that I'm giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I am done with this assignment, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them just email me requests. Now that all the housekeeping stuff is out of the way, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

V 02:02

No yet?

Flor Carabez 02:03

All right. So we're going with V how far are you in your undergraduate program?

V 02:13

I want to say I'm not too far for a few credits left. And that would be about it.

Flor Carabez 02:19

Cool. And what's your major?

V 02:22

Criminal Justice.

Flor Carabez 02:23

What was your experience in choosing your major in criminal justice?

V 02:28

I think my overall experience was that it didn't lead. It didn't lead as a as want where it was kind of like a need. So I had to either follow the need to follow the passion, the passion would have been to most people would be like sports or a different type of hobby that might be art or, you know, digital programming. But I think in my type of me for studying it was going into law enforcement or essentially in that area.

Flor Carabez 03:04

So when you say need, are you What need Are you like whose needs are you referring to?

V 03:11

Everyone? Anyone's need, basically, because I feel that it would be it's a playing my part into law enforce. Okay, so I think that playing my part into law enforcement, rather than trying to follow a passion that would just benefit me, or that would maybe influence people, although that is not bad. But it's not, it doesn't give a sense of community into what the role of being in law enforcement and those type of agencies would.

Flor Carabez 03:41

Okay, so what need did you see in? So it sounds like you decided to go into criminal justice because you felt like you could fulfill a need by being in that field. Correct? Okay. So when

you're talking about the need, are you referring to like a lack of officers? Or what needed? Are you referring to, or what gap? Did you see?

V 04:13

I feel like it wasn't necessarily a gap, but it's more of the times are changing. So since the pandemic, it's there's been less officers and I guess, in a way there's been more people in other areas of like entertainment, an economy that is different. So it's not that it's the numbers or it's the it's the quality of work by just saying that. Every few years, there's like low number of people and then there's a high number of people and then these times it's just been low.

Flor Carabez 04:49

Okay. So, earlier you mentioned that you found that you could either go by need or you could go by passion, so when you decided criminal justice, you weren't passionate about it.

V 05:06

That doesn't mean that we're not passionate in the work. It's just that I think a passion would be more connected like to what you would hold dear or you will be closely involved in when you were younger.

Flor Carabez 05:20

Okay, so So this wasn't something that you thought about as a kid.

V 05:23

It came up as a kid.

Flor Carabez 05:26

Oh, it did. Okay,

V 05:27

well, my mom asked me, Do you want to be a fireman? Do you want to be, I want you to be a doctor, I want you to be you know, this, that and that to look at the options, okay, what would I best fit into realistically, and throughout the years, it was okay. I like doctor. And then one year wasn't one year was and so on.

Flor Carabez 05:43

So when you were thinking about what you were fitting into, what criteria were you using for yourself?

V 05:55

By criteria, do you mean that like the talents or what was?

Flor Carabez 06:01

So when you were putting yourself into these buckets? Like, okay, maybe I could be a doctor, maybe I could be a police officer, maybe I could be a fireman? What were some things that were coming up for you where you were like, I wouldn't be a good fit for this because of XY and Z. Or I would be a better fit for this because of XY and Z. Like, what did you use to kind of compare if you would be a good fit?

V 06:27

Way. Like, couldn't really compare to many. I couldn't really compare it to many examples. I think growing up in the Hispanic culture, like Hispanic parents tend to compare each other's children and each other's friends, children a lot. So that that played like a connection, because I will see connections with other kids. And I would, I guess, in a way, I would try to compare myself according to the results that we had, but then I will see that, oh, I have different results for

for another way. But even if it's another method, so there were a lot of comparisons and differences, but I think it's more closely like with maybe siblings or cousins, but in thinking like, and I think maybe, I think with like classmates, I think that's earliest way that I can compare with, because people were pointed out, like when you will take, let's see, you will take the multiplication, las tablas, and they will give you a minute, and they don't assume completed I think that might be like early way to know. And then I tried to see, okay, if I wasn't fast enough, and I can't crunching these numbers, maybe I wouldn't be the best with math one way, you know.

Flor Carabez 07:59

Okay, so it sounds like the the comparisons that your parents were doing with you and your siblings played a role. And then another role was, I guess it's like your aptitude, your academic aptitude. If you were if you found yourself, like you were really good at something, you were like, okay, if I'm good at this, and I could be good at these professions. But if I'm not good at these things, and I wouldn't be good at these professions. So this is does that sound alright?

V 08:30

In a way, but I feel like growing up I think, scenarios and certain, like, certain expectations were kind of set up. So I think what I'm trying to say is, as a kid, we didn't see it as them trying to analyze like, oh, what we're good at or what will be in the future. I think they, in a way, change the condition so that we would see as oh, we're just being competitive, and we're just going

through this because of the reward. But in reality, it was a little bit more deeper to differentiate differentiate individuals.

Flor Carabez 09:10

Okay, so did you do find now like reflecting back to when you were deciding to come to the school? Reflecting now, do you think that this was exactly your case? Like, your parents played a role in your choosing your major, your maybe your school played a role in your choosing your major? Does that make sense? Do you think that's, that's accurate for you?

V 09:43

It's not exactly accurate, but I would say it was it was going to fall into that lane. I didn't have an ideal. I didn't have an idea or like, like a plan for something other than that, you Okay, so you didn't line up with high school either. So,

Flor Carabez 10:03

so how did you land on criminal justice then

V 10:10

that could resolve that could revolve around I think probably like military influence,

Flor Carabez 10:21

okay,

V 10:21

I wanted to actually be in one of the branches, but I looked over, you know, my college options and what I would do in the city. And I decided it was better to say,

V 10:35

but aside from military influence, it was the people I met, the people that I, that I connected with the people that I made friends with the friends, that fell off, the people that I didn't get along with, and then ultimately, you know, gain respect for and they respected me. And it was just so people that I was surrounded with, they just educated me, they gave me reasons on why not to do certain things, or why not to pick an option in the military, when I can do something else. It's like a, it's like a follow up of when people will learn from other people's mistakes. It's kind of like that people also take notes from those that are the best or that are around them. Why would Yeah, I'll relate, I could relate it to like in a way pool. So I wouldn't play pool with the kids, like, from, like, on grade level, or from NLU, you know, I would go play with like the older

gentleman, like if I had the chance to go somewhere, because, you know, they kind of would not teach you, but they would help you understand more, and then apply it. So

Flor Carabez 10:35

okay,

Flor Carabez 11:52

Gotcha. So when you were in high school, it's not like it sounds like you weren't someone that was going to like the counselors and saying, I want to be a criminal justice major, how do I get there? Is that? Is that accurate? Or did you have conversations about majors?

V 12:13

some conversation about majors, but I wanted to know more about future jobs, what organizations were happening, I wasn't too deep into politics, and what was happening in the world like social economics. So I wanted to get more into detail about that. Like, I would say, what, maybe 2018 2019 junior senior year, I didn't really know much about investing, or Bitcoin or any of that at all. And then when the pandemic happens, that's when a lot of people got educated. So it was,

Flor Carabez 12:43

so in high school, then you were more your goal orientation was more occupation. Not so much like. So let me give you an example. So a lot of students will be in high school and they're thinking, in that moment, what am I going to do after high school, and it's either work, go to military or you go to college? For you, what I'm gathering is that you weren't asking, maybe you were asking a little bit about military, but it was more. So where can I work? In the long run? And then you were like, You were looking forward to the think backwards? Of like, what should I major in, it's going to make more money? Is that what it sounds like?

V 13:30

I don't think I thought about too, I don't think about I thought too much about the money, I thought more about what I could do well, without exerting myself too much. It's something that I could not do in my sleep, but obviously be able to comprehend and then make the other individual lower than me, well, not lower than me. But, you know, that's learning from me to put them in a stable place where, okay, if I can do this and lean onto other people and teach this class, maybe, then I think I can pass that on to you. Oh, it wasn't money. At first, it was more about educating myself, and then putting myself out there so that I will see the options, the options of myself and then the options of other people.

Flor Carabez 14:17

Gotcha.

V 14:17

So you know, when you look at somebody or what somebody else has, and you're thinking to yourself, oh, how and you know,

Flor Carabez 14:23

yeah, so your, your, your strong skill is leaning into curiosity, where if you see someone that's in like, a higher level, or they're in a position where you're like, Oh, I wonder how they're doing it, you're looking at their lifestyle, and you're like, Okay, well, let me talk to them, to see how they got there to maybe give you some guidance to see if you could do it too.

V 14:49

In a way.

Flor Carabez 14:50

Okay. Um, so, you mentioned earlier that when you were thinking about what to do, and You were looking at military options. And you decided that leaving Chicago wasn't a thing for you? What? What kept you what kept you in the city?

V 15:14

I think it was opportunities of what other people were established. So you mentioned some time, like, maybe sophomore year that I could go into, like physical therapy, or go into all that. In a way, right now, the doors are kind of open for that. I don't need a certification to personally train people or to go to go to other type of gyms. And, well, for me, it's been easy to connect, because I haven't really, in a way, been in the company long enough to say, oh, you know, I deserve this or that, or I haven't been doing well. And I haven't also done bad. So it's a lot of reasons why I stayed in the city. But family would be one of them.

Flor Carabez 15:59

Okay, so your family kept you here?

V 16:01

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 16:04

When you say your family kept you here, whas it like? You feel like you were gonna miss them?

Or?

V 16:09

No. I went on all of the military trips.

Flor Carabez 16:14

Absolutely not

V 16:15

Not at all.

Flor Carabez 16:16

All right. So then what do you mean by that, that your your family was a reason why you stayed.

V 16:20

So when I say stay, right, I think it's more of the like, status that that I'm at. So even though I'm in the city, or even if I'm away from the city for a bit. Like it's important to connect into, still seek advice or to understand, because you get different perspectives, and you won't, you'll hear similar like, we all social media and all that. So when news breaks out, you know, we, we hear first in a way and all that, but what we don't hear is the, like the Spanish broadcasts or the other different opinions that they have. And some of them they might not be. I don't want to say that they're, they're like, they're purposely like reprogrammed or controlled, but in a way, it leads you to a different opinion to actually discover, okay, is this are these facts? Or is this just something that is, you know, telephone game?

Flor Carabez 17:25

So did you stay here because you're kind of like, so, my, my parents, they're there, my dad speaks more English than my mom does. But my, both of them because of their level of education, there are certain things that they just don't understand. So I feel like I'm translating between two languages from Spanish to English. But with my dad, I'm also having to translate from English to English because there's a lot of jargon. Do you feel like you felt like you stayed here? Because you're kind of protecting them? In a sense, where if these things are happening, you can explain to them like, this is actually what's going on? Like, not so much what they're seeing on the TV, but it's this? Is that Is that what you're what you're, that's,

V 18:21

I think that happened to most families, most individuals, like first generation students, so I don't think that's something that's new. I just think people are kind of more watchful now and they take more precautions. So it's not it's not nothing new.

Flor Carabez 18:34

So with you not leaving, what ended up keeping you here with your family

V 18:48

I guess they wanted to see me like graduate and go through the process of this and not do it alone. Like I guess all these students would.

Flor Carabez 18:55

So that was important to you. Okay, that makes sense. So what was it like when when you were going through the paperwork and stuff in high school, and you had to choose because obviously to come here, you kind of have to pick a major from what was listed. So what was that whole

process like when you were like alright, I'm going to NLU. And now you were you have this list of majors.

V 19:24

I think my high school they made it overcomplicated. Made overcomplicated. And they were very complex with it. Because they it was like they made us list off what we liked, what we didn't like our potential likes, and our potential dislikes for a situation or a job that we might end up that we didn't plan for. And now I think all those categories along with trying to find a university and looking at if it's two year or four year and all that it kind of mixed up the students and then drag the process because there were what 30 30 35 Students for a class and you made to three advisors, the meetings and everything that the meetings and the due dates for certain applications, or documents that you had to have. Barely, I don't want to say barely. But I want to say probably most of the students from my graduating class did not have it squared away, they didn't have it all completed. So there were a lot of delays, or some people were on top of their stuff, but people had to look at a lot of other second options.

Flor Carabez 20:37

So in your case, you chose yours, like your study before you

V 20:43

I try not I listened to them, I did listen to them. But I also tried to listen to like my parents or my sister because she had chosen nursing. So it was different for her for, like North Park University. So I went back to okay, what am I good at? And what would I enjoy and what is there?

Flor Carabez 21:02

So your sister helped guide you a little bit?

V 21:06

For sure. I didn't go to too much. But when it came to the paperwork and everything Yeah, double check. Okay, so

Flor Carabez 21:11

how big of a role would you say your your parents and your sister played in you choosing criminal justice?

V 21:23

I think in the back of my head, my my dad and my mom, probably one me to get like a well paying job, right. But I don't think they would imagine it would probably be like a public servant type type job to serve the public, but I think they're alright with it. Let's see. So I'm trying to think because this family members in my have their teachers and doctors and all that so in a way, they instilled it in my head, like, by going back, like when I was younger, they might they wouldn't do the the comparison and contrast. But they would mention oh, tu primo Alfreto es doctor where he had gone to the army, right? When he was in his 20s. Then he came back, like he said, he wanted to finish school and everything. So by like 40 He's a professor so so in a way, I guess a mixture of competitiveness, and like, like the the curiosity and urge of wanting to and all that I lean more towards in the lane of, of criminal justice. And then for my sister well, for my sister, I did consider like, being a doctor and going into that area, but I didn't, I guess I didn't feel confident enough to go through with the studies. So I just left it at that I think it will complement Well, my sister's a nurse and all that, and I go into this, or whatever.

Flor Carabez 22:55

So with the confidence thing you just touched on. What do you mean by that?

V 23:04

So maybe it's because of like the practices and like the trainings that I've had, but I feel I'm more careful. and way, way more I think okay, so if I were to explain in in a metaphor, if I were to

explain it. In a comparison, I would say I'm more confident and more careful with a with a gun in my hand. Rather than having like needles or very scalpel. Something along the lines of that in a very, like important, like maybe not add doesn't have to be surgery in another manner. Okay. So as we just because I've kind of not gotten used to it, but it's just practice.

Flor Carabez 24:01

to you, because you've already had prior experience with

V 24:06

prior not prior similar. So,

Flor Carabez 24:09

okay, so it has nothing to do with like, academic confidence or you your perception of your potential.

V 24:25

I think academic confidence changes. So it's, it's different at times, I wouldn't. Maybe it was like in a different scenario I would buy in most of what I looked at. I wasn't like not it doesn't seem for me.

Flor Carabez 24:43

Okay. So if you could, let's say that cost wasn't a thing. You could literally do whatever you wanted and got paid like everyone got paid equally. Would you still choose criminal justice? As your major

V 25:07

probably most likely. The other options that I have in my head apply be doctor and Air Force pilot.

Flor Carabez 25:24

So are these things that you are genuinely interested in? Or are these occupations that you're considering? Because you've seen them in your family?

V 25:36

Occupations I would consider. Okay.

Flor Carabez 25:40

See how much time we have left?

Flor Carabez 25:47

Before today, Did anyone ask you? Has anyone asked you to share your story? What about choosing your major or being a college student? Never.

V 26:00

Somebody asked me something in the den, but it wasn't like that. So

Flor Carabez 26:04

was it something similar?

V 26:06

I forgot.

Flor Carabez 26:07

You forgot? What essential items do you want folks to take away from your experience?

V 26:23

College experience academic experience working experience, like

Flor Carabez 26:27

your story that you're that you just shared?

V 26:34

Well, since this is related to like Hispanics, right, I would say to us, I would say to us, like, they hate us, they hate us if you use it as a fire. Because even if you're, even though you grew up in a household where your dreams, your passions are unsupported, I feel in a way you can still find, like, whatever you're good at, or eventually, whatever you're good at, will find you. Because you can get noticed. And a lot of times when I was in high school, and I would work and I'd be in the job team and everything. There were times where we put in hard work and all that, but we didn't

get noticed. And that's all right. Because there's a lot of people and there's a lot of competition, it just should strive you to work better, to be a better version yourself, to have not just to be a better version of yourself, but have the individuals around you be better versions of themselves.

Because, yeah, it's it. And I think that relates to a lot of groups, a lot of like, future groups that you know, you surround yourself with. Feel that even if you do have, even if you do have, like negativity or like the unsupportive people in your life, you can kind of twist that, to look at the positives of it and even if, in a way, even if you are, like the opposite of that, like there are some people out there that are groomed, right from the moment that they're born and everything that they're doing, they're groomed, that they didn't make a mistake or that you know what they're doing is perfect. Although it's not, it might not be a good job. I feel that sometimes people aren't honest with you. So you have to be honest with yourself and look at what you're lacking and what you're not good at. And even if people are telling you that oh, you might be drained or you might be tired or this ticket it's alright to take a break but everyone is at a different pace in their own life. So if you kind of want to rush it Don't Don't be don't in a way don't don't react without thinking don't wait don't also react based off of emotion. So look at everything that is happening and make make it like a wise process so that you have checkpoints for what you want to do.

Flor Carabez 29:13

When you mentioned about being Hispanic and using the hate what what hate Are you referring to

V 29:20

any negative like your father, like my dad, right? I don't know if he's jealous, but I guess because we had we have like a like a family. We have like, like a family friend, friend family or whatever, right? We're not related. But because my aunt has been neighbors with this Hispanic family for years and all that and they have like, I guess families kind of like one of them became a godmother for another like niece and all that so I'm not related to them but they are just All they came over the house maybe like a month ago or something, the these two girls that I played with as kids, now they're older, right? And my dad with like, with, with like with drinking, he will try to get me to oh, they're in the living room go introduce yourself is that and I just came from work I'm sweaty, I'm from the gym, I don't, I'm gonna you know as Hispanic, I'm gonna greet everyone in the house and I'm gonna say hello, just that but I'm gonna go shower. And he's there and he wants me to like conversate with her or them, you know, like, you know that she's pretty and this and that and I'm telling my dad, I'm in the, in the kitchen and I'm telling him I don't need in a respectful way I don't need you to well, it's okay that they you know, brought over they came over the house with them and all that but I don't need him to bring girls to the house for me to meet and this and that. I explained to him. I lied to them even I told them look, I work at the gym. I see women every day. This and that. So

Flor Carabez 30:59

is that a lie, though?

V 31:01

But yeah, but I you know, I made it like I was flirting, but I told him it's fine. So I guess like, like with the with the hate correlation. Because my dad doesn't, I guess like it's a little bit like jealousy that I'm having like fun. But in a way, I'm still working through this. So I guess that maybe? And then, I guess Hispanic parents like to pick on the Hispanic parents like to pick on the what is it? It's not the it's not the like that. What would it is the errors, they will pick on the errors. It's just like any other person, like when you mess up, they'll correct you, they'll chew you up. But I think spanning parents will pick on the the type of like the lack of ability, like lack of ability, and I guess what other people will like kind of do better. Like, let's say like, I'll give you an example. So in the gym, right, well, not in the gym. So I think as to when we're like sprinting and running. So I'm a good runner. But I guess with sprinting I guess I'll like like fast. So I guess I'll fast and part of that has to do with like my core and like my stomach. And I'm not I'm not like I'm very very lean. But if I have to water bottles, I'll get bloated, if it's on me. So with that, I guess my dad will pick on and because I have my dad's jeans, I guess he'll he's picking on the same person. And I'm like bro I just got a stomach right now and this and that, he'll look at me like, No, you were skinnier, or this or that. And, you know, I guess use that hate like kinda have to work harder. But don't take it too personal, don't take it to heart, I'm not gonna, you know, be bent over backwards over you know, this and that.

Flor Carabez 33:06

So does your dad focus more on the negatives and not so much on your assets? Like, it sounds like he focuses a lot on your deficiencies, quote, unquote, and doesn't really give you como no te da aplausos on the good things that you're doing. Like he doesn't celebrate with you. How far you've come in college, or the fact that you're still in college, that you're working.

V 33:38

I think it's like a neutral.

Flor Carabez 33:40

So he does like a good balance

V 33:43

No. Because when I like when I'm making an error, or when I have to take the car and do something or run an errand that's that's like a normal like an order, like, you know, but I always say it's like neutral. I don't ever get like praises or I won't get like, you know, you did a horrible job. So, in a way and like no, it's very neutral.

Flor Carabez 34:06

So the like the example you use about oh, like, oh, you gained weight or whatever, so he does it more jokingly it's not to make you feel like shit, I guess? Or is

V 34:19

if he is sober? He sneaked these things.

Flor Carabez 34:25

Okay, so if he's drinking, he's being serious, but trying to say it in a joking way. But he's like lowkey talking shit. Okay, gotcha. What about your mom?

V 34:35

Mom doesn't really mom's neutral to she she'll tell me like if I've been if I've been back and forth the whole day or the whole week. She'll tell me where are you going now and until the gym she says gym already take? She said take a break or this or that? She won't. Yeah, no, she won't look at the deficiencies She because she'll, she'll remind me of like, Oh, you are you have class, you have this that,

Flor Carabez 35:03

okay

V 35:04

Just because I guess she knows she worked less than my dad, she's more home.

Flor Carabez 35:08

So so she's supportive, in the sense of holding you accountable to go to class and stuff. But do you see any praises? Like, do they ask you about how school is going? Or do they try to

V 35:22

I bet behind my back and all that? I think that praises, okay. Because they're like, they don't talk about other my kids that I grew up with. They'll talk about other family members, this and that. And I'll hear my mom, she'll tell it like in a phone call. Yeah, I'm in school still doing this doing that. So I'm not getting praises, but I know for a fact they're kind of like showboating me. They will know, they know that I'm working at Xsport or Home Depot did that and this. In a way They're just, you know, like, they're satisfied with with the process of me keep going.

Flor Carabez 36:01

Okay. Do you feel like you have enough support to complete your, your degree in criminal justice,

V 36:12

support in what aspect?

Flor Carabez 36:14

whatever aspect you need. So when we're talking about support, you know, like in high school, college, it's like, whatever is offered to that's all you get, right. But sometimes you might need something that isn't offered. So for the support that you feel like you need, do you feel like you have it?

V 36:34

I probably do, but I'm not utilizing the way I should, or the most that I should. Or maybe I'm not in the right spot to to do to ask for it yet.

Flor Carabez 36:51

Okay. What do you mean by that?

V 36:52

Maybe like, I am supposed to be stuck and figure out a different solution or a different type of alternative. Not that strays away too much. But that gives me focus for another plan.

Flor Carabez 37:07

Okay, so do you feel stuck right now?

V 37:12

A bit. But it's not like, oh, I don't know what to do. And no, no, is like I guess maybe like two years. That's what I'm thinking, you know, and with everything.

Flor Carabez 37:25

Okay. So are you feeling because you're close to graduation? Are you feeling like rushed that you have to think about what's going to come next after graduation?

V 37:42

I wouldn't say rushed. But I think it will probably be it's, it's not rush. It's in a way like

Flor Carabez 37:57

pressure?

V 37:58

no, not pressured either. It's, it's like I have to prepare for this challenge. Because in order to if I'm going to work my way up, I have to establish like a role that I'm going to have. And I have to do it well. And I don't even and if it involves like writing reports, for whatever, or behind the desk, I want to know, in advance so that when I'm doing it, I'm excelling. So not rushed, not pressured. But it's like I'm awaiting a challenge. I'm awaiting the hard work that's about to come. And it's like right now I shouldn't be. I shouldn't be too like too relax. But like, I don't know.

Flor Carabez 38:42

Kind of like, you know, you have this responsibility. You're just like anticipating it.

V 38:48

Yeah, but anticipating maybe, okay.

Flor Carabez 38:51

When you started here, did you automatically start with criminal justice? Or did you have a different major?

V 38:58

No, I started with CSJ, that's why I came.

Flor Carabez 39:01

And so I know you. It wasn't necessarily Passion Driven. But do you feel passion for it now? Or does it still feel more like you're doing it out of a need?

V 39:15

Both. Now, there's more passion. Because I look at my classmates, I look at future people that are going to work. And then I look back at like old crowds and other people that shows other majors or the universities. And like, I'll listen, I'll look at the news. I'll listen to their opinions others saw definitely more passionate, maybe.

Flor Carabez 39:36

Okay. So you didn't mention at all anything about NLU being a Hispanic Serving Institution? Do you know that we are a Hispanic Serving Institution?

V 39:52

No.

Flor Carabez 39:53

Do you know what that means?

V 39:56

It's not that you accept Hispanics

Flor Carabez 40:01

Okay, so the Hispanic serving institution is basically a label. It's a designation that universities and colleges get from the Department of Education. So like the Department of Ed is like the main boss, right? So only certain institutions get this designation, you get this designation, if you

have at least 25%, Hispanic enrollment, full time undergraduate. So that's why we have it. With that the school gets money, grant funding to support programming. We can use it for whatever we want. So it sounds like you didn't know about the designation. Now you know what it means. Now that you know what it means, Do you feel like it's impacted your experience here? Having that designation? So we've had it for at minimum, three years? Well, since 2016, so it's been longer. Do you feel like now that you know what it is? And that we have it? Like? Does it change your experience here at all? Or does it make sense? Or does it matter?

V 41:30

I want to say that it does. But I'm not. I can't think back on how I'm looking. I'm thinking about career fairs and other events, maybe other people, I'm other people in the past. I've got here as a freshman, there were Hispanic there were a lot of people. But they weren't that many transfer students. So in a way I should more Hispanic students graduated with in the last years. If the numbers are right, and that might be true.

Flor Carabez 42:13

Did the so you didn't know that it was a thing till today. But now that you mentioned the graduation rates of Latino or Hispanic students, did that play a role in you choosing? And all you?

V 42:29

If the if, well, I probably know but for God, but if this was this all connects, and I knew prior to this, and my coach I mentioned in the past and this then the probably most likely made sense to Why choose?

Flor Carabez 42:47

Okay. So you had talked a little bit about being Hispanic. So I also like to use Latinidad as a term to describe that. How did your Hispanic descendency impact your experience with choosing your major if at all? So you mentioned a little bit about your parents and kind of the dynamic that you have with them, what their support looks like with you, and that you had members in your family that went to the military? Maybe they didn't, but they're a lot of them are college educated? Have you have doctors in your family? Do you feel like you're Latinidad played a role in what you chose as your major? Probably

V 43:49

like, what is it? Are you talking more into awareness or representation?

Flor Carabez 43:54

Well, it's whatever you think. So initially, you mentioned that there's you mentioned Hispanic, and you mentioned, you mentioned hatred. You talked about the dynamic with your dad. And then you talked about fulfilling a need and being a public servant as someone majoring in criminal justice. I'm assuming you're looking into being like a officer or something like that. Right. So did your you being Latino did that play a role in your major? If you would have been any other ethnicity? Would you still have chosen this major?

V 44:39

Hard question if I was any other probably did play a role because growing up, we probably didn't see enough Hispanic officers. Or maybe we didn't notice, well no. We didn't have Hispanic officers that have, like, at an elite level, or at least at least high level, like maybe in the FBI or other organizations, they're probably low numbers if anything. Kinda like, I can't think of the guy's name, but there's like a, like African American Sniper within the last five to 10 years, and he's had the most, he's at the top at the very, very top. So I guess representation does matter. We, we kind of witnessed that there weren't enough officers or there wasn't enough type of people at a high power where they could comprehend certain certain events on why they would happen. So seeing that, I guess, played a role. And in my head I thought maybe I'll join. There'll be more.

Flor Carabez 45:59

So you didn't see too many people that look like you in these positions. And now that you have thought opportunity to get a degree, you thought that it would be a good idea for you to help with the representation

V 46:16

in a way,

Flor Carabez 46:17

okay.

V 46:19

Do you know Alexa? Grosman

Flor Carabez 46:20

No,

V 46:20

it was like a week ago, she she won the the UFC Flyweight Championship. Okay, so she beat this. I think she was American, maybe? Or either American or Russian. I'm not sure which, but yeah, she won like a week ago, the flyweight. So she's a third. She's the third Mexican in the UFC that currently holds a championship. The other two I can't think of their names right now. But they won titles in a different a different time. So it's not that so I can draw that comparison. So what we can say 10 years ago, right. 10 years ago, we didn't have Mexican fighters. We had Mexican boxers, obviously. But we didn't have Mexican top level elight fighters in the MMA. It was all Americans. It was all Brazilians. Whatever. Kane Velasquez was one of the earliest MMA fighters right? He won the championship. So he was one of the first people in those years. Right, just just one of them. And recent years now we have more. So now we have we have three we have so I guess I could draw that comparison. Now. It's more free, frequent. Now. There's more competition now it's more complex. So

Flor Carabez 47:44

sounds like you take deep pride in being Latino.

V 47:48

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 47:51

Cool. All right. That is all I had for my questions. Do you have any questions for me?

V 48:13

It was like a how to statistic question, but I can't phrase it. Like officer why can't I can't frase it like with? Maybe, I can explain it. What are the what are the different what are the comparison numbers? With?

V 48:37

What are the comparison numbers with with Hispanic people? And in criminal justice and what is the the like the difference with people that don't study criminal justice, but they still have like a role. So you know, how psychology they have many people that make work together? What is the ratio of that?

Flor Carabez 49:09

Are you talking about like the the major, like the major here? It sounds like to separate to statistic question

V 49:17

the major like overall, like how many how many? How many Hispanic officers or law enforcement officials are there compared to those that are outside of the areas like psychology and sociology?

Flor Carabez 49:34

I have no idea.

V 49:35

Are they like, are the numbers bigger for like Hispanics to be in those other categories and then work into law enforcement or for them to just be in law enforcement because I have like a theory. I feel like Hispanics would they could have representation in law enforcement, but I feel there's more understanding In the other majors to break it to break down certain issues, rather than going straight into law and into those forms.

Flor Carabez 50:09

So you're asking about what are the demographics of people in law enforcement, and then you're asking about how many people go straight into a law enforcement career path versus starting in psychology and then getting into that,

V 50:29

yeah, basically the success rate.

Flor Carabez 50:32

That I don't know. I do know that there is a disparity, ethnically, there's a disparity of Latinos in psychology and in criminal justice, especially criminal justice. Psychology is a helping profession. Criminal justice could be a helping profession, in a sense, it's just that the culture is a little different. So in psychology, there's a lot of Latinos going in, because there is a high need for Latinx therapists, because in our culture, we don't talk about mental health. So it's, in a sense, it's like a softer, profession going to because it's more intimate, it's one on one. Versus if you go into law enforcement, it's a whole culture that's already been established for many years, that hasn't been very kind to people that are not white. So when you're going in there, you're kind of going in already knowing that you're gonna have to be extremely resilient to go in. And then within itself, there's a hierarchy. It's the culture is just very strict, very rigid compared to psychology and like human services, for example. But I don't know, I look it up. I have no idea though. I know that there are parts of some districts, I don't know how much in Chicago but I

know in Canada, they started doing a mental health special, like a specialty team within the police force, so that if there are calls that are mental health, crisis's, then they'll send out these mental health specialists instead of sending sending out the officers just because the mental health specialists are also trained officers. But they have that psychology component where, for example, if they're going to jump off a bridge or something, they know how to de escalate the situation. So I know there are, there's a lot of conversation about making the police force a little more welcoming to other ethnicities. I just don't know what that's gonna look like, just because it just goes way back in time. There's a lot of racism rooted in that system. And obviously, the dynamic between the police force and our community hasn't been all that great. So you are brave. Do you have any other questions for me?

V 53:17

That was the only one actually.

Flor Carabez 53:20

Okay. Well, I'll look it up. I'll Google it. And then if whatever I find, I'll email it to you. But that is all I have. Once I'm done with the whole study, if you want the results, like the whole thing, then just email email me requests that I can send it over to you. And if you have any questions after today, you can also email me or you can text me through the number you have for me, but thank you. I'm going to stop recording now.

Bella

Sat, Mar 18, 2023 11:52AM • 58:29

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

teachers, talk, classroom, students, bully, hear, people, mom, iep, kids, told, feel, high school, questions, mexico, college, professor, parents, education, special education

SPEAKERS

Bella, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:02

Bella thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is flor and I'm a doctoral candidate here at National Louis University. I'm one term away from graduating. The reason why I'm conducting the study is because in my personal and professional experience, I've noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are creating a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from the

study will help elevate students stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is. And I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I'm going to cover how this whole thing will play out. To protect your identity, I'm using the pseudonym Bella that you chose in your Screening Questionnaire. This will be the name I use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. The idea behind this is that this might influence you to be more honest or honest in general, since no one will be able to know that this is you. I have one central question for the conversation. But I might decide to have follow up questions just for clarity. I want to make sure that I'm documenting and understanding your experience the way that you experienced it. And not just by my perception. As I'm asking the questions, take your time responding and feel free to ask me any questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I'll get an idea for a separate question. Or I might take note of your body language, just to know that I'm giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I'm recording your verbal responses with my phone so I can analyze the answers later. Once I'm done with the assignment, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the final product, I'll gladly share it with you just make sure you email me request. So now that all that is taken care of Do you have any questions for me before we get started? All right. Um, okay, so how far are you in your program?

Bella 02:33

I'm in my senior year,

Flor Carabez 02:35

senior year. So when are you graduating?

Bella 02:41

That's where I'm not sure about.

Flor Carabez 02:43

Okay. And what's your major?

Bella 02:46

Early Childhood Education?

Flor Carabez 02:48

Okay. Were you always majoring in that?

Bella 02:52

Yes.

Flor Carabez 02:53

Okay. And what? What pushed you to do early childhood as your major?

Bella 03:01

Um, I guess, a start in second grade, actually.

Flor Carabez 03:06

Second grade?

Bella 03:07

Yes.

Flor Carabez 03:08

Wow. Okay, tell me that. Tell me more.

Bella 03:11

Um, I have two special education teachers that made a difference when I was younger, because I went to a really poor school, didn't have the right education at all. There was a lot of violence in my neighborhood at that time. And those teachers made a difference. Because I was in the classroom, maybe with eight boys and I was the only girl because it was a special kids classroom. So we were all in that classroom all day. And I wasn't sure I wanted to be a teacher because I had a lot of ideas at that point. I wanted to be a veterinarian, a dentist, or like an airline thing, a teacher, I had all these ideas. But I wasn't sure at that time. I was like in my head. I wanted to be a veterinarian because I had a lot of animals. So when time passed by, they were still with me through fourth, fifth sixth to eighth grade. And they really cherish cherish me because they didn't saw me as a person who had a learning disability. They saw me as a person the way I am. Because like, I used to get picked on a lot in Fairfield. That's the name, because we were known for the R word. Retarded group.

Flor Carabez 04:38

Oh, well thats. Yeah.

Bella 04:41

Okay. So every time we will walk to like our specials or something. Everyone was there laughing and making comments to us because they knew we were that group because we used to be there all day. So like, that changed. Maybe in fourth grade. I spoke to them first only to those teachers because I told them like, I want to be in a regular classroom, where there's more girls, because I was the only girl in that class, there was a bunch of boys. So you know, that was different. So when I finally did get the experience, I didn't like it, because all the girls would pick on me because they knew, you know, so I only have one specific friend, but those teachers would always be right there with me because like, every time I used to not behave well, they always come like, this is not You remember, don't let those kids change you. Because they're changing me because I'm like, I'm not like them. Because like I was in that classroom through so much time, and I'm finally in a regular classroom, and I wasn't sure how to act or how to like, behave and all that. So what I saw I did, you know, as kids, and then they were there the whole time, like, that's not you remember this, don't let them get to you. I know this is hard for you, because I know you want to do this. And I remember like not liking what they said. But now that I reflect they had a point because I did. I did change. I used to I used to wear trensas as all the time. Like two trensas, and every time I used to arrive school, I used to take them off because they used to blame me for that. And I used to love my hair straighter. I used to wear more like tighter pants, and like more shirts to show my body because like That was brutal. They used to bully me so much because I wasn't as cool or pretty as the girls and stuff like that. And I remember, they used to like me and my group of friends. We used to pick still get picked on in those regular classes. Even though we change our experience and everything we were still known as the R word. And

then like, they didn't still didn't want us to like be part of that classroom. So every time we used to have specials, gym or group work, we were always the last one to get picked on. Because they didn't want us to be because we were slow, basically for them. But I remember those two teachers were always there for us. And always tell us don't listen to them. They're just hating on you. Remember, you're different. You're your own person. I still went through those bullying throughout eighth grade and they were still there for me. But when I did graduate from eighth grade, I went to a charter school. That was not CPS two charter and CPS are both different. So when I got to high school, I still keep contact with them. So when I got to high school, I got to know another teacher, I still keep in contact with her as well. Her name is is can I say her name? Miss Carroll, my choir teacher. First day, we had to pick electives I didn't know what I wanted so they put choir. I got I got the schedule. And I'm like, I don't want I don't want to see I let them pick in I look at choir Oh my, I don't want this. And I got there. Oh my gosh, she made a difference. She made music fun. She made me find my voice. And something that sticks with me on that is she told me is an IP, it just a program. It doesn't represent you. And I always stick with that I always even now I wrote a research paper about something about my experiences about special education. And I put that as my conclusion that an IEP doesn't represent you. It's a program in that stick with me because like ever since she said that, that change the way I thought because I used to I still get like services, you know for for my disability. And every time I think low of myself, I always think no, that phrase she told me and I think of all my two teachers in second grade. Because those teachers made a difference. It made me feel better because when I got in choir she made me from my voice. She made me feel welcome and comfortable because I used to have my shelter still. So when I got out of high school, I was still I got I got back to myself. I felt like okay, if I'm in that change, this is high school. I don't know this people they

don't know me. Okay, so I want to get those rooms like I did in second grade. So like when I got there, I was comfortable with myself. Because every time we used to be in choir, the minute I enter there, I will start bursting laughing nice to start high be hyperness jumping everywhere because the minute I was in class, I knew I could be comfortable and she will always laugh with my stuff and stuff like that. Like we could be like just singing and now nowhere I just started making noises for fun and it was one time. I remember I entered a classroom and I've said just dancing and she started dancing. Is that is that one classroom? That made me feel comfortable being my hyperness. Because everyone, I, when I used to be really hyper, like, in my regular classes, like, come down, and you know, you never say come down to a person when you're being hyper I just I was just looking at them like, don't say that I'm gonna be more hyper. When I was in her class, she never had an issue. She never told me to come down. And maybe my senior year, we know you need hours to graduate from high school, right? Like, I'm, well, what's it call

Flor Carabez 10:31

the service hours?

Flor Carabez 10:32

the teacher?,

Bella 10:32

Yeah, service hours. And I didn't know where to go and ask her. Can I do serve? I can I do my hours here? Yes. So I started working with preschool, kindergarten, in first grade were her class, I used to go through those periods to help her. And that kind of made me more realized I wanted to do something because like, I was doing services with her. And I was doing surfaces were a special education teacher as well. And something I made me realize that I don't ever want a kid to like go through what I experienced, to change for who they are because they have an IP, because I don't want them to change because I that doesn't represent you, it just you just need extra help when it comes to assignments. And that's okay. Because I still need help and I'm an adult now and I am in college, I still need help, extra help. And it's okay, because we all struggle with something. So I'm like, I want to make those changes for those students. Because I don't want them to change. And those two teachers and my choir teacher made the difference for me, because they made me realize who I am. To not change. And to be, she made me find my voice as well. Because I used to be shy all the time. I used to be my shelter all the time. In there. Every time I used to go in that class, I started talking more and she was like, I've noticed you change and like because of you of course because you made me feel comfortable. You don't judge me, you, you made me realize who I am. And why I want to do because whatever time I used to, like help her with the kids. I felt so comfortable with them I used to laugh I used to like, because we used to, like do just dance. So it was so fun. Because at that time, I realize that I want to do something with education, especially with special education because that's my minor. I'm like, I want to make changes. Because when I was in middle school, everyone, even my own teachers, and especially in gym, he will let the bullies bully me and who bully me,

Bella 12:39

the teacher himself. He used to scream at me, he used to like make names, he will like, se dejo, he will let the bullies bully me he will bully me as well. And some other teachers saw they're a bully me. And they're like, during those general education class, they will show left them. So when I was with those two special education teachers, they always made a difference. Like don't do that. Don't do that. Like they step in now like other teachers, and then like, I told them, like, I don't want to work with this specific kids because they're bullying me. Wow, that's right away. Put me in those kids. Oh, my I just told you, I don't feel comfortable with them. Like, oh, my can I be with my friends or something? Like, it's not that I want to because you know, when they think like, oh, let's put these kids when they're gonna be together, they're just gonna slack off and not do work. I'm like, No, I want to be with them because I feel comfortable with them. Because you're not gonna bully me because I'm am I if you're gonna put me in this group, they, they will believe me and I make comments. They're gonna call me slow because I cant do group work with them. So that's why we were always picked last because no one wanted wanted me. And then my friends couldn't pick me because we were friends. So like, that's why I'm like, I don't want those students to go through. Because my education is different. Now, teachers are doing more things. But like imagine, back then nothing happened. Like no cambios or anything like teacher led bullyings going on. Like, like in my school. By that time. I knew there was like, maybe like five kids who suicide at that time, because there was so much bullying in that school. Like it was so much. And then the principal that we had time, didn't do anything. They didn't do any changes. And when I finally left, like great, we finally got a new principal. And I went back

to that school recently because my nieces go there. It's so different. Like, it's it's so different from when I went in, I'm like I don't even recognize. And there's like two teachers that I and they're still there when I was there in second grade. And I'm like, damn. And they recognize me too. And they asked me how I am but I'm like it changed so much. And those two teachers and my choir teacher kind of made me really want I want it because I'm like at that time Like, why, but I literally reflecting those experiences and how I felt. I'm like, I want to do this because on my especially special education, I want to do a difference because in my placement right now, it's known for a special education. So like, everywhere you go is cluster classrooms, there's a general education classroom. But in all those classes, there's at least one student with an IEP or a 504. I remember the first time I went because I'm like, I want to go there. Because I want to know, more special education because there's my degree, well, my minor. And I remember the first day she comes in here, I, when I came, she was just giving me a tour of school. And she's like, don't freak out, because there's because there was a bunch of wheelchairs and she thought I was going to freak out. And I'm like, oh, no, I'm not freaked out. I'm like it's okay, because I went to school. Before I went to second grade, I went to a school where it was no for a special education. So in that classroom, there was kids with feeding tubes. wheel chairs. There was all a bunch of disabilities. And I told her Oh, no, I'm not freaked out. I'm used to this. I've seen this since I was little maybe since preschool, basically, I'm like, It's okay. I've seen this before. And she's like, really on my Yeah, because she's like, usually people when they see this freaked out, I freaked out. I seen this since I was little. But yeah, those, those three teachers made me realize what I wanted. Because especially with special education, I want to make a difference with those kids, because I don't want them go through I went through and feel like no one hears them out. Because no one heard me. Besides those three teachers, they tried our best, but they can't really

do something, they couldn't really do anything. Because for for people, they're just teachers, like their voice don't matter. Our our students voice didn't matter, too, because my words didn't matter. Just those two teachers sometimes made a difference really count. So when those, that's why I wanted to do something with special education, because I'm like, I want to do a difference, I want to do a combination modifications that really fits for them. Because I'm like, I don't want them to like feel left out, or feel like their voices are unknown, or like, we don't notice them as a person. Like I don't want them to like, we just see them because they have an IEP, because I don't want them to go through because that was really such a bad experience for me, because I changed myself. So multiple times, because I wanted to please the person, the people, the groups of teachers, yeah, the teachers, even the lady. That's why I'm like, I want to do a difference when I go to my classroom, because I'm like, I don't want them to go through what I went through. So right now, my placement, I'm trying to make a difference with those students who have an IEP or overall like all the students as well, because I don't want them to like, feel like their voices doesn't matter, like, so every time they used to call with me. I always try like, one time, one time, because they're all trying to talk over at one time. I want to make sure I can hear all your voices. I wanted to hear all your opinions, because they were all saying different stuff. So I'm like, wait, wait, wait, what do you think?

Flor Carabez 18:08

So you mentioned that in second grade, you had veterinarian, teacher, dentists, dentists, you were talking about? I'm assuming you were talking about a flight attendant aeromosa. So did you keep those occupations as an option? Until you got to high school?

Bella 18:35

Yes.

Flor Carabez 18:36

And then what made you decide on education in high school

Bella 18:41

senior year,

Flor Carabez 18:42

senior year

Bella 18:43

when I was working with my choir teacher, when I was doing the services I needed, and especially that phrase, she said this when, she told me my senior year. And I was like, Oh, I think I want to do this because like, we went to like college fair. You know, when you go downtown, there's like a bunch of colleges, you can apply to get more information. I didn't know what I wanted. So I just, oh, another option. I wanted to be a nurse or paramedic. So I had a bunch of options. So like, I like go, I was standing there, all these colleges everywhere and I was like, I don't know what I wanted to do. That was before I did my services. So I was in my junior year I think so you know what I did, I just grab a bunch. I got I went to all, each one of them. I don't know what I want, So let me see what you offer what's your programs. So when I got in my senior year, I had to do a bunch of services. And I did all my services for Miss Carroll. And I did all my service with the students she had. I still have videos with my kiddos I have a whole picture with all of them. And you know that hit me I'm like I want I think I want to be a teacher. Because like I said, I had another classroom I did my services with, there were students who had an IEP, and I help them around like their class where you, stuff like that, so I was going with this class and this class. And you know, like, I don't even know what what I thought about. I'm like, wait, I'm working with kids. I mean, I did want to be a teacher but I wasn't sure like what grade you know, I'm like, do I want to do high school? Do I want to do little kids? So all that spending time with little kids in our classroom with it clicked. I'm like, I think I want to be a teacher, and I explained

For little Kids

Bella 20:22

Yeah, with for little kids. I'm like, Oh, big kids are kind of you're basically your own bullies

Flor Carabez 20:40

they're their own bully?

Bella 20:41

like they're my own bully.

Flor Carabez 20:42

Oh, they're.

Bella 20:43

Yeah. Like because one time I was with fifth grade and they were so mean. They were making comments like to me. I was like woah, woah you don't even know me. And this kid went up to me because I had a pixie cut that time. And he was like, Are you a boy or girl? I was like, Oh, my God. This is so many comments. And oh, no, no, I'm a stick with early child education, kindergarten to second kindergarten second, like third grade is fine. But like, after you get to fifth grade. I just I'm like, No, I wanted to do little kids. And I spend more time with little kids. I spent one time that fifth grade class. It made me open my eyes. No, I don't want to do older kids. I'm gonna stick with little kiddos. And then after that, I started getting jobs at daycares a summer, summer jobs, camps. And volunteer. I volunteered to another summer camp. To, you know, to like, do I still want to do with teaching? do i I still want to do a little kids? My thoughts haven't changed. Last year, I work in a summer camp too. And they still haven't.

Flor Carabez 21:55

Nice. So all these options. Get to high school. And then you're like, you know what I'm gonna add to this list. I might be a paramedic, I might be a nurse. And then senior year comes around, you need your service hours you meet with Miss Carol. She's like, you can work with me. And you're working with kids. And you're like, alright, this is an option. And then she tells you that your IEP doesn't represent you. It's just a program. And then you said, What did that feel like?

Bella 22:27

I cry,

Flor Carabez 22:27

you cry,

Bella 22:28

I cry because like, that's maybe the first time a teacher really said that to me. I'm like, cuz she made me realize who I am. She's like, she's like an IEP doesn't represent you. It's just a program. But it just says you need help in these areas? Doesn't say who you are. What's your favorite color? Doesn't say your personality? doesn't say anything about that. Does that make? No, just like this is just a program is just to help teachers with what you need help with it does not represent you. And I will still cry. I'm like, You're right. Right. Because I started I still had like, some bullies at a time that as much as I had through my eighth grade, it was just one bullied but like, she, she really like made me like when she said that phrase, I kind of wrote down because I never thought of it that way. You know? So like. My brother, he's autistic. And he sometimes points out, like, Why does no one wants to talk to me? Or like, why can no one be friends with me? And I'm like, and sometimes I'll hear him say I hates this stupid IEP. I'm like, I wish I didnt have it. Because everyone just sees me as and you know, you know, it was like, because I'm like, I felt like that I felt that hatred before. And I told him that phrase, I'm like an IEP just, it doesn't represent you. I told him it just helps teachers to know where you at? Where do you need help

with? What was your past testing your SMART goals and like all of that, bro, oh, my doesn't represent you. And I still use that phrase now. Because Im like it's just it's, it's such as phrase that makes a difference for people. And then I go into that stuff is just to help teachers, you know, where you add? What what areas you struggle with, you know, I told him like, doesn't represent you. And that time when Miss Carroll was telling me that I was crying because I'm like, you know, you're right, you know? Because I'm like, Oh, that was my biggest fear. My biggest fear because I told him I How can I be a teacher when I have this learning disability that sometimes I have a harder time understanding things, have a harder time doing assignments? And I'm like, it's just like, how am I going to do it? All my kids are gonna probably laugh at me because I don't know how to read this or, or I don't know how to solve this math problem because I forgot she's like, well then do it your own way. We all have our own different teaching styles, we all have our different ways. I might I bet you, each of your teachers in college you're gonna have You're all have their own struggles. And if she, you know, she had a point because like, sometimes I still think about like that my How am I gonna like teach them? Because sometimes in my placement, I feel like Oh, I forgot to say this word because I stutter a lot when I'm with them. Even now I still stutter. And, and they, and I'm like, It's okay. I tell them, It's okay. I'm gonna make mistakes, okay? I'm like, all my friends. I'm gonna make mistakes while reading this and doing your math problems. Okay, so I'm learning with you. Okay? and they say okay miss Bella? And I'm like it's, I think, about how she said, we have our own learning styles. And I'm like, it's okay to show students that we struggle as well, because we don't want them to show like a that we perfect that, we have no emotions, and we not feel anything. And I'm like, because like, if you show them that you make mistakes, and you have emotions, they're gonna be more open with you. They are more open with me. And like, I still stick with those things and Miss Carol. So because I'm like,

it made me like realize, like, she made such a huge impact with me. That the stuff that she says sometimes I think about like, okay, she's right. I can do this. I can tell my students I make mistakes. And I do before I go into a lesson. I like, listen, friends, or make some mistakes time to time. Please correct me if you see something, okay. I told them like I make mistakes. It's okay. And they do correct me which it helps. Because when I have second grade right now, so my it's really helpful when they do that. Because like, oh, yeah, you're right. Right. You're right. Thank you.

Flor Carabez 26:46

And it shows that they're learning to it.

Bella 26:49

Yeah, you're right. It shows it like it does. It does make a difference.

Flor Carabez 26:54

So talked a lot about high school, elementary school, under resourced schools. You haven't brought up anything about your Latinidad that did that play a role? Or does it influence your your career aspiration or your major?

Bella 27:23

Well, when I was very little. I was mute. I didn't talk. I used to, like, every time used to like, be overwhelmed, something. I used to rock myself so bad to like the point I would hit myself. And my mom used to get all frustrated because she didn't know what to do. And I remember my dad, like, saying things to like. He was like, I had something I was there's something wrong with me. So they sent me. They sent me to the school. Now I will say earlier, I went to the school, I was like known for special education. I went to that school.

Flor Carabez 28:10

mhm

Bella 28:11

it was difficult for my parents because they didn't know what to do with me. So when I was like, in that school in Fairfield, those times were really hard for my parents because I knew I knew, I know, they didn't know how to like say things to me, because, you know, they were in different generation. So like the way they used to, like say things to me, is by saying mean things to me, by saying the time my dad used to be alcoholic. So he used to say like, eres pendeja, no sabes hacer nada, que que tienes, no tienes nada en tu cabeza Because that's how mad he was because I

guess he was disappointed because I, I didn't know how to do certain things. I didn't know how to do certain stuff. I didn't know how to interact with kids of my age at that time. So like my mom was overwhelmed. And when I remember this sticks with me, but this I don't know, maybe was a speech therapist or something. But they used to come to the house like every once a week to talk to me, because I was mute. I couldn't talk to them. I I don't remember why. But like when I went to that school I didnt talk at all either I used to just rock and suck my thumb all the time. Because that's the way I used to like interact with them. As I got older. I got out of that phrase. The mute I still rock and I'll admit I still rock sometimes now not as much were point I will try to harm myself. But like I'll do it when I get

Flor Carabez 29:51

self soothing.

Bella 29:52

Yeah. And so sometimes I'm like I'm like in the chair or on the sofa or in the carro. And my dad will still say stop moving. Oh my gosh, sorry, I'm getting anxious. Like, my parents used to really had a hard time with that because like, they were disappointed because like, I didn't know what I wanted to do. And then especially with the IEP, my dad used to like say a lot of things like Yeah i'm, slow. Like, I don't know how to do anything and like, why cant you be like other kids? And then my mom at that time, she was really supportive. She understood, but like, I

know, I used to, like, every night I used to see her cry to my dad. And I used to, like, think to myself what was wrong with me? Because like, I could, I didn't want my mom to cry. And she used to like, say, It's okay, you're just different. I didn't want to hear that. I didn't want to hear I'm different I'm like, why cant I just say, I'm just like everyone else. Just but just with this learning disability, you know? I want to say it's okay, but she would like eres your different my dad used to have a hard time like my mom this is off topic, but we were in high school. I applied to NLU and she admitted to me like I didn't expect you to go to college. Because how slow you were. So I that hit my friggin feeling so bad because I'm like, you don't believe we're gonna go to college?

Flor Carabez 31:32

Does she say it in English or Spanish?

Bella 31:35

She said like, te puedo decir halgo? She always starts like that. We were on the bus too and I'm like, and then when she said that I'm like fuck, like, okay, okay. I'm like, mm? Que Mami? Y dice, well. She's like, No me esperaba que ibas a ir al colegio. Esque estaba pensando que eras the P word.

Flor Carabez 31:39

Pendeja?

Bella 32:02

Yeah. And I was just like, porque? Pues mira, por tu disability. And I was like, I'm like, does that mean? It doesn't mean anything mom. I can still do things that other people do I just have a harder time to process things probably we just jumped at that because I'm like, I knew I was gonna cry in a bus. I'm like, mmm.

Flor Carabez 32:33

So even after that, you still chose to move forward.

Bella 32:38

Yeah,

Flor Carabez 32:39

you applied. And then obviously you got admitted. So then what happened?

Bella 32:44

Um my dad right now its the conduct test. He's saying that it's an easy test. You just need to study more, you need to like put more and not be more lazy. And I was trying to explain to him that these tests who that it's meant to fail people. The people who create this test are not even educators

Flor Carabez 33:11

which test?

Bella 33:12

the conduct test

Flor Carabez 33:13

Oh for your education major

Bella 33:14

yeah because I haven't told him I didn't tell him I failed and that week I was gonna take it again. He said donde vas I'm like oh voi hacer mi examen otravez. Y dice, no pasaste? I'm like, no. Mija, necesitas practicar mas, no seas huevona. Preparate. Es facil. And I'm like no es facil. I tried to explain to her because I tried to explain because my Spanish isn't that great. So it gets in the way sometimes. And sometimes I get so frustrated because I don't I can't say what I want to say to them. So like I'm like Pa la gente que hico este examen no son maestros. I'm like, este examen es para I don't know how to say it. para que no pasen. I'm like, ese es el proposito.

Flor Carabez 34:05

weed people out

Bella 34:06

yeah, I'm like no entiendes es bien dificil. Son cien preguntas. I tried to tell him like, you have to understand it's not an easy test. And I'm like daddy, but you have to remember I have a hard time processing this. I'm like, I need more time. I need more help with this. I'm like I don't even understand half of this stuff. And he's like, Well, busca mas ayuda o algo porque necesitas pasar. I'm like, Well, you don't think I'm trying? I'm like it's hard. It's a hard test and I'm like, I still get two times and like, it's not easy. And I remember I told my mom. I was like, I was crying because I was on my placement. And I call her I'm like, Mom, umm, I need your opinion. I was like no pase mi examen so tengo dos opciones. Puedo hacer mi graduacion este año pero sin mi

licencia. O puedo regresar en septiembre pasando con mi examen de mi licencia. And she said pues qual quier cosa yo to soporto. Like, my mom relationship got better. Because when I was younger, I used to not get along with my dad I used to get along with my mom. Now, I get along with my dad, I don't get along with my mom. So like, at that time, when I told him about the test, I guess they flip flop, like my mom support me. And my dad didn't. He was just like, your lazy and mean like that. So I was just kind of shock. Because I didn't want to tell my dad because I didn't want to disappoint him because we had a great relationship. And I'm like Oh my God, I don't want to disappoint him and tell them like, Hey, I didn't pass the tests. I'm not gonna graduate. You know, so it was hard to tell him but he it was not the reaction I expected. But my mom, she was more supportive, and I was more shocked. I even told my boyfriend. She's okay. What? and he even said is your mom Okay? I'm like, I don't even know. Maybe shes just gonna talk shit to people. That's what she does. So like, cuz she's like, I support you whichever option you want. I'm gonna be there for you. So I'm like, she's I don't I don't know this woman. So I was shocked.

Flor Carabez 36:30

So you said that she will talk shit to people? So have you heard like, did she say stuff about you?

Bella 36:38

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 36:39

So is it like, just like, she'll seem supportive?

Bella 36:43

Yeah,

Flor Carabez 36:43

then she'll be on the phone. So like, what are some things that she says?

Bella 36:46

Okay,so when I was 19 I met my boyfriend. And we still you know, that phrase used to you go a lot with your significant other to get to know them

Flor Carabez 37:01

Puppy love

Bella 37:02

And then she would say, it's fine, you can hang out with him. It's okay. I hear her, no esta en la casa, no quiere hacer nada. Siempre esta afuera con el. And I'm just like, you just told me it's okay to go out. And I'm like, and then she's talking crap. And then my cousin tells me, like she's talking shit about you.

Flor Carabez 37:23

So she's talking to what, one of your tias?

Bella 37:26

Of course her sister.

Flor Carabez 37:28

Oh.

Bella 37:31

And then she was talking this morning, I heard her talk to the people. My cousin like, oh, esque no paso su examen so la voi a mandar a mexico, asi que tiene un mental health break. which I'm like, y no va tener su graduacion este año yo creo. And you know, like, I was she was in the bathroom with the door slightly little open. And I was gonna go in there to brush my hair, you know, and I hear a talk and I'm like, you know, I can hear you mother. I can hear you.

Flor Carabez 38:03

So her. Her solution to you. Failing your your exam is to send you to mexico

Bella 38:12

to get a mental health break

Flor Carabez 38:13

to get a mental health break.

Bella 38:15

Originally, I was not going to go to mexico this year because my plan was like, I'm gonna apply to jobs. I'm going to interviews you know, like, so I usually buy my airplane tickets ahead of

time. So this year I'm like, I'm not gonna go and then my mom heard a news I'm gonna get four months off because she usually wants me to go so I can give my family things like clothes.

Ropas zapatos.

Flor Carabez 38:37

Oh because you go by yourself

Bella 38:38

I go by myself.

Flor Carabez 38:39

Okay,

Bella 38:40

and I'm like, and I see her after I tell her the news. We were shopping. I see her buying things for my nephew from Mexico. Oye porque estas comprando cosas si no voy a ir a mexico este año? She's like Oh, I'm gonna send by correo. I'm like, and I told my boyfriend I'm going to mexico, I'm going to mexico. He's like how you know? she's buying things. And she usually buy things

when I go to mexico to send to take them home. And then maybe like a week later two weeks, para que descanses ahi. I'm like ma, necesito hacer mi examen. She's like, its fine. Solamente una semana. I'm like una semana? And she's like yeah. Yo te compro boleto. Because I usually buy it. So she's like, yo to compro boleto, te vas a la playa and I'm like okay.

Flor Carabez 39:42

Do you do like going to mexico?

Bella 39:44

Yeah, I don't I don't mind it because I spend time with my cousin. But you know, like, originally I was not gonna go.

Flor Carabez 39:49

Yeah,

Bella 39:50

like, I wish she could have told me ahead of time.

Flor Carabez 39:53

So do you feel like it sounds like they their support your parents has flip floped over time,

Bella 40:01

yeah.

Flor Carabez 40:10

Do you feel like do you feel like they know how to support you?

Bella 40:14

No

Flor Carabez 40:16

that was very fast. Do you feel like they're doing their best?

Bella 40:21

Yes. I don't blame them. The reason I don't blame them, because I know that they grew up with no support. They grew up really independent. They couldn't show emotions because that shows as weakness. So they didn't get that from their mom or dad. So like, I understand, you know, I don't blame them. I don't get mad. I get frustrated. It's better than mad. And I am like, Okay, let me calm down. It's not their fault. I'm like okay? I'm like I know they're trying their best. They're trying to show their love in a negative way. It's okay. It's okay. I can't blame them. And I still don't blame them. Because they went through shit. And I understand that.

Flor Carabez 40:31

I'm going to shift gears to I guess, like a branch of that question. So do you know that National Louis is a Hispanic Serving Institution? No, yeah. Have you ever heard of us being a Hispanic Serving Institution?

Bella 41:44

my four years here? No. Okay.

Flor Carabez 41:47

Do you know what a Hispanic serving institution is? Okay. So the Hispanic serving institution, the acronym is HSI. So maybe you've heard of an HSI No. Okay. So that designation is a label, think of it like a label, right? The way that colleges and universities get that label is by having at least 25% of the entire enrollment for the undergraduate college, be full time Latin X students. So we received our designation, I believe in 2016, I might be wrong, but it was around that time. Because we've had at least 25% of that enrollment. When you were in high school. You said that you grabbed a bunch of applications and pamphlets and stuff at the college fair and all that. What made you apply to NLU?

Bella 42:55

Um, my counselor,

Flor Carabez 42:58

your counselor,

Bella 43:00

she well she went to a meeting that NLU had for like school counselors and you know, the, the one that helped us to like apply to colleges and FAFSA. She went because she knew I wanted to do education because I had a lot of options I wanted to go to but you know, I wasn't sure and she

came back she's like, You have to come to NLU. It is known for their education. It used to be all girls school, you know, and she told me all this education she told me like, how many classes would I take and about FAFSA and then she like, we came with a few groups, a few friends classmates of mine. We came you know, that tour in the freshman year like to like know, like they you sit down in the classroom,

Flor Carabez 43:49

like open house?

Bella 43:51

I don't know. We were just our our it was just me and my high school.

Flor Carabez 43:56

Okay,

Bella 43:56

so we just sat there. And there was this one person who came in to talk about NLU and basically, and on that spot we were able to do our application and they accepted us right away.

Flor Carabez 44:06

Oh,

Bella 44:07

yeah. So you know, I'm like, um then I got my FAFSA. And the only thing I noticed it got covered all up, the only thing I will pay is my computer, you know, its not bad. It's like I am like, you know, it's not bad. And then my teacher was telling me you should go for the education. And then she went to the meetings, that tells you more about NLU. And she came back with all this data, like, look, all these other students are doing the education. This school's known for education and like she was telling me more about NLU. You know I was convinced because I'm like, FAFSA'S covering everything. It's known for education. I'm like, it's close to my house, because my parents at the time didn't want me to go all the way to Idaho. I got a full ride.

Flor Carabez 44:53

Oh you got a full ride. Okay,

Bella 44:56

and and I was like, I wasn't sure between that one and NLU. You know? And I'm like, Okay, I'm like my parents didn't want me to go over there, they didn't want me to go over there because they're like, you're going to change into a different person. So I can't go. That's what you're saying I can't go? No, no, you can't. So I'm like. But okay, I'm cool with this because like with other schools I had to pay a lot. And I'm like, I don't want my parents to have to go through that go through that I don't want my parents to like, help me with it. I'm like, I don't want them to go through that struggle, because I heard many stories about my high school teachers, that I still contact them, like how they had to pay loans and stuff like that. I'm like, you know, NLU it is. So I, you know, I accepted it.

Flor Carabez 45:42

Okay. Now that you know what the HSI thing is. So we get the designation because of enrollment. With that label, there comes money. So the university gets money? Because we have 25% Minimum enrollment of Latino students. Do you feel like now you know what it is? Do you feel like that has impacted your experience here with your major or as a student at all?

Bella 46:15

Can you repeat?

Flor Carabez 46:19

So do you feel like I guess if we didn't have that label? Would it have mattered? But do you think it would have changed your experience here?

Bella 46:35

Personally, I don't think it hasn't changed. The only thing recently, I had an issue with a professor. Were in our classroom is all woman. And we're all Latina. And she said, I have a lot of high expectations, because you're all Latina. She's like, I want you guys to do your best. You know, that was the first time someone said that, because of our race. And I was just like, so you're taught, you're putting this pressure on us, because we're Latina. You you're saying all this, the way she say I didn't like it either. Because she's like, I have myself as a Latina as well, I have so much expectations for you guys. Because I are Latina, a woman, I expect you to do your best because she's such a strict teacher. We have so many issues with that professor this time. And at that, at that point, you know, that kind of triggered me the way she say about Latinas. I'm just like, that's the only difference right now that I felt something because like you know, COVID, something like that does the whole time during zoom, they didn't really feel a difference.

Because we just saw a professor on screen, they were just talking to us. So I only been in campus freshman and senior. So I haven't really seen that until now. But like those times, we were just on Zoom. You know, like we didn't really interact with no one we didn't interact with our peers only when we went to breakout rooms. So we were just a screen professor, talk. That's it. So that's

why I feel like that's why I say no, I didn't really like it was different. Until like now, but that's why.

Flor Carabez 48:13

So the one interaction where your ethnicity comes up. It's negative. Do you feel like it's influenced your your career decision or your major decision at all?

Bella 48:37

Honestly, no, because, of course, she pressures us to do more into this stuff. I mentally, all, my peers are really exhausted in that classroom because she's putting all this pressure on us.

Honestly, at this point, we're not doing our greatest in that class because, at this point, we're not trying to even do our homework. We just tried to like, turn it in. You know what I mean? We just tried to turn it in, we don't even try our best, because that's how much pressure she has on us. At this point. We're all feeling that pressure. We feel overwhelmed. We feel frustrated, like a why are you putting all this pressure on us. And we've never had an issue with no one since freshmen til now with that professor, like, not our professors never we never had an issue. We all been together since freshman. So like, that's the only one teacher we ever had a problem with. I never had issues with professors in the past like that that much as her so I'm like, its making us really overwhelmed, frustrated, mentally really exhausting. We're oversharing about it. Like, we feel exhausted, emotionally, physically, emotionally and physically. And oh, there's one more. I

forgot we were talking about it felt like it was going Yeah, mentally. Mentally. We're all talking about it because that professor has so much expectations for us because she like, because you guys are Latinas, I expect so much from you. We have to show that we're doing our greatest best and stuff like that. From my, from my way you say it's just not the best, you know, I didn't say it but I wish I did because I'm like the way she say it is not what you should say to us. Just because we're Latina. You should you should have those expectations for everyone. Not just for us. You should just stay right there. You have expectations for us. These high expectation that's why you pushing us so much because we're Latina. I'm like you should have that for everyone. Just not for us, you know. So we all, and I know everyone felt intense when she said that we all made a face. You know, we haven't said anything to, well we have one professor that we vent to all the time. No one say that. I noticed. I don't really know. They said she just said we have a lot of expectations for us. But um, she didn't say anything about being Latina. And I'm like, what aren't you saying it? I'm like, you should say it. Because we all felt intense when she said I noticed everyone like feel intense like, they all they were all relaxed in that one minute. She said a real like, we made our face we scratch and everyday. I'm just like,

Flor Carabez 51:14

and the professor's Latina?

Bella 51:15

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 51:20

Interesting. Okay, before today, has anyone asked you to share your story?

Bella 51:37

Not at all. I haven't, as a talkative person, I love to talk. So I know. I know. There's like a podcast at NLU where we can share our story. And I recently was on a zoom with that person. And he shared about that, you know, and of cours right away I'm like, sign me up to talk. I'm like I want to go on. So he has two questions prepared. We're gonna talk on Monday. So like, honestly, I haven't really had no one share about it. Okay, like my story like, no, maybe not.

Flor Carabez 52:14

What essential items do you want people to take away from what you share today?

Bella 52:23

What do you mean essential?

Flor Carabez 52:24

Like highlights? What are some key takeaways?

Bella 52:36

Well me personally, is don't let your parents control what you want and make you feel. Because those comments where my parents made that because I was slow and everything. And I feel like, that's the main reason they didn't put that pressure on me like, I want you to become a nurse. I didn't have the same experience as other people. They didn't pressure me of that they didn't pressure me about college. Because because I was retarded for them. So like, that just made me push even more. To show them I can do things like other people. And because it's just because of my parents didn't think I could do it. I want them to like realize like no matter what your parents say you can still do it like because because it did hurt a lot it did hurt because I'm like I wish they had expectations from me. I wish a little bit they could because like I could hear everyone saying like their mom wants them to do this or that, like do you know what I mean? I didn't have the experience because my parents didn't believe I could do it. So something, I think I want people to know is that don't let your parents words or faces don't get to you because that's how they're doing it to trying to get to you. That's their whole point trying to get to you. Because then once they know then they know that they're gonna get to you. They know you're gonna do what they say. And I want them to like know for who they are to not let anything get in the way because like, I was close to that with all the bullying all my teachers, all my parents. Like I was

so close to being someone else. I was just close to not going into college. I was close to just working, not going to school and stuff like that.

Flor Carabez 54:36

What haven't I asked you that I should know?

Bella 54:58

My pronouns

Flor Carabez 54:59

Your pronouns?

Bella 55:00

And my, what's that word? I forgot what it's called. You know, like when they asked you if you're bi or stuff like

Flor Carabez 55:11

your sexual preference?

Bella 55:14

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 55:15

Okay.

Bella 55:16

I don't get that question often ask,

Bella 55:19

I don't like recently I told my friends. I prefer they and them. And they were being like, why haven't you never told us? We've been calling you she? I'm like, it's it's a cruel word. Cruel Word, Word where? Why silent

Flor Carabez 55:19

okay.

Flor Carabez 55:37

world?

Bella 55:38

world to like, you know this information because all these thing that's going on right now. I'm like it's just something I've tried to keep myself. If they ask, I tell them.

Flor Carabez 55:49

Okay,

Bella 55:49

if they don't, I don't tell them. I will happily love to tell people I am, but it's something. It's scary right now. Because I know, right now they're trying to like take transgender people rights, transgender issues and stuff like that. So I'm like, the reason I don't really talk.

Flor Carabez 56:09

So your pronouns are they them? And what is your sexual preference?

Bella 56:14

Bi

Flor Carabez 56:14

BI. All right, I will try my best to remember that. Do you have any questions for me?

Bella 56:28

Well, once you we, you're done with it. What are you gonna do then?

Flor Carabez 56:32

So my goal is to have at minimum eight interviews. All Latinx undergrad full time students at NLU. Once the interviews are done, then I take the recordings, I put them through the software that will make the audio into words that I can read. So the transcript, I'm gonna go through them, I'm gonna listen to everything again. And then what I do is what's called coding in research. So I

go through everything, and then I try to pull themes, things that were, I guess you could say, like trending with all of the participants. And I'm going to analyze everything, interpret it. So the dissertation will be, I think, like five or six chapters. Once all that's done, I type everything up, type my results. I give everyone access to the transcription, but it won't have your name. So you did drop your name in there. I'm going to switch that part out to Bella. And the dissertation will have my analysis, my conclusions of it, some suggestions for schools, about what we talked about today. In the end is going to have all of the transcriptions. And that's it. I defend. I present it. And I'm done.

Bella 58:03

How many people have you interviewed so far?

Flor Carabez 58:05

I've had four.

Bella 58:08

Four.

Flor Carabez 58:08

Yeah. So I'm halfway. Yeah. Yep. So answer your question. Do you have any other questions?

Okay. All right. Well, thank you. I got to know more about you today. I'm going to hit pause.

Maria

Mon, Mar 20, 2023 8:59AM • 56:39

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

feel, graduating, psychology, brother, classes, high school, dad, sister, told, school, people, mom, question, counselor, experience, choosing, friends, students, dropped, teacher

SPEAKERS

Maria, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:05

All right. So, Maria, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study I'm conducting. I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor Carabez and I'm a doctoral candidate here NLU one term away from graduating. The reason why I am conducting this study is because of my personal and professional experience, I've noticed that

choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from the study will help elevate students stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out. To protect your identity, I will use a pseudonym you chose in the Screening Questionnaire. This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. I have one central question. This conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow up questions for clarity. I want to ensure I'm documenting and understanding your experiences as the way you experience them. And I've just by my perception. As I'm asking the questions take your time responding and feel free to ask me any questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question or might take note of your body language, just to know that I'm giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I'm done with this assignment, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them just email me requests. Now that all the housekeeping stuff is out of the way, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Maria 01:58

No, I do not.

Flor Carabez 02:01

Alright, so we have your name as Maria. How far are you in your undergraduate program?

Maria 02:08

So I'm currently a sophomore.

Flor Carabez 02:11

Okay, cool. So you have about two years left?

Maria 02:14

Two more, yeah.

Flor Carabez 02:14

Okay, that's exciting. And what's your major?

Maria 02:18

My major is psychology.

Flor Carabez 02:22

So what made you decide on psychology as your major.

Maria 02:28

Um, so I was diagnosed with depression and social anxiety at the age of 12. I was I was really going through it. I remember, in school, I was sent to the counselor. And she was really like, no help. I remember crying to her telling her like I can't be around like my classmates. Because I did grow up like, big, like my whole life. And I was getting bullied. And I was, I was not able to concentrate. I was failing my classes, I would come up with excuses. Every day, not to attend class. I had asthma. So there was like a perfect excuse. And I remember going to my counselor, and she would just call my mom and tell her to talk to me instead of her talking to me. So then that was one of the reasons why I went into psychology because I knew that I would be able to help students who were going who would probably go through the same thing or even other things. And I also grew up with divorced parents, so I have a lot of anxiety. And I would always wonder like, oh, like who's gonna pick me up? You know, and I kind of want to be there for kids that didn't like, who went through the same thing as me. You know, like, it's, it was really hard

for me, but the main reason why I chose psychology is to help kids understand and help them feel like they're not alone.

Flor Carabez 04:18

So you were going through all this starting at the age of 11 When you were younger was being like a therapist or a psychiatrist or anything like that. An idea that you had or it didn't happen til later?

Maria 04:35

So it didn't happen till later. It happened when I was, I believe a junior in high school. I had dropped out of high school for two years due to the same reason. I did go my freshman like year I went like for two months. I during that time I became very suicidal and I just couldn't attend class, I felt like I was really behind. And I remember this one time, my counselor, my high school counselor called me, and she told me that she would be there for me. If I went back, and I remember going back to school, and one of my teachers, it still follows me till this day. She told me, why are you back? You're not going to graduate. And then I remember crying in class, and I left. And I never went back. So that's when my two years of like, dropping out came. So then, I remember I remember like, I went back to school. It was Latino youth High School. I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

Flor Carabez 05:48

I don't think so.

Maria 05:50

It's an alternative high school is that it's in Pilsen area.

Flor Carabez 05:54

Okay. Yeah. Never heard of it.

Maria 05:55

So I went back there. And I met this like, amazing counselor there. And she was kind of like a big inspiration as to like, why I want to become a high school counselor.

Flor Carabez 06:10

Okay, so it sounds like you had a terrible one. And then you have one that came through?

Maria 06:14

Oh, it was actually my teacher, the one that told me like, why am I back?

Flor Carabez 06:17

Oh,

Maria 06:18

because I, I did talk to my counselor, but she had sent me to class.

Flor Carabez 06:23

Okay.

Maria 06:23

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 06:25

So earlier, you had said that you had someone that had called your mom, and she

Maria 06:30

Oh, that was my middle school.

Flor Carabez 06:31

So it was your middle school counselor that was trash. Okay, things making too much noise. So, the counselor that you had in high school, did she look like you?

Maria 06:46

No, she was White.

Flor Carabez 06:48

Okay. But you still felt like you resonated with her like you vibed with her?

Maria 06:53

Yes.

Flor Carabez 06:54

Okay. So when you were you went back, you know, you got back into the groove of things. When you got to the point of, I guess at what point did you start talking about your goals after high school?

Maria 07:13

As in like, my career goals?

Flor Carabez 07:16

Yeah. So, so there's, I guess, a lot of times in high school, there comes a point where the, either the teachers or someone will start asking like, alright, like, what are you going to do once you're done here? You know,

Maria 07:28

yeah. So I remember, I used to have this class called college and career. I had my teacher I was really close to that my teachers in that school. And I remember her, I remember her telling me,

like, what am I passionate about. And as when I told her, like, I am very passionate about like, counseling and being there for people and helping them. And that's when she introduced me to like psychology. And she even enrolled me to classes that we had there that have to do with psychology. And that's when I became very interested because that was probably one of the only classes that I would like, actually pay attention.

Flor Carabez 08:16

Okay. So, when were these just conversations, or did you have to do like a, like a, an assessment or anything like that?

Maria 08:30

I feel like I did have to do some assessment. I remember having to choose like, universities,

Maria 08:38

that came with like the major of psychology and then I also I don't really remember much. I I believe I did that and think I also I also interviewed my high school counselor together to tell her for her to tell me her experiences. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 08:38

okay,

Flor Carabez 09:06

Okay, cool. So it sounds like having someone there for you because you needed this resource. was helpful, especially since the first experience you had with someone that was supposed to help you with your mental health was trash. And then she came through and when she asked you about your passion, you said that you wanted to help people. Okay. What did these conversations look like with your parents?

Maria 09:38

So my mom, she was very supportive. Because she knows like what I went through as a teenager and also like my sister, she has OCD. So it has been like very challenging and I always felt like it was my responsibility. To like, help her overcome like these will these triggers that she would have. But my dad, my dad doesn't really talk to me about school. He just assumes I have it together. He, he just found out that I was studying psychology recently. And I remember he was just like, why are you doing that? And I kind of explained it to him, but I had I received no like response from him. It was just kind of like, Okay, that's it.

Flor Carabez 10:41

So when he asked you that, what did you how did you respond?

Maria 10:47

I remember telling him that. It had a lot to do with like, my past experiences, and that I just, I enjoy helping people. And I take them serious, because I remember not being taken seriously. And I did call him out on some things. You know, like, I was, like, telling him that some of the reasons why I chose psychology does have to do with my mom and him, and I just, I just want people that, to know that they're, there's someone to understand them. You know, there's someone that will help them and they're not alone.

Flor Carabez 11:24

And zero response?

Maria 11:26

Yeah. Yeah, my dad's like that he doesn't, doesn't talk much.

Flor Carabez 11:31

So no verbal response. But did you catch like, a vibe? Was there any like body language? Like, what did what did his other response seem? Like?

Maria 11:41

I don't know. Like, it's because I'm so used to his like, responses when they're not verbally he just got to know like that.

Flor Carabez 11:51

Was it like a judgmental? Or was it like,

Maria 11:53

I took it that way?

Flor Carabez 11:55

Okay.

Maria 11:55

But, um, I don't know, I didn't, I didn't really care.

Flor Carabez 11:59

Okay,

Maria 12:00

because I never really went to seek their approval. You know, I kind of just, I've always lived like, in this mindset that, like, I have to do what's best for me. Because I don't know what the end of the day, you know, it's like my life. And I understand that the like, they have, I don't know, if your parents ever, like told you like, I pay this and I do this, like, you have to live under my rules, you have to do what I say. But to me when it comes to like education and stuff, like, I have to choose something that I'm going to want to do for the rest of my life. You know,

Flor Carabez 12:36

where do you think? Where do you think you started? The I guess the not seeking their approval?

Maria 12:55

Honestly, I think it was my freshman year of

Flor Carabez 13:01

high school?

Maria 13:02

no here, college

Flor Carabez 13:03

okay

Maria 13:06

Because I remember my mom, she always wanted me to be like a teacher. Because she thought I was really good with kids. I, but I remember just telling her like, No, I don't see myself, like doing that. And my dad, like I said, he never really asked me till recently. So he didn't even know why I was coming here for he doesn't even know if things are getting paid nothing. He doesn't know anything. He like, like I say, he just assumes I have everything together.

Flor Carabez 13:37

Why do you think he doesn't ask or why? He assumes,

Maria 13:42

um, I, I honestly think because growing up, I never asked for their help. I always figured things out by myself. Like, I did everything on my own. I never asked him for help, like with homework or anything, I kind of just figured things out. And there's like a huge difference between like my brother, my brother, he always like be he would be failing classes. He would. He would just like he was very rebellious. You know, and they would like focus more on him. So then my little sister came around, and they obviously like focus on the little one, you know, so they kind of just like, pushed me aside. Well, she never asks for help anyways. You know?

Flor Carabez 14:34

Are you the oldest?

Maria 14:36

No, I'm the middle child.

Flor Carabez 14:37

You're in the middle. So your brother's older?

Maria 14:38

Yeah, he's 25.

Flor Carabez 14:42

Okay. So it's your brother, you and then your younger sister. So when you told your mom that you were going to do psychology, you said that she was supportive. What did that support look like?

Maria 14:54

Um, she said, Well, she kind of just said if that's what you think you're like good at then go for it. Yeah. But she was she didn't question me at all. She just told me like, if that's something I'm passionate about, like to go for it, just kind of actually to have an actual plan, you know, because I did, at some point explain to her like what I have to do in order to get to like, my, my goal. But she said, as long as I have a plan that she will be cause, she'll continue to support me.

Flor Carabez 15:28

Okay. So what does the support look like today? Or like on a daily?

Maria 15:33

I don't think she understands that, like, I have a lot of work. You know. She doesn't understand like, why sometimes I could be moody or actually last night is a perfect example. I, I work here now at the University, and I also have another job. So I kind of don't have time for myself, you know, and she told me like, oh, like, why didn't I? And what is, I think, clean, like the living room or something, you know? And I said, oh, like I was doing homework and like it's finals. And she just didn't get it. You know? And she just continued to like, say things to me. But I would, I would say she just doesn't bring it up, but she knows what I'm doing.

Flor Carabez 16:23

Okay, so Does she ever get upset? So if you tell her like, oh, well, I have a lot going on right now or have a lot of homework. How does she respond?

Maria 16:33

She always tells me Oh, like, how do you think I feel like I have to work? She works six days a week. You think I'm not stressed? You think I'm not upset? Like she kind of makes it about her? You know, and it kind of like, It upsets me obviously, because I'm telling her like, I'm trying to get this work done. And we have two completely different reasons why we're stressed, you know, and but she has like, she's always making like things about herself. And that's what caused me to become more stress.

Flor Carabez 17:09

Your older sibling did. Did he go to school or anything like that?

Maria 17:15

No, he didn't.

Flor Carabez 17:16

Okay. And your younger sibling? How old Is she?

Maria 17:19

She's 17.

Flor Carabez 17:20

She's 17

Maria 17:20

Yes, she's still in high school,

Flor Carabez 17:22

is she What is her academic life looking like she talking about college at all.

Maria 17:29

So my little sister, she is struggling a lot right now. So we've been waiting for like, two months or so to get a therapist for her, so that she can go back to school. She's currently not going to high school to her classes and things. And it makes me really upset because she kind of reminds me of me, you know, and it and I don't like that. I feel like I was a bad influence for her. You know, even though I know she has her own excuse, and I did too at the time. But she, it makes me really sad to like see her at home and like, think that like her life is over, you know, because she's not going to classes. But she's currently not enrolled. Just because we've been waiting for two

months to see a therapist and have like them write a note for her to do like classes online or something.

Flor Carabez 18:37

So with you wanting to be in that profession and seeing how it's impacting your sibling. How does that make you feel?

Maria 18:53

I kind of it makes me feel like sometimes, because I can't help my sister. It makes me feel like I'm not doing it right? You know? like I'm probably not capable of like helping others if I can't help someone I love and I know, like, personally, you know? But I feel like at the same time it like encourages me, you know to continue and like, be a little more positive to get this like thing done.

Flor Carabez 19:30

Okay. Um, before today, had anyone asked you to share your story about your academic experience or choosing your major or even being a student?

Maria 19:45

No.

Flor Carabez 19:48

What essential items do you want people to take away from your experiences?

Maria 19:55

What do you mean?

Flor Carabez 19:57

So if, if they were to pick up My, the final product, right? my dissertation whenever it's done, what would you want people to take away from it from your experience like key items, highlights?

Maria 20:19

I feel like they shouldn't, they shouldn't be quick to judge. You know, because although I had good professors, I also had bad ones. I just want them to be a little more understanding, and not

be quick to judge. And go, just to go easy on people. You know. I don't know if this is an example, a perfect example. But like to me, I had an English professor here. My grandma passed away, like, at the time when she was my professor, like maybe two days ago. I told her like, I couldn't complete my quiz. And she said it was too late. And it was too bad. Although I explained to her, like what happened, and she still, like, was really hard on me. And I wasn't close to my grandma. But she was all I had, you know. As in like, I, I knew how, like, it affected me in a way because I know, that was all my dad had too. So even just like her saying, like, no, like, it's too late, too bad. Go back to your seat. That like really made me like upset, you know. And I was really sensitive at the time because I was going through it. So I just really hope like, people are a little more understanding, and they just go easy on others.

Flor Carabez 22:02

So I noticed you haven't mentioned your Latinidad yet. How did your Hispanic descendency impact your experience choosing your major if at all?

Maria 22:18

Actually, I so in my high school, there were all white counselors. So it um, and even after like one was fired, another white one came in.

Flor Carabez 22:32

Oh.

Maria 22:33

yeah. So I was like, I was, I always wondered, like, obviously, white people, like they go through it differently. You know, I always wonder like, what they were thinking at my school at the time. Like, why don't you bring someone that might be able to relate to us? Or, like, just know what we mean, by when we feel like we're being treated unfairly, you know, because although like, I have an amazing counselor, I will admit that there was like times where she would be like, Oh, but the whole school here is like Latinos. You know, like, what makes you feel like you're? I don't know, like, divided by the others, you know? And at the same time, it was like, I don't know what it is, because I don't think you're understanding the my story like why I'm telling you, you know? But yeah, it was it was really weird to me how like, he was just white after a person being my counselor, even after, like, our whole school, just being full of Latinos. And so I believe that's why I would go more to my mentor, because he would like I saw him, he was like a father figure to me. You know, he, he would listen to me, he was, he was a big part of the reason why I even graduated. Because he was there to, like, motivate me, and he would tell me, like, I see, like, so much potential and you know? But, he would also bring up like, ways for me to pay school, you know, because he knew that my parents were not going to help me. And if they if they could, they would, I think but yeah, I was. I don't know if that answers your question, but it

just made me feel like they wouldn't understand me, but she wish she would understand me in other like areas of my life, you know?

Flor Carabez 24:49

So I'm assuming your mentor's, Hispanic,

Maria 24:53

yes.

Flor Carabez 24:54

Okay. And how did you meet them or what was it like getting them as your mentor.

Maria 25:02

So, I, um so my mom was kind of tired of me being home and like sad and stuff. And I remember this one day, I was just like, Ma like, I think we have to like figure things out, because I believe I was 16 at the time. And I said, I want to go back to school and like, I want to graduate, you know. So, I remember her taking me to the hospital. And that's when I was like, evaluated. And she told them everything that like, I was suicidal and depressed, and I just need to

find like the right school, that's going to help me. And that's when they took me to this program, where I would go like three times a week, and then that's when they were like, their job was to find you the right High School. And that's when I was introduced to Latino youth High School. And I remember going in there, it was so scary. Because it's, it's just kids that are like, gang affiliated. You know, and I was like, Oh, I don't fit in here, like at all. But then I started to even like, realize that I can relate to them, you know, like, even though I am not gang affiliated and stuff like that I can relate to them. And I even spoke to them, and they're like, Oh, I know someone that like can help you. Just to be there for you and talk to you. And that's when they introduced me to Danny, my mentor. So when I went to him, I told him like, hey, like, can I work with you? You know, like, I was told, like, all these things about you? And I feel like, I would be comfortable working here with you. And yeah, like I was he was assigned as my mentor.

Flor Carabez 27:00

Nice. Do you still keep in touch?

Maria 27:03

Yes, I do.

Flor Carabez 27:04

Okay, did he play a role at all in you choosing psychology as your major?

Maria 27:10

Um, I think so. I saw how passionate he was, like with other students, and like helping them and making sure that we're passing our classes. And he was he was a little like, harsh, too. He would be like, do you want to fall into like, he would show like this graph of like, drop out students. And he would be like, do you want to fall into like this category of like, what we're known for and stuff like that? Yeah. And he even even had like, it was like this. It was like a board I remember in his office, and it was like, all about like, drop out students and like, how they were like, all minorities and stuff. So yeah, like, I believe so. Because even if I wasn't in like psychology, I would still find a way to like, help people.

Flor Carabez 28:05

So initially, when you were choosing your major, did you say, I just want to do something where I'll help? Or did you say, I want to be in psychology?

Maria 28:13

When I chose my major, I knew I wanted to be in psychology.

Flor Carabez 28:17

Did you come to that decision? Because of strengths that you knew you had? Or did you come to that decision? Because you thought you wouldn't be good at other things? Um, or was it not like that at all?

Maria 28:37

I think it was, like, the strengths that I had, um, I don't I growing up like, all my friends would always come to me and they would always tell me like, how I make them feel safe and like, comfortable and like they feel like they can be themselves around. Around me and stuff like that. And even like, recently, I don't know if you've seen this board up at the school. I it's about the women's with a woman month,

Flor Carabez 29:08

Women's History Month?

Maria 29:09

Yes. And my friend actually wrote a sticky note there for me, and she said, she inspires me to be a better person as well as teaches me how to love myself without her knowing she does.

Flor Carabez 29:21

Aww.

Maria 29:23

Yeah, and I was like, oh, like, that made me feel like, she cares about like, being she cares about me, you know, like she she knows that like, I won't judge her. And she can be herself and that's honestly my goal in life is just to make everyone be themselves and like, know that they have someone to go to because I never did growing up. And that's why I'm not saying it's my job. But like, I would love for it to be you know, yeah, to be there for kids. And what anyone? Yeah,

Flor Carabez 29:59

that's beautiful. So what does your support look like now, in general, it could be whatever you consider support for you to complete your degree

Maria 30:18

can it be like my friends?

Flor Carabez 30:19

whatever you whatever is keeping you, whatever's keeping you on track.

Maria 30:25

Honestly, I would say my friends, I've made amazing friends here at the school. He, he has been so supportive and like, he helps me like, get my work done. Because right now I'm really behind on some of my assignments, but he's on it, you know, like with me, and he's always mentioning it, like, Hey, have you? Did you finish this? Like, or how's this going? And he, it's kind of like, he's able to read me, you know, when I tell him like, No, I haven't been able to get this done. And he's like, Okay, what happened, like, what's wrong? My other friend, she also is like, really, like, on it. We're majoring, we have the same major. And she's always telling me like, oh, like, I had this class before, like, I can help you. I know. And like, they have helped me so much. And they have been there, like, for me through everything, even if it doesn't have to do with like school. And another is my sister. It has always been like my sister, me and my sister for everything. And I feel like almost everything that I do is for her, I don't like to say like that. But it kind of is, you know, because I, I am so thankful that my sister didn't get to experience the things that I did growing up, um, and I just want to like, I want to push her to do better and be better, you know, because I started like, really low, like, my life at her age was so bad. Like, I

had really bad like experiences with friends and like, stuff like that. And sometimes my sister doesn't want to go out, you know, and I push her to, like, go out, like to live a little, you know, because those things that she's doing now, I wasn't able to do them. And almost like she, she motivates me, you know, that I can do it. And she is someone that I come out of school, and I go straight to and I talked to her about everything. And she's very, like, she motivates me, you know, she tells me like, hey, like, if you went through this, you can do this, you know? Yeah.

Flor Carabez 32:53

Do you feel like you have a layer of pressure to finish your degree?

Maria 33:03

Yes, I do. Just because I'm 23 years old, and I'm a sophomore. So I feel like I so. I, I was enrolled here in 2020. But I dropped out. It's really, it's like, it's a complicated story. I was enrolled here. And I was a lot bigger than I am right now. I would always compare myself to all my classmates, you know, I'd be like, oh, like she's pretty, like she's skinny. You know. And then I couldn't even come to class because I was like, I'm literally like, the ugliest girl in this classroom, you know, and I don't want to be here. And then I developed a binge eating disorder. And it was it was really bad. I started to gain even more weight. And I remember I was like, I can't come to class anymore. Because all my friends were like skinny and like definitely pretty, you know. And so I dropped out. And it was really bad. Because I didn't come back til 2022 or

2021 and I couldn't I just at the time like through that break. I lost 80 pounds i It was really hard for me like to To accept the fact, even to this day that I no longer look like her, like who I was, you know. And sometimes I still do it. Like, I still compare myself to other people and stuff. But I think I feel very, like, pressure to finish. Because of my age. You know. And also, I tried to convince myself that I'm not like, that that's not the reason why. But it always comes back, you know, and I don't know, I just I get it makes me sad. Because my friend, he's a senior, and he's my age. So I'm like, oh, that should have been me. You know, I should have been almost done. But I always tell myself, like everyone goes on their own pace.

Flor Carabez 35:57

Yeah, that's true. Where do you feel like the pressures coming from?

Maria 36:04

I feel like

Flor Carabez 36:07

your dad.

Maria 36:08

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 36:09

What is what is the pressure look like?

Maria 36:12

Um, because my dad doesn't know that I dropped out throughout the year. So I feel like he's just very confused as to why I have not brought up graduation. You know. And also, I tried to tell him like, hey, like, I take summer classes. I kind of tried to drop hints just for him to bring it up. You know, but it never happens. He never brings up like, Oh, why are you still going to school next year? You know? It's kind of hard. I kind of, I kind of don't want to just tell him, you know, I wish that he would ask me, like, why am I still in school? Or like, Why have I not brought up graduation and stuff like that? But I can feel it. Like, I can feel that he's like, when are you graduating? You're 23. You know?

Flor Carabez 37:08

What is? What is the emotion that you're trying to him asking or not asking? So when we were talking about pressure, you brought up that you feel it from your dad? Do you feel like he's expecting for you to finish? Like at four years? And if so, with you not graduating within that four year timeframe? Is it fear that you're getting of like him getting upset at you? Or do you feel like he's gonna yell at you? Or disappointment? Or what is the emotion that's coming up?

Maria 37:55

I feel like he. Yeah. He wanted me to graduate in the four years. But I think what I fear is disappointment. Because my brother never went to college. He did graduate from high school. But my brother, my brother failed. My dad. My brother's an alcoholic. Not once has he ever thought about going to school or like, getting it together. You know? So I feel like now it's all me. You know? And I am scared that like, just because I'm graduating at a different time. I'm going to disappoint my dad. Because my mom, she knows, she asks, When am I graduating, and I explained to her and I told her. But my dad, it's like, my dad's family. All of like, my uncle's kids, they all graduated from college, they all have their degree, they all have their professional jobs. And I feel like, it makes me so sad. Because I feel like that's what my dad wants. You know, that's what my dad wanted from my brother. That's what he expects from all of us, just because he sees it in like his brothers, you know? And it's kind of like, oh, when am I going to show off, you know, that, like, Oh, my kid has a degree like, my kid is out there getting like, her master's degree now, you know, or, you know, just a professional job. And I can see it in his face that like he wants that moment already, you know, because that's all my like family parties.

That's all they talk about. You know, like, Oh, my kid is now working here. Like I have my coffee. He works for Google and like, you know, and my dad kind of just like steps away from that and it makes me really upset that I already feel like I failed him you know, but I haven't told him like, hey, like, I'm not graduating yet till 2025

Flor Carabez 40:12

It sounds like it's coming more so from your dad than your mom.

Maria 40:15

Yeah, my dad.

Flor Carabez 40:17

do you feel like there's a sense of competition in your like, on your dad's side of the family with the cousins or las tias?

Maria 40:28

Um, to me, I don't view it as competition, but I think my dad does. To me, it's kind of like, just get your work done. You know, like, whatever time you finish, but sometimes it just feels like I

should have been done and I should have had my dad, like, happy and like him telling my uncles, my aunts like, hey, like my daughter finished, you know? But I do believe my dad views it as, he views it as competition.

Flor Carabez 41:00

Does your dad have any expectations of you that are specific to you? Because you're a girl?

Maria 41:16

To be honest, I don't know. Because my dad doesn't talk to me about

Flor Carabez 41:20

he doesn't talk at all.

Maria 41:20

Yeah,

Flor Carabez 41:21

but you know that he wants you to finish school?

Maria 41:22

Yeah, like he. He drops hints. Like, for example, like I'm on the phone with him. Um, and he's always like, oh, like, where's your brother? Oh like your brother, this, this and that. And like, my girls, me and my sister like, No, nothing like that. Like, and, you know, but it's kind of like little hints that he's like, oh, like, I want you to be done already. You know, kind of like

Flor Carabez 41:55

Do your parents compare you to your siblings? Or vice versa?

Maria 42:04

Yeah, a lot. Um, I feel like my mom does that a lot. She's always like, oh, like, you're not like your brother, your brother just goes out drinks and bla bla bla. And she's always like, Oh, but you go to school, and you do this and that and you're still taking care of your sister. And stuff like that. But I wouldn't say that, like, the the she wants me like to be like someone specifically, you know. But even that puts like, a lot of pressure on me, you know, like, Oh, I'm not allowed to go out and have fun once in a while, you know, because she's going to think like, oh, you're becoming your brother. You know? For example, last night, I went to a concert. I got home like

at 11-10:30. And she said, Where were you like, Oh, you're starting to become like your brother like coming late and stuff.

Flor Carabez 43:07

What concert did you go to?

Maria 43:08

Oh, it was a Kpop concert. I went with my sister.

Flor Carabez 43:13

Oh, nice! the comparison of yours you and your siblings that your mom does? Does that cause any drama or friction with with your relationship with your siblings?

Maria 43:28

Yes. I never had a good relationship with my brother. Never. Um, I even hear stories of like, when I was a baby, that my brother never liked me. And it makes me really sad because I wish I had a relationship with my brother. I never understood why my brother didn't like, like me or want to be around me. But it was it was weird. You know, I was a kid. And I always wanted to,

like spend time with him and like, play with him. And I even knew my brother was gay before I even knew what the word was. You know? Because my brother used to like, he would play dolls with me and like, I know that doesn't mean anything. But he would like he would like put a shirt on and he'll pretend like it was hair.

Flor Carabez 44:18

He'll put it on his head?

Maria 44:26

Yeah. And I never like judged him and like nothing. I I never even told my parents what he was doing. Never. You know? Because I thought that like oh, if I keep this between us like maybe you will trust me. Or you would spend more time with me, you know? No, honestly it got worse and worse. My parents got divorced, because it was a domestic violence. My I grew up like seeing my dad being physical with my mom. Like he would do like really bad like things. And I feel like my brother grew up seeing that and thinking it was normal. So he would, he would hit had my sister and I a lot. But it wasn't like, like a pinch, or none of that. It was like bad, you know? And there was times where I would think that he would want it to see me dead. You know? I'm sorry.

Flor Carabez 45:43

no, you're fine.

Maria 45:43

And I would see how he would treat my sister. And I am. I feel like that's why I became very attached to her. Um, because I was like, Oh, I have to protect you, you know? Because to this day, my brother, he doesn't want anything to do with me. You know? He hates me. And I still don't know why. But I feel like, there's times when my mom always me, well, tells him, like, oh, like, she, she goes in, like, to school and like to work. Like, why can't you do that? You know, and I feel like Don't say that, because I feel like he's gonna hate me even more, because you're comparing him to me.

Maria 46:53

Yeah, that's a big problem with him. I, I always try to like, have like a good relationship with him.

Maria 47:03

But ever since he like turned into like an alcoholic. It's hard. It's really hard. I tried to like, talk to him and be like, hey, like, you need to stop drinking. You know, it's a lot. It's almost every it's every day, he goes out and like, he has horrible friends that like, are always calling him like, Hey, let's go out and drink. You know? And then he just goes, like, if you know that you've drank already, you know, like, take a break. But no. But it creates too much drama. And it's like every day.

Flor Carabez 47:47

So did you know that NLU is a Hispanic serving institution?

Maria 47:53

I actually didn't know.

Flor Carabez 47:55

Do you know what a Hispanic serving institution is?

Maria 47:58

No. But I do remember my teacher talking a lot about it. My high school teacher, because she would always say, you will love the school, like the school is going to remind you of your high school. You know, and it does a lot. And I feel like this is why. Although I came like the first time and I left. I'm glad that I gave it like a second chance because I can see it. You know, I can see how the similarities between my high school and here. And it's small, you know, and I feel safe, And yeah.

Flor Carabez 48:35

So the Hispanic serving institution is a designation. So it's like a label kind of that the Department of Education gives to colleges and universities that have at least 25% enrollment of full time Latinx Hispanic students in the undergraduate college. So with your teacher telling you like, oh, there's a lot of Latinos here, did that sway your decision in coming to the university?

Maria 49:09

Yes, it did. I remember telling my counselor that. I thought I wasn't going to be comfortable talking to her because she was White. But it was like the complete opposite after and she understood. You know, but then I told my, my college and career teacher, that I would really like to go to a school where like, I would feel like I fit in. I didn't specifically tell her like, oh, it's because you know, I want the same like, I want women or you know, like to be there. No, but she just like she just knew like, she knew what I meant because she was White. She was a White

teacher, you know, and when I went into that high school, before being enrolled, I would like analyze it a lot. And I was like, Is it really a lot of white people? No, because at my old school, there was and actually the teacher that told me like, why are you even back? Like you're not going to graduate was a White teacher. And I feel like that's where I gained my fear of like, White people not seeing my potential or, you know, yeah.

Flor Carabez 50:22

Okay. Do you feel? So maybe you didn't know that we have the designation, but it sounds like, coming and seeing so many people that look like you that, get it like you were saying earlier? Do you feel like it's impacted your experience at the University?

Maria 50:44

Yes, in a good way, in a really good way. Because also, like, my classes are, like, mainly Hispanics. I feel safe. You know, I feel like I wouldn't even be judged for speaking Spanish. You know? I, it just feels like, I don't know if you ever have like this, like feeling like, when you see someone that like, looks like you like, oh, I can go up to them and talk to them. Like, I've known them for years, you know, and that's kind of like what happened with my friends that I have right now. I felt so safe with them that I just like to talk and talk and talk them. That's how, like, we became really close. You know, and that's, I feel like, that's what I like about here that I feel like I fit in, you know, and I don't feel like anyone's gonna, like exclude me in anything.

Flor Carabez 51:43

Did the designation or, you know, knowing that there's representation? Has that influenced your experience with your major?

Maria 51:57

What do you mean by that, like?

Flor Carabez 51:59

So you've mentioned you feel safe, because there's a lot of people that look like you you feel safe speaking in Spanish? has all of these experiences that you've had with your Latinidad and the representation here, has it impacted your experience with your academic major?

Maria 52:21

I would say yes, but in a good way, you know, because my friend, I, she was one of the first friends that I made here. She's also a psychology major. And she's also Hispanic. So I feel like just hearing why she wants to continue, like, her career in psychology made me realize like, oh, like, although we have different stories. Like we can do it, you know? And, honestly, like, all

those psychology major kids that I know of, they're all Hispanics. So it's just like, oh, you know, like, you can do it like, well, I can do it too. We can all do it. I don't know if that answers your question.

Flor Carabez 53:04

Yeah. Sounds like you feel like you have a team.

Maria 53:11

Yes.

Flor Carabez 53:13

Sounds good. What haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Maria 53:19

I feel like I covered everything about my life to you. I haven't even I've never opened up to anyone about like, the physical abuse that I've been through with my brother. So that's like really new to me. And I feel like that's why I just cried because I, I don't even think I I see the counselor here and I've never even told her about it. But also, like, although I feel safe here and

stuff like that. I've I've also like grown a lot here. I learned how to stand up for myself. Because I I've experienced body shaming here at the school. And I've lost 80 pounds, like I said, and it's been like really hard for me like in the past to stand up for myself and know, um, but other than that, I just feel like I don't think you've asked me like what have I learned by being here? But it's a lot. I learned how to like stand up for myself with the staff workers, at Centro de Exelencia. I also learned how to like to show more of like, emotion, you know, communication like solves problems and I never really like believed in them. Because I kind of just solve my own problems on my own and like, you know, and yeah.

Flor Carabez 55:19

What made you feel comfortable telling me about your experience with your brother

Maria 55:29

kind of just came up you know, I feel like, um, maybe the fact that like, I'm going to be named differently.

Flor Carabez 55:41

Okay,

Maria 55:41

you know. And I, I just feel like it's a big part of the reason why of who I am today. Because I don't believe that, like violence solves problems. And I don't know, I just I, I'm a very like, empathetic person. You know, I like to put myself in other people's shoes. And although, I've never shared this with anyone. I just feel like maybe, although I don't know your story, like maybe you can relate to me or like you can understand like, where I'm coming from.

Flor Carabez 56:25

Okay. All right. Do you have any questions for me?

Maria 56:32

No.

Flor Carabez 56:33

Okay. Thank you. I'm gonna hit stop recording this thing now.

Anastasio

Mon, Mar 20, 2023 8:59AM • 1:14:25

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dad, mom, day, life, experience, high school, forensics, guess, work, school, puzzles, stepdad, criminal justice, literally, money, reading, people, orders, question, parents

SPEAKERS

Anastasio, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:01

nice thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study I'm conducting I genuine appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my email, my name is flor and I am a doctoral candidate here NLU and one term away from graduating. The reason why I'm conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience, I've noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are creating a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from the study will help elevate students stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out. To protect your identity. I will use a pseudo

name you chose in the Screening Questionnaire, Anastasio. This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. I have one central question this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow up questions for clarity. I want to ensure I'm documenting and understanding your experiences the way you experience them, not just by my perception. As I am asking the questions take your time responding and feel free to ask me any questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question where I might take note of your body language, just know that I am giving you my undivided attention.

Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I am done with this project, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them just email me your request. Now that all that is taken away, do you have any questions for me? Before we get started?

Anastasio 01:59

Not at the moment.

Flor Carabez 02:00

All right, cool. So Anastasio How far are you in your undergraduate program?

Anastasio 02:08

Well, I'm currently in my senior year and hopefully, I graduated on time with everybody else. But I've also just come to terms like I guess it goes more. Having anxiety like I'm not going to graduate with everyone, I'm not going to graduate with everyone. And then I was like, no, wait, hold up. Everybody has their own pace.

Flor Carabez 02:34

So when are you done? Done?

Anastasio 02:37

Um, but apparently I'm supposed to be done by June.

Flor Carabez 02:41

Nice. And what's your major?

Anastasio 02:45

Criminal Justice?

Flor Carabez 02:47

Nice! So what was your experience with choosing criminal justice as your major

Anastasio 02:52

um, throughout all my life, I just really loved riddles and reading and all of that. So when my high school implemented a forensics program I was like, I need to do this. And I did it for two years. And then on the third year, I found out that apparently, they were looking for a new teacher and that they will look slow that if they found one, and if they didn't, they will just discontinue and I was like, okay, cool. Halloween day. I'm over here dressed up like the white rabbit from Alice and Wonderland my little top hat and everything. And I was walking past the side of the school that's completely empty, like abandoned type. And that's where we do like a rest of their programs. And I walked by this door and I see a woman there, who's going over like different blood splatters, and I was like, hold up. I was not aware that we continued our program. Let me go in. And she's like, hello, are you new? And I was like, No, I've been to the school, like, for the past couple years. And she's like, are you here for the program? And I was like, I could be. So she's like, Okay, well, do you want to stay? And I was like, yeah. So then she started going over the blood splatters and what case they were looking into blah, blah. The rest of students I have no idea who they were. So they were new to the whole program. And I was like, I know this like the back of my hand already, I know what's going on. So I made a little grand opening theme to it. And I explained everything from top to bottom as to how it went who did it

when why, how in all of that. And she was looking, and with that, I leave because I have somewhere else to be. I bowed and tipped my little hat. And I left. I sneaked inside of a little art program because I remember they had like, a bunch of different skulls for some odd reason we had a rat skull, a bunny skull, and a deer skull, and I really wanted to take the deer one. But when I went back to go take it, it wasn't there anymore, I lost my chance for that. Um, and after that, I kind of just went back and I studied forensics for the last two years of high school. And I was like, I really like this. We had a problem called I mentored and we were all required to take my mentor actually studied here, said that she knew you. And I was like, okay, bet, so she brought me here and told me like the layout of everything inside and outside how things were and I was like, okay, and she was like, and they have a criminal justice one, and I was like, Yeah, but what if I want forensics specifically, she was like, well, you can still do that. But I say it's best to weight all your options first and I was like, wise, okay. I came here, and I took criminal justice. That's it.

Flor Carabez 05:55

nice. So you said you've always liked puzzles and riddles and stuff. Was there like a, like an age where that started happening?

Anastasio 06:06

Um, so ever since I was a kid, I was the only girl up until like, maybe I want to say five. But I don't really count my sister as well, because she was dormant for majority of her life. But I didn't have any female cousins until I was 14 I believe. So literally the only girl because my sister will go off and do what, whatever. So I was raised in a family full of men. I grew up. And I would always rough house a lot of people, which is why and I really got along with the women because they're more like you're too rough, you're too this, you're too that. And I was like, y'all are boring. But yeah, but on the days, my cousins were not available, or I just wasn't allowed to go out or do whatever. I would just stay at home and mind my own business while either it was like watching TV playing with like plushies because I was terrified of balls, I hated them. Or literally just like reading. I remember my grandpa and my mom used to take me a lot to the library and I would look up like legends, mythical beings and all that, along with other books. I don't really remember because I don't know, I think I think I would just go towards more like the hard to read type of books. Rather than like the picture books or books I'm supposed to get around my age. So all the books that we borrowed from the library was stuff my mom picked up for me. And I was like, I don't want this. So I guess my obsession was like riddles and solving, and everything just came with the books. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 08:03

what pushed you to the more complex books?

Anastasio 08:06

Um, well, was the fact that I guess like, my parents thought that I was like a prodigy or something. The fact that a lot of teachers would praise me that I'm always like, more advanced than the other kids. I remember I came into school really late in kindergarten, I always felt that I came in really late, but I didn't know it was some mix. A mixed class. So they're doing Spanish and English. So I didn't know anything about the English language. Because again, Mexican raised in a household full of like, just pure Spanish. Um, but I came in like maybe towards like, the middle of the year or something. And then, like, a month or two later, I was already on top of everybody else. I completely learned the language, the writing skills, reading skills and the pronunciation skills. So I remember my mom and my teacher always having meetings and she's like Yeah, like, she's so smart. She's this blah, blah, blah. And I was like, Cool. And then the teacher mentioned something like saying, yeah, she's like, more above on her reading skills. So yeah, I'm constantly having her read something and I was like, hold up. You told me I am more higher than what the books I'm getting. And I guess that's why I started going towards like more harder one, see if I could actually read them. And then my obsession with Fear Street started with RL Stein. Like Goosebumps not so much Goosebumps more Fear Street.

Flor Carabez 09:54

Yeah. Good. So riddles. You enjoyed them. And then you had the forensic class. So what what made you kind of connect the two dots? Did you just like pop in and you're like, Oh, this is cool. Or did someone say like, Hey, you should come check this out.

Anastasio 10:20

It was more like that. Hey, come check this out. I've always just preferred like old school stuff in like the board games and I just don't know reading stuff like that. Yeah, like playing video games and I can connect to it. But I've always just met me more towards like what it was before rather than technology. To this day I ask my sister for help with computers because that I have no idea what's going on sometimes. But I do remember one time. The one day I actually went to lunch, 'cause I used to just hide in a classroom just to read books. This lady popped in out of nowhere, and she was like, Hi, can I talk to and I was like, Who are you? And she was like, I am trying to open up a program. And I was like, okay. And she was like it's a forensics program. And I was like, okay. And she was like, yeah, so and then she started explaining to me how they go over different types of like blood spatter, finding fingerprints, how to get them, the cases that they go over how to solve what we what they miss what they could have done better, you know, like all of that. And I'm like, oh, so it's just a huge riddle class. And she's like, Oh, interesting way but Yeah, basically. And I was like, Okay, Sign me up. Yeah, I want to do that. And then I just fell in love with it.

Flor Carabez 11:38

So what did the conversations look like with your parents when you were like, I'm going to school for this

Anastasio 11:50

so for a while, I had the idea that I was going to join the army. Because I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I never anticipated I was going to be alive. So my mom used to always push me to like, go find something else find something else you love, you know, and that's where forensics came up. And she was like, What about forensics? You love that, didn't you? And I was like, Yeah, I could probably do that as a hobby. And she was like, No, pursue it. Do a degree on it. Go find a job in that. Like, go work with the dead you're already creepy enough. And I was like, Gee, thanks, Mom. I love you too. And she was like, pursue it though. You'll love it. You love being in the dark you love working with the bodies? And I was like, Yeah, sure. Then do it. Fine. Um, so it was more like a negotiation. I have been like, I won't go to the army, if I'm allowed to study this. And that's what happened. My mom gave up her dream that I will become an architect because like, I just never really liked it. My parents always tried to push their dreams onto me. So for the first two years of college, actually, my dad will always come home and be like, have you decided to become a doctor yet? No. Doctor? No. Every single day, what about a doctor program? go into nursing. Do this. I don't want to do that. Well study medicine. It's interesting, but I don't want to do that. I can read about it though. And he was like, Okay, fine. Whatever. be whatever you want. Thank you. Very last day of school. For my second year and he's like, Are you sure you don't want to be a, why? That's too much work. I'm not trying to do all that. And I don't even act like that. I'm not about to go in and be like, how are you doing? What can I help you with? Uh, no, no, let me let me work with the dead dad. I will work with people. As long as they're like, Okay, so fucking weird. You're weird. So another was thinking, so it's more like an ultimatum though Yeah, if they're willing to kind of just give up and

they're like, okay, but now they're pushing me like what do you want to be now? And it's like, I been telling y'all for the past year. I'm gonna go be a cop. And they're like, you're gonna die and I was like, if it happens it happens. I can't change the course of that. So my mom really said you got out of the army because I thought you were gonna get killed only to be killed outside when I was like we're all gonna die at some point. There's there's no way we can stop you know, it's not like I can predict when and just not go that day.

Flor Carabez 14:34

Right. So you did start the army?

Anastasio 14:39

No, I never did. I told my mom I would quit all of that and I would completely disregard it as like an option. If I was allowed to study criminal justice,

Flor Carabez 14:51

what had influenced you to go the army route? Initially,

Anastasio 14:57

um, again, it was more like I guess I didn't know what I wanted to do. Like I love reading, and I loved learning forensics and all that. I guess I just never really considered it being an actual career that I could do. But again, it just correlates more to like the fact that I didn't know it was gonna be alive by then.

Flor Carabez 15:22

What do you mean by that?

Anastasio 15:25

So, I've been having a lot of traumatizing experiences with like the whole sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, literally all types of abuse. So obviously, at some point, I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression, anxiety, all of that gist. And I've attempted many suicide attempts during maybe my first to eighth grade, I believe, to the point that the teachers were now starting to like realize what the heck happened. And they were like, oh, yeah, so they had a meeting with my parents. And they were like, Well, we found these we found that we found notes, we found that that she would write andd, blah, blah, blah. Either you get her help, or we don't think she's gonna be alive by the time you guys actually recognize it. So they did the work. They would take me to therapies, I never talked. So then the therapists were like, Well, why don't we close her up a bit? And my mom said, What do you mean close her? And they're like, Yeah, let's, let's take her away, put her in a facility or something. And then we'll see what happens. And

my mom's like, no, no, you're not taking away my daughter you're not gonna do that. I will find her something else. And they were like, okay, so I guess it got so bad to the point, they had to get a hypnotherapist to force me to talk. And then that kinda helped a bit. I do remember. Just being really groggy and really sleepy when I got out of those sessions, but I do remember the smells, because this lady would use like a bunch of different oils she always had like a rack full of different types of oils to this day, I'm still finding this one specific smell that she had, and I don't know what it is. But yeah, a lot of the teachers just never believed that I was going to be alive in time to make it through high school, or even be in high school. And I didn't know that until the first day of high school that I walked in with, like, very little uniforms and everything. I had jitters obviously, but in my head, I was like, It's okay, like, it's a new leaf. It's a new life. Like, nobody knows me. I can start fresh. And my mom broke down. And I was like, why are you crying? And she was like, cuz you're here and I'm like, it's the natural course of life events. Why wouldn't I be here? She was like, I didn't think you were gonna be alive. And I was like, what do you mean? She was like, they always told me you weren't gonna be alive to make it to high school. And I was like well, I'm gonna go now. You deal with your emotions. She's like, Yeah, go go, go do something. I was like, bet. And that was the first day I actually started opening up a bit more. And I initiated a conversation for the first time in my life, and I made a friend.

Flor Carabez 18:21

Nice. So with all of that experience that you had with your mental health, and trying to find support with all that, you're like, Okay, school starting high school brand new life and brand new leaf. The riddles part still remains though. The love for the riddles,

Anastasio 18:43

the love for puzzles in general. Actually, when I had my stuff back, during that time, I'm pretty sure I had to stop that. A lot of my events are just like, mashed together because I would go dormant, or I'd block everything out for a while until I kind of came back and I was like, wait, I'm still supposed to be doing shit manually, not automatically. My stepdad loved video games as well, but he loved more specifically, like puzzles made out of metal. I don't know if you ever seen those things. It's like two pieces of metal that are like stuck together and you need to like figure out how to like unsolve it and how to separate them. Once you separate them. You could do it again, but just figuring out how to put them back together. Okay, so he would always buy us little knickknacks and stuff like that and different types of like little puzzles and it was like oh cool.

Flor Carabez 19:39

like brain teaser. Okay. So earlier when you mentioned that your parents were trying to figure out some options to support your mental health. Were you talking about your biological parents or was it your mom and a step parent?

Anastasio 19:57

Um, it was More like my mom and my stepdad.

Anastasio 20:04

because during that time, my biological dad again had no idea that I wanted to change like his thinking. He grew up in a very sexist family and it's always has been like that. And he's still like stuck in his old ways of like no, like, there's no such thing as depression, there's no such thing as being like suicidal they just need a good whipping to like get back in shape. That's where a lot of the physical abuse came in that and the fact that because he got so used to me being praised and constantly bringing home medals and trophies and certificates and all that, he was like, my daughter is smart just like me, she's able to get things quickly just as me so when I started falling behind a little bit he didn't like it so a lot of shit happened. To this day I still don't appreciate my own medals or certificates. I see them like thank you and I just throw them away. Until my mom finds them and she's like stop throwing away all your stuff. And I was like, I don't know where I put them. I guess I just put them in a random place until they get lost, and then I just completely forget about them. But, yeah, a lot of support came from my biological mom and my stepdad. Because my stepdad was very open minded to a lot of things. He always believed in equality. He was always ready to like, learn more about things. And my mom's sister was the same way as me. She loved reading too, but she loved reading. She is very open minded. She was like, No, I believe a lot of these things actually exist like this. So she will like guide my mom and be like,

stop being dumb and help your daughter. Like this is an actual thing. This thing actually exists. This thing is like a plague. So my mom's like, Okay, fine. So a lot of the help came with that. My dad at some point did kind of like came around and was like, Okay, I gotta like I'll pay for it and see what happens. But it stopped when I started getting raped. And that's where he was like, No, I don't believe that's what happened. I believe she initiated it, or I believe that she was dreaming about making it up. So he kind of stopped the help with that. And that's where my stepdad came in more like saying no, this is your daughter. You're supposed to believe your child and not whatever the fuck your husband sister is saying.

Flor Carabez 20:04

Okay,

Flor Carabez 22:36

So you said your dad is sexist kind of old school. How does does he support your your career choice now?

Anastasio 22:54

Um, well, he came around and he was like yeah, okay, like, I mean, as long as you're doing what you like now and as long as you get good money out of it, then go for it, if you want and I was like, okay.

Flor Carabez 23:09

Did he ever judge you for not being like roughhousing, like being more of like a, like a tomboy type of thing?

Anastasio 23:20

Um, no, I think he just believed that, Because I was raised up with like a lot of men in my house prveiously. Okay, it's just like a phase type of thing. Um, to this day, he's still very close minded. He doesn't believe in like the LGBT and stuff like that. He's still very against it. So when I tried coming out, he didn't like that, but yeah, up to this day, me and my sister are constantly trying to get like, so when we go clothes shopping, we like going our separate ways now. Because that way he doesn't know where the clothes are from. So if we go shopping with him, and he's constantly tailing us after us, we can't go anywhere but the women's section.

Flor Carabez 24:12

Okay.

Anastasio 24:13

He doesn't let us out from the women's section.

Flor Carabez 24:19

Gotcha. All right. So I'm gonna deviate back to the major exploration part. So you're in high school, you know, you love puzzles, reading challenges. It sounds like you're you crave challenge.

Anastasio 24:38

More like the stimulation of when

Flor Carabez 24:44

you're at the point where I feel like there's a point where you're like, Okay, I'm near the end. What am I going to do after high school? What did that look like for you?

Anastasio 24:57

Oh, Um, I look like a lot of breakdowns. Because I had, again, it just comes back to the whole, I had no idea I was even gonna finish I was gonna live, like, my whole thought was I'm gonna die before I turned 15. And even through high school, I was still exploring, experiencing like a levels of trauma that I had, still experiencing a lot of the abuse that I had. So I was still pretty much dormant. And what I mean by dormant is like, I literally just go throughout my day automatically. I have automatic responses for everything, automatic actions for everything. And I'm literally just doing whatever in my head, like, in my head, I created a small space. That's literally a nest. I have my bed in there and have like a bunch of like little things from my past or my future from like, my present. Future sounds weird, but the thing is, usually, I would I have very, very vivid dreams. And a lot of them seem like future wise. And usually, when I get deja vu, it's because I've had those dreams before. And I was like, Oh, I already experienced that. So it's just like, finding out where they come from specifically. So throughout majority of my high school years, I was pretty much just dormant. And just in like my little nest that I created. So when counselors and mentoring teachers were like, What are you going to do? What are you going to do? And I was like, I don't know. And they're like, Well, you need to figure it out. And my parents were like that, too. They're like, You need to figure out what the fuck you're going to do with your life. And I was like, I know that. And they were like, You know but, you're not doing anything. And I was like, I know, like, I know what I'm doing. I know what I'm what I'm aware of. I just don't know what I can do. And that's where my mentor kind of like helped me out. She was like, Okay, well, you love forensics, and you love this. Why don't you go and go with criminal justice. Like, it's gonna open more options. Either way, forensics, is a branch of that. So go and do like a general study of it. And then whatever you prefer, then you could either you can transfer and pursue that one specifically, or you can continue doing all of that. And I was

like, okay, yeah, that helps me. So now, that basically took off, like the whole experience of feeling like I was drowning. And for the first time, I was like, Oh, I can finally breathe again. And everything's like calm waters.

Flor Carabez 27:41

So if you could describe the experience of choosing your major, the whole, like, there's so much like, what would what would be one word that you could use to describe that point? Or that stage?

Anastasio 27:59

I guess impossible. Like I love challenges and all that. But there are still some challenges where I'm like, I am drowning in these.

Flor Carabez 28:24

Gotcha. So counselor comes and says, Hey, you really liked forensics, criminal justice is a branch of that. Where does the army fall into play in these conversations.

Anastasio 28:37

So I want to, it was my mentor, actually, that helped me with that, not my counselor. So I went to Phoenix military High School. So a lot of our things was already military based. So I guess I just got used to that. A lot of things that I do were based off of like my own comfort that I was already used to. I can adapt easily to like different changes. But again, because I was always in survival mode ever since growing up and ever since I was born and all that I can adapt to change and I can quickly make change the demeanor and to make that in order to like survive, but I still look for that comfort where things are still the same and things are calm and like there's nothing out there. So like again because it was like a military grade school. I got used to like the marching to the yelling to the orders that we would get. And a lot of people from the Army or Marine Corps or any type of military branch out there will come and visit the school and be like, Hey, join us. We do this, this and this

Flor Carabez 29:59

gotcha, So since you were already accustomed to that culture, you figured, well, this would be a decent option because

Anastasio 30:07

I'm used to it. And I'm used to being around it. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 30:10

Okay, that makes sense. All right. So we had these two options. And then sounds like you're more so your mom and your stepdad were like, hey, maybe we shouldn't put you at risk of losing your life so quickly, since you know, you've made it already this far. And you came to a negotiation thing with them, like, alright, well, I won't do that. But I also don't want to be an architect and I don't want to be a doctor. This is what I want to do. Does that sound right?

Anastasio 30:43

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 30:44

Okay. And then they were like, alright, as long as you're alive, that's what it was?

Anastasio 30:48

pretty much,

Flor Carabez 30:49

okay,

Anastasio 30:49

like, as long as you're going to something and you want to finish that, then go ahead, because they know I don't like leaving things unfinished.

Flor Carabez 31:00

So it's, it sounds like it might still be of, their support is coming stemming from a fear of you taking your own life. But as long as you're focused on something that you're enjoying, you will remain alive.

Anastasio 31:18

As long as that thing that I'm still interested in, keeps my interest. So I guess what they were hoping is that the specific career keeps me interested, just enough to at least live for majority of the life an original personal lives. They would be okay.

Flor Carabez 31:39

Okay. So the decision to do criminal justice came, it sounds like it might be a mixture of passion and need. A little bit. Okay. Now, would you say that it's still the same case right now? You're almost done. It sounds like you are leaning towards becoming a police officer.

Anastasio 32:06

Yeah, again, my original thought was, I'm gonna become a cop. And then I'm becoming a detective, because that just puts me right back to being able to solve the cases. During my forensics classes, we will have mock trials. And I love doing the mock trials. You know, I love recreating them and reimagining how things went down. So that was my original thought. So from what I know, the type is basically do the same thing. They do their little mock trials, and they recreate things just to figure out what happened, what, when and where. And I was like, I want to do that. That is what I like. That's a huge puzzle I want to solve. But then, like, a lot of things started coming back. Like, depression, anxiety, and all that I'm still battling with it. I'm still having trouble with it. But I guess. I'm still stuck in the way of like, my tunnel vision, and not being able to open up to like more options. Because I feel like if a lot of options are open, I tend to become overwhelmed with it. And then I get stuck. And I never realized that until present time. So when a lot of other people started coming to class and saying hey, criminal justice opens this branch and this branch and this branch comes from this specific branch and all that and I was like, Wait, hold on, too many options. And it was overwhelming. I can't and then I froze. And I was like, I don't know what I want to do anymore. I don't know if this is what I want. And did I pick that because I really wanted or that I picked that because I needed it. So in other words, I

guess in a way it's still because of passion. It's no longer a need anymore, because it's more like yeah, I want to do that. But now it's more like passion and like a solid with a question mark. To describe it I guess.

Flor Carabez 34:23

Yeah, sounds like a good description. So when you said that you were asking yourself like did I choose this out of passion or need. When you say need What do you mean by that?

Anastasio 34:35

I mean, something like something that's gonna keep me going, like, is this gonna be interesting enough to literally keep going and wanting to pursue more in this wanting to become a master of it? Or am I just gonna fall off that bridge again and be like, you know what, I don't know what I want to do with my life. I don't know what else I was gonna do. Because when I planned my whole suicide and all that my original plan was I'm going to die before high school. And then high school was just around the corner. And then I was like, you know what my mom seems happy that I progressed in life, let me see if I can make it towards the end of high school. And hopefully try to like live by the time High School is done. And I learned to live through it. Because I was dormant because I wasn't aware of anything anymore. And then I was like, Okay, well, high school is finished. Now what? And then my next plan was like, Okay, let's go to

college and see. See if I can finish college, then make it alive, just enough to finish college. And then college came up, and I was like, this is different, kind of like this.

Flor Carabez 36:10

So are you in college for yourself? Or are you doing it for your mom?

Anastasio 36:15

I guess it's a little of both actually, for myself, because I don't want to live in the situation that I'm in. And I don't want to live in the situation that I grew up in, you know, because I, we went through poverty at some point, when a lot of things broke down. And I was like, I don't want to be alive. If at some point, I'm sitting here and be like, Okay, where am I going to get the money for food? Where am I going to get the money for rent? Like, no, I need money. I need a means of survival. I need some type of stability. So I guess that's where my plan B, derived. Because my dad, my dad would always be like, always have a Plan B, Plan B fails. You have Plan C. Do all the letters in the alphabet, just make sure you have something some type of option. I was like, okay. And if college fails, which I'm hoping it doesn't, because I really like it here. But again, I'm getting used to this I'm finding comfort and stability that all these years of my life is like school, school school what's going to happen when I no longer have school anymore? Work?

Flor Carabez 37:38

Right. Okay, so how do you think the your degree is gonna? So let me rephrase that. When you mentioned that you you went to get the degree, you're in school right now a little bit because of your mom and for yourself. You don't want to experience poverty ever again.

Anastasio 38:03

Right?

Flor Carabez 38:04

How do you feel like having your degree is going to, I guess, either impact or ensure that you don't experience poverty again?

Anastasio 38:15

Well, when we first came in, I remember at some point I don't remember what class it was. Or if it even was a class, it was probably an event. I don't remember. But they showed us a chart of the money that different types of careers make within a year and I was like, that seems solid that's gonna get me by. I never had plans of marriage or kids. And I was like, if it's just me alone, I can live off of that I can have enough stability to like, you know, have my own little place and my

own stuff. I was pretty much like it was like I have enough money to live for myself and I have enough money to buy whatever food I want. Buy whatever snacks I want. You know, nobody can tell me like oh, you can't eat that

Anastasio 39:14

I was never allowed to experience different types of food or junk food. I didn't even know junk food was a thing. Um, I actually didn't know candy was a thing. Yeah, in my mind, I just assumed all types of candy were literally just gummy worms. Because I didn't know I didn't I was so sheltered in my life that I was so behind on life, but so advanced in school. And it was always like a contradicting because I was like, No, I am book smart. I know what I'm doing. I know what things are like, but then people will come up with life questions. I'm like, what is that? I don't know what that is. I didn't know what a block was. until high school.

Flor Carabez 39:54

like a block like a city block or like a cinderblock.

Anastasio 39:59

Like the city block.

Flor Carabez 40:00

Oh,

Anastasio 40:01

Like, I remember somewhere during sixth or seventh grade, like, the little calles. Like I always knew that as a calle but like in Spanish. I didn't know there was a word for it in English, I knew that there was a lot of things in English, that Spanish-wise, you know, but I remember these popular girls were having a conversation. They were like, oh, like, how far away? Do you live? And they were like, I live like a block away. I live two blocks away. I live a couple of blocks, you know, stuff like that. And in my mind I was like, What are they talking? I'm like what are blocks. And I remember, and you know the sidewalk has small squares? I assumed they were talking about that,

Flor Carabez 40:48

like the little slabs of concrete?

Anastasio 40:50

Yeah. I assume that's what it was. Because I was so sheltered. And I was only book smart, but in all my readings, I'd never really read things that have to do with life. So I remember specifically going home that day. And I was like, Okay, this name, this girl named Melissa, she used to live, she used to live in the same fucking street that I did. I guess we just never captured the fact that we were in. And it was like this, she said, she was like two or three blocks away. And I was like, That's too little. I never question everything. Um, I guess I just wanted to be, you know, some like, to me, that's like, to the point where we are from two different worlds. I don't think it's something that is part of mine. I never questioned on being until high school. And I was like, hey, Ma, and she was like, what? And I was like, I just got a random memory from sixth grade. And she was like, What is it? and I explained to her about, like, the whole blocks, and I was like, what is that? She was like, Are you being serious? And it's like, she was like, las calles, bloques. Donde estamos es un bloque. Oh, okay.

Anastasio 41:03

So did you know what a quadra was? Or you didn't know what that was? In Spanish?

Anastasio 42:20

Not in English

Flor Carabez 42:25

Makes sense.

Anastasio 42:26

And then I remember whatever, whoever that other girl was, was like, how many blocks away do you live? And I remember I was like, I now live 7 blocks away.

Flor Carabez 42:36

Oh, that's funny. We'll check how much time okay. So what was my question gonna be? Okay. So I noticed you haven't talked specifically about your Latinidad. you've talked a little bit about the language switching? You've talked about being in a mixed classroom and how you learned English because your native language was Spanish. You talked about your dad being Machista? How did your Hispanic descendency impact your experience with choosing your major if at all?

Anastasio 43:30

Um, I guess with the whole machismo culture.

Flor Carabez 43:35

okay

Anastasio 43:36

with the whole you can't do anything. Women aren't allowed to be in schools, you know, stuff like that. Because my dad has like a little family business and family business means that literally means like, an actual little family, but in his mind. My dad's family is him. His parents and his siblings. That's it. Nobody else. And because they were all raised in the same old thinking that my I don't want to call her grandma

Flor Carabez 43:51

his mom.

Anastasio 43:53

Yeah, as his mom and his dad were raised them. They tried teaching us the same thing. Like women aren't allowed to vote. Women aren't allowed to speak up. You guys are supposed to follow our orders. You guys are supposed to learn this. Do you guys belong here? You guys belong in the whole kitchen thing? You know? So when my parents separated, and I was living with my step dad's family. I felt so weird. Because they valued your opinions. They valued your choices and they always did everything as a family and as a family. They meant both their

overall family and the ones they created. So, it was weird for me. When my stepdad came up and was like, Where do you want to live? And I was like, aren't you gonna pick that? He will say, Well, yeah, we have these options, but which one do you like better? Do you want to go see the houses and see what room you want? And I was like, Okay? What color do you want? Do you like this one? Or this one? Do you want to do this? Or this? What do you want to eat? Oh, well, we want something else. But we can go take you there. You know, it was more like, Okay, this is new. This is liberating this refresh, I feel. So at ease, and I feel like I can breathe. I feel like I am alive, rather than a robot or something just following what I'm supposed to do. Until my parents, well I used to always call him Papa postiso, because he was like, my fake dad. But I do count him as a father. And so my Papa postiso and like, my mom's separate, and I was like, oh, now what. And then we went back to my dad, and then now my parents are now married.

Flor Carabez 46:13

You're biological parents?

Anastasio 46:14

my biological parents, because the agreement was that if they were together, I was gonna live.

Flor Carabez 46:20

So how does that make you feel?

Anastasio 46:22

Um, I've regretted my choice. I regretted my choice the day they got married. They hated it. But I do remember my dad pinching me and was like smile. And I was like. To this day, I still regret that.

Flor Carabez 46:41

So your biological parents got back together because of your suicide ideation and attempts and all that.

Anastasio 46:47

Um, my suicide notes, specifically, because my dad was like, What do you want? And I was like, I don't know what, what I want. They're like, Well, do you want to live and I'm like not live in this, no! And they were like, Okay, well, what makes you happy? And I was like, don't know what makes me happy books makes me happy. being lost in a world of books and being lost in a world of like puzzles and riddles. And anything fantasy like is what makes me happy. And they're like, Would you be happier if me and your mom are together. But at that age, that was a part of my fantasy that my parents were living together. And they were like, a nice happy family

away from like, all the types of like abuse that we've ever suffered. Just something new, something refreshing, something like them being together, but having what my mom and my stepdad had. And I answered Yes. If we're together again, would you stay alive? Would you be happier and I was like I think I will be happier. So that was the agreement. They went, they got married, my mom made a deal with my dad as well. So now they have their own little deal. And my parents and I have a deal that if they were together, I was going to be okay. I was going to stop the whole depression and anxiety and stop all the mental illnesses and live.

Flor Carabez 48:23

Did they stop?

Anastasio 48:26

No they didn't. I think it just made it worse, actually.

Flor Carabez 48:32

So it sounds like they're, they're supporting you out of fear that if they don't, you're going to take your own life.

Anastasio 48:42

Um, I think they actually forgot about that after a while. Because now my sister is suicidal. So now they're focused on my sister and I am as well.

Flor Carabez 48:53

Okay. Um, so it sounds like the the layer of the Latinidad that impacted. Your choice was the machismo. So you kind of use that to fuel like, you're not going to tell me what to do. I'm a girl and I'm gonna do what I want type of thing.

Anastasio 49:13

Basically, and the whole, if I'm able to get out of this house, I can literally do what I want, you know, like, in a way I'm still gonna be following orders as a cop. I'm still gonna be like, where I'm needed. But, now I can be somebody different in everybody's life. I got so used to being a victim and a nobody a background character and the villain of people's stories. I was like, no, what if? What if one day I meet someone that went through the same thing? And I can be a hero in that one. Because I like the way that I felt when I was able to help. One of my best friends back in elementary. Speak up about her being abused by her dad. Sexually abused by her dad. And I was like I kind of went through that same thing, not by my Father but by somebody else. But I know what it's like, like you need to talk. And she did. But her mother hated me for it.

Flor Carabez 50:16

But you liked that you were a hero though,

Anastasio 50:18

I liked that I was able to help her and get out of that situation because it was just breaking her down every day. And she got so depressed every single day. And I was like, I know what that what that feels like. And I know that it feels very shitty. I don't want people I care about feeling that shitty. So I told her, I was like what's going on? And she opened up and she was like,

Anastasio 50:40

you know how you were raped? And I was like, yeah, and she was like, I'm in that situation right now. And I was like, okay, and we ended up figuring out a plan

Anastasio 50:54

and I went with her that day to her house my mom was in the back, waiting for us on the other side of the street. And she told her mother her mother cried. But it was more it looked more out

of anger actually. And directed towards me So honestly, I feel like she knew she just didn't want to say anything.

Flor Carabez 51:21

So aside from a fueling your ambition to finish so that you could escape following orders in your personal life. Does your Latinidad impact your your career choice at all?

Anastasio 51:53

I don't think

Anastasio 52:00

or actually it probably does. Because again, it goes back to I like, helping those that can't really help themselves. Because I know that I know that in our culture, there's always going to be some type of abuse, and I've experienced the most I know what it's like, you know, like, giving our culture and our people a little bit of hope, like change. We can get through it, we can get out of it. We just need to fight harder, and we just need to stay alive a little bit longer for it.

Flor Carabez 52:33

Do you feel like you have a layer of pressure to complete your degree or to stay in this major?

Anastasio 52:45

Not necessarily staying or finishing? It's more like pressure of being on time. Because again growing up as always, I'm like things need to fall in natural order. Things need to go during specific times, and I'm afraid I'm gonna run out of time. And then be stuck.

Flor Carabez 53:09

run out of time. Are you referring to the the suicide stuff? Or is it something else?

Anastasio 53:14

More like falling behind.

Flor Carabez 53:21

So the timeframe that you're thinking of when you're talking about running out of time or falling behind? Who's setting that timeframe for you.

Anastasio 53:30

My dad, he's always said, a timeframe for everything like the whole you need to be done with school at this age and this age. These are the years you're supposed to finish school. These are the years you're supposed to be at this level and stuff like that. And I was always so afraid that if I ever ran out of time for anything that things could just go back to physical abuse they think it just derives from the same thing that my dad would give me a certain amount of time to learn something. And if I didn't, I would be deprived from everything that I had from pleasures like my game from things that keep me distracted from food from water from anything literally. Now as a child when timetables came up, that's where my hate for math came. My dad was like I need you to learn your times tables, because I just couldn't really capture it. Like I knew them forwards. I just didn't know them backwards or salteados. It took me a second later. But even just taking one more second could deprive me from a lot of things. Because I needed to learn them like that. If I took one second later, he was like No, go back. You're gonna study more, you're gonna learn it better. And I was like, Okay, um to the point that he realized that I'd only learned them when he would lock me in the room. And I wasn't allowed outside. And I hated that room for a specific time period, when it was my favorite room, he turned my safe space into something that I absolutely hated. It became my safe space because my grandfather lived in that room. Everything I knew was in that room. And I was always locked in that room. But it was locked out of safety. Because my grandfather thought that if I was in that room, and he locked everybody else outside, they wouldn't be able to hurt me. And it worked. Until he moved away. And now because it's like an old door, and it needs a skeleton key, um, my dad will lock me in

there and be like, you're not getting food, you're not getting water, you're not getting anything until you learn your times tables. And it's like, Okay,

Flor Carabez 56:07

does he do that now with with your college grades, homework and stuff?

Anastasio 56:14

Um, no, because I never show my grades

Flor Carabez 56:19

does he ask for them?

Anastasio 56:21

My dad was never really interested in my life. He always wanted a boy. I'm not a boy. So he just never really had any type of interest, you know, just as long as I'm following the natural order of life and as long as I'm within that timeframe, I'm okay.

Flor Carabez 56:43

Okay. So, do you know that we are a Hispanic Serving Institution?

Anastasio 56:56

No.

Flor Carabez 56:57

Do you know what a Hispanic Serving Institution means?

Flor Carabez 57:01

I don't think so.

Flor Carabez 57:02

Okay, so the Hispanic serving institution is a designation so it's like a label you can think of it like a label. Colleges and universities get it from the Department of Education that comes with funding and it's all because that school has at least 25% enrollment of full time Latino undergraduate students. So every time the school meets that, I guess like quota they get funding

they get the designation renewed. Did that ever come up in conversation when you were in high school that we were Hispanic Serving Institution?

Anastasio 57:44

No. The only thing that that come up when researching schools were the charts of like how many percentage of people that had you know like we had this many whites we have this many Blacks, Asians, and specifics of all that

Flor Carabez 58:04

did. So what did they say about this school? About the ethnic or the demographics?

Anastasio 58:13

They didn't really say anything. They were just like, they have more Latinos and everything you will probably be comfortable then I was like, Okay.

Flor Carabez 58:22

So that that swayed your decision to come here?

Anastasio 58:26

Um, money swayed my decision, the cheapest one I found with the whole shelter thing. I wasn't allowed anywhere else outside.

Flor Carabez 58:39

So going away to

Anastasio 58:41

was not an option.

Flor Carabez 58:42

Okay, what about community college?

Anastasio 58:46

That also wasn't an option.

Flor Carabez 58:49

So what did they why was it that they allowed you to come here but community college wasn't

Anastasio 58:56

because of the word University. My dad believed that community college he found community colleges as school for the dumb ones.

Anastasio 59:10

Okay.

Anastasio 59:12

Like, no. Son escuelas para burros. Tu no eres burra, tu no eres mensa, tu no eres tonta. Esos son para los que no saben que quieren hacer en la vida y tu si.

Flor Carabez 59:22

So he chose the school for you?

Anastasio 59:24

He didn't choose it for me I was still kind of allowed to pick out what schools I wanted to apply to. Just as long as it fit within like the money base, because my dad was like, I only have this much amount saved for you for this for like school. So you can go to anyone but this is as much as I'm willing to give up to help you and I think okay, and because this was the closest to home and the cheapest one. Then I was like, I kinda Wanna go here? And I also kinda like the community in it. So he was like, Do you feel comfortable there? I was like, yeah. And he was like, okay, then I can help you pay out everything for it and you don't need to pay a cent. And I was like, okay.

Flor Carabez 1:00:14

So he's supporting you financially?

Anastasio 1:00:16

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 1:00:20

Do you feel like now that you know what the designation is, you know that there's money attached to it? Do you feel like this has impacted your experience at the University?

Anastasio 1:00:32

Um, I guess it just impacted in the way like I don't need to worry about the money

Anastasio 1:00:44

I don't really know what to say. It's just like, I don't need to worry about the money I was gonna say because like now the money I earn is for myself, but it's not it's not for me

Flor Carabez 1:00:54

the from your position because you work here. So where does where does that money go?

Anastasio 1:01:00

It goes to a savings account for that my dad can use it to buy another house.

Flor Carabez 1:01:06

So you're working for your dad? Basically.

Anastasio 1:01:10

I have to.

Flor Carabez 1:01:11

So is that an agreement that you had with him or so he just said, you're gonna go to work, you're gonna give me that money.

Anastasio 1:01:20

He said that I was allowed to have a bank account. Originally, the money was supposed to be for me. Because originally, like in my dad's little family business, he buys houses he like old abandoned houses. Him and his brothers shape it up, make it look really nice. And then he rents them out. So the original plan was that they were going to use my older cousin by a year have him basically run the little family business, go into state farm or whatever, and be able to like sell them and tell them like hey, these houses are cheaper, we can buy those we can renew we can rent them out stuff like that. That was the whole thing. Like the whole going into an organization and just working from the inside, you know, to get them more more comfortable, more stability, more money. But then my cousin decided he didn't want to go to college. After various beatings,

he didn't sway and he ended up basically running away. So now he's a deadbeat in everybody else eyes. he's not allowed but because he was first born in the whole family my dad still favores him and it's like no, he just needs a father figure in his life because he didn't have that

Anastasio 1:02:54

so now my dad is acting like his dad. so when that went out the window the next in line was me and my dad was like you can work for Bank of America you can work for like the other banks figure out what's going on figure out what houses we can get in all of that and I was all like, but I want to do criminal justice. I don't like math like that. I don't want to work for that. So it was a lot of persuading again and he was like fine if you don't want to be that you can be a doctor and I was like I don't want to be and then his dad came in and was like no because why would we give it to a girl only so that she could like fall in love, quit school get pregnant and then just leave the family. Like she's not. No va servir. No sirven. And they were like so now they were in a panic were like well, who's next for mine? My youngest cousin by a year but he has autism and he was like No, the next one in line is my other cousin, Angel. We call them he's like one set of twins and twins meaning like him and my sister because they were born in the same year and around the same month so they're like we're not willing to wait that they didn't want to wait that long. So they were like, no, we need to train Anastasio. Like she will follow orders she will like comply like if we train her enough. She will do what we want her to do. My dad just didn't count the fact that when we moved back in with him that we were still stuck in the whole. No, we have opinions. We have voices, we can do what we want. He didn't count that he thought that we were

still going to be dormant and just following orders. So when we started acting out and lashing out, he was like, no, this is not going to work.

Flor Carabez 1:04:49

So instead, he said, You're gonna have this bank account, but I'm gonna use the money.

Anastasio 1:04:54

Um, I think it was more like a trick because he was like, we're gonna teach you how to be financially responsible. But just know that any money you earn needs to go into the savings account. I was like, okay, cool. Like, I can use that later. And he was like, No, we're gonna use this so you can buy a house and I was like

Anastasio 1:05:17

okay. Why? And he was like, What do you mean? Why? Like he's like, Don't you want your own house? I

Anastasio 1:05:23

was like, Well yeah, sounds nice but are you going to teach me how to get it? And he's like

Anastasio 1:05:30

well, that's what I'm here for aren't I? and I was like, but is it gonna be away from your family?

And he's like yeah, he didn't like that. Because where he goes the family goes in every house we've ever lived in and been in his family's apartments.

Flor Carabez 1:05:51

Oh, so does his whole family live with you guys?

Anastasio 1:05:56

So my tia Concha and his brother live in the first floor. his other brother his father and my tia live in the second floor. and we got the scraps which is the attic because originally it was just going to be for him himself. But again with the whole marriage and the deals and everything come into play we ended up getting the smallest one but either way my dad always let his family pick first and then we would just go whatever was left. So I told him, I was like, I won't touch that money in the bank account if I'm able to get a family, a house away from your family, and he was like yeah, we can get like a small little little small two story house I was like no, I want it to be by my choices I want it to be picked on what I like. And he was like Yeah, okay, like it

could just be the five of us. I was like we're not five we're four. And he's like well what about your grandpa? And I was like, that's your dad I don't want him there

Flor Carabez 1:07:10

what did he say?

Anastasio 1:07:14

and he walked away, a lot of things he never really replies. And so it's just like a lot of grunts.

Flor Carabez 1:07:26

is that just when he's upset or in general he just doesn't talk

Anastasio 1:07:30

just in general sometimes if you listen close enough you can tell when he's upset

Flor Carabez 1:07:44

has the Hispanic Serving Institution designation influenced your your experience with your major at all?

Flor Carabez 1:07:59

Thanks that's valid so what essential items do you want folks to take away from what you shared today

Anastasio 1:08:14

live

Anastasio 1:08:16

live live just enough to get out of whatever horrible situation you're in and find something you're actually willing to live for. It doesn't necessarily have to be because of yourself because a lot of a lot of times it's like Damn I hate myself I don't want to live for myself but like find something. right now I'm living for my chance. And by chance I mean my cats, my Haru and Lucy. I joke about it, but I told my mom I was like, if my cats die I'm dieing. I don't fucking care. I have nothing else. And she's just like well what about Roo and I was like you're sick. You're gonna die at some point.

Flor Carabez 1:08:16

live

Flor Carabez 1:09:02

Before today, had anyone asked you to share your story?

Anastasio 1:09:08

like in general? good question. I don't think so. I think I've just always willingly shared it out because a lot of people just kind of come to me and be like, Hey, I'm living in this this and this sounds like that. I know what that feels like. I did this actually when that situation but you can do whatever you know.

Flor Carabez 1:09:32

And what haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Anastasio 1:09:47

What haven't you asked me that I think you should know?

Anastasio 1:09:52

I guess when when things change, where things change in the fact that living for others rather than living for me. Um and what I mean by that is, again, a lot of my life I've just always lived for others always been what others wanted and stuff like that. And I came to the realization with my stepdad when they found my suicide notes, actually, I want that. I want a life where I can do what I want. I want a life where if I ever find someone, which I'm not really planning on this, I'm just going through trials and errors I guess. What I want somewhere where my opinions are valid, and my options are valid and I'm allowed to put an input. So now, if I ever decide to live with anyone, whether it's roommates or whatever friends. You know, stuff like that, as long as I'm fully able to hold my own ground, I will be okay.

Flor Carabez 1:11:24

So this brings me with a follow up question. So did you decide on criminal justice because it offers some structure? But you find comfort that with this degree and this job, you're going to be able to build your own life where outside of work, you are your own person,

Anastasio 1:11:48

um, that, um, the fact that I also found out that because people know, different versions of you. And because people place you in whatever category in their specific book, like, for example, for my mentor, she was someone that opened my eyes to certain things. So in my book, she's like a supporting character. You know, my stepdad was like, a knight, I guess. In like my books and stuff like that. I know not a lot of people go for cops because of like, what's going on around today. But back then a lot people actually did trusted the cops. They always went for help and be like, Hey, I'm in this situation. This is happening right now. Like, come help me, come save me. I guess I just always wanted to be like a supporting character, like, hey, like, you can do this, we can get you out. But now you need to start doing things on your own, you know? The whole I can probably change this person's life just by being there.

Flor Carabez 1:13:12

So you're okay with having still taking orders following superstructure? Because you know that it's for a greater good.

Anastasio 1:13:23

Basically, um, of course, I'm, if I'm being jeoparder, I'm gonna be like, No, you got to do this. No, that is a very wrongful thing to say like, if they're like, well, was like, the whole you know how they have security up and they were like putting like tear gas to people like they were throwing them? I'm not gonna do that. They're like, well, you need to go protect. I'll be like,

okay, but I'll protect the people from all of you guys. Because why would you do that? There are children there. Why? Why would anyone want to experience I was like, Do you want me to pepper spray? See what that feels like and then decide if you want to do that now.

Flor Carabez 1:14:01

Okay. Do you have any questions for me?

Anastasio 1:14:13

Not Really.

Flor Carabez 1:14:15

All right. Well, thank you. This was a very good interview. Wow, we went very well. I'm going to stop recording now.

Tiffany

Mon, Mar 20, 2023 8:59AM • 51:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

feel, major, guess, mom, people, siblings, college, questions, high school, students, family, step, generation, criminal justice, school, experience, push, dad, sounds, designation

SPEAKERS

Tiffany, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:03

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study I am conducting; I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor Carabez, and I am a Doctoral candidate here at NLU; I'm one term away from graduation! The reason I am conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience I have noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from this study will help elevate students' stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out. To protect your identity, I will use the pseudonym you chose in the screening questionnaire. This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. I have one central question this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow-up

questions for clarity. I want to ensure I am documenting and understanding your experiences the way you experienced them, not just by my perception. As I am asking the questions, take your time responding, and feel free to ask me any questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question, or I might take note of your body language. Just know that I am giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I am done with this assignment, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them; just email your request. Now that all the housekeeping stuff is out of the way, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Tiffany 02:21

No.

Flor Carabez 02:21

All right, cool. So I do want to emphasize that past participants have shared when they're starting, que, they make sure they do it well or they don't do anything wrong. So there's no wrong way to share your story. Just make sure you're being honest. Whatever you feel comfortable with sharing is totally fine. You're not this isn't like a job interview or anything like that. It's just me

trying to collect your experience. So I'll start off with, how far are you in your undergraduate program?

Tiffany 02:55

Meaning how many years?

Flor Carabez 02:57

Yeah, like how far are you from graduating? Or what year you're in?

Tiffany 03:01

Well, I'm a junior, and I need one more year to graduate.

Flor Carabez 03:05

Nice. And what's your major?

Tiffany 03:08

Criminal Justice?

Flor Carabez 03:09

Okay, cool.

Flor Carabez 03:12

So what was your experience in choosing criminal justice as your major?

Tiffany 03:18

Well, at first, I wanted to be doctor, but I felt that I had more passion for other type of stuff. I'm mostly involved with crimes and I like like, investigating and finding like, Oh, how did this happen? Or finding truth? So I guess that was like, my lead for that major.

Flor Carabez 03:41

Okay, so when you started college initially, did you start off with criminal justice? Or did you start off with a different major?

Tiffany 03:49

Um, at first I had put me as human services

Flor Carabez 03:53

at National Louis? Okay. And why did they put you in Human Services first?

Tiffany 03:59

um, cuz, since it was full um they thought that it would be like, a good step, and then they'll be able to change me after the semester finish. But for some reason it's still like, under it.

Flor Carabez 04:15

Okay. So when you started here, did you tell them what career you wanted? And they just put you in Human Services?

Tiffany 04:22

Yes, because it was like full. So they're like, oh, right now there's like, no occupation or stuff. So for right now, since we don't want you to be like, backtracked even more, we'll just put you here, but then later on, you'll take the classes that you need for it.

Flor Carabez 04:39

So criminal justice was full. Okay. And when you were in high school, and there came that point where you're like, Oh, I'm so close to finishing. What did that what did that look like for you? or feel?

Tiffany 04:58

I guess it was like a bittersweet moment, because I mean, you create these memories, with people that you know, maybe from childhood, and just trying to, like get good grades turn in applications, like in time for you to like, be able to have that opportunity. And I guess like the pressure of like having good scores a good GPA, having good connections, good letters of referrals, like I think that's like, what causes stress, but at the end, it was. Okay.

Flor Carabez 05:29

So sounds like you felt stress pressure during that time, a little bit of sadness, because you were gonna leave people that you had relationships with? Where was the pressure coming from?

Tiffany 05:44

Um, I guess it's my family. Since I am the first generation to come to college. And I have other siblings, I have to be like, the role model in order to, like, tell them that it's okay to do stuff. Like, how do I explain this? I feel like failing or, like, not striving for what I want is not an option for me, especially since our Mexican culture is like, if I could do it, you could do it. Like, they'll try to push that mindset onto you.

Flor Carabez 06:20

So first generation pressures' hard. How many siblings do you have?

Tiffany 06:25

Well, I have three and then I have three step siblings. So I guess it ranges so I'm like, so my stepbrother, he's 23. I'm 21. And then it's my stepsister who's 18. And then my other stepsister who's 16. And then my brother's 15. The other one's 14. And then the smallest one is six.

Flor Carabez 06:52

You're so you're like the second one from the whole line of siblings.

Tiffany 06:58

But I'm the first one to go to college.

Flor Carabez 07:00

Okay. And at what point did you acknowledge the pressure? Of being first gen.

Tiffany 07:15

I think I was little since it's like before we met my stepdads family, I think it was just me and my mom. So I always been like, the first one, I do stuff or the first one to set that example for my siblings.

Flor Carabez 07:31

So you mentioned that you feel like you have this pressure that you can't fail. Are you in criminal justice? Because this is what you're passionate about? Or what pushed you to do this major?

Tiffany 07:49

Well, I'm really passionate about it. But I think I also want to be able to help other people, like try to solve that. Or even if it just opens like another window for me to like, go out there and explore. That's something that I want to take. Because I additionally wanted to do study abroad, but we don't have that here that much. So I'm trying to build other connections to see if there's clubs or anything like that, that would benefit me in the long run.

Flor Carabez 08:19

Okay. So you had also mentioned that you were deciding between being a doctor and criminal justice. What swayed you to do criminal justice?

Tiffany 08:31

I always want to be a homicide detective.

Flor Carabez 08:33

Okay,

Tiffany 08:34

sounds really fascinating. Like, I don't know, I guess it's just like, the crime scenes and like, being able to find the context clues or like who said, like, it's invisible to the eye. And I always said that, if that's not like the path I take, I would like to be a lawyer. Because I feel like it'd be a good lawyer. I like debating.

Flor Carabez 08:54

Okay, cool. So what had what had you interested in being a doctor then?

Tiffany 09:01

Um, basically, I guess it was just like, being able to take care of my mother, if she gets sick. I'll be able to like be there for her like, guide her, I guess. And, I mean, I guess it's fun, but I don't know. I don't know.

Flor Carabez 09:21

Did your high school help you with deciding on your major at all?

Tiffany 09:26

No, not really I think they were more concerned about filling in applications for college?

Flor Carabez 09:31

Okay. So there was a lot of, I guess, attention with just college applications in general.

Tiffany 09:38

And academics like how they were like what you were missing to get those steps in.

Flor Carabez 09:43

Okay, so when it came to conversations about your career and your major exploration, what did that look like?

Tiffany 09:51

What, specifically like with myself? or well? I guess I was like, with my partner. She wants to be like entrepreneur. And I want to, we were talking about like, what I wanted to be and I was like, Well, I'm really passionate like about criminal justice. It seems fascinating, like, the way they can figure out stuff and like the steps they do and like how they help other people. And I also feel like it's very like stigmatized, like, that job is very, like, critical and how other people view

it. So like, when I feel like, I'll be a good candidate for that title. Maybe change like how people perspective.

Flor Carabez 10:36

When you say your partner, you're referring to, like a school partner, or like a romantic partner?

Tiffany 10:43

romantic partner.

Flor Carabez 10:43

Okay, so you have someone that's been brainstorming with you. Okay. Have they always been in? I guess, at what point did they come in to help like to support?

Tiffany 11:00

I think that would be like,

Tiffany 11:02

the middle of sophomore year,

Flor Carabez 11:04

okay. of high school or college?

Tiffany 11:05

college.

Flor Carabez 11:06

Okay. So in high school, what are these conversations look like with your major stuff?

Tiffany 11:15

Um. I guess I really didn't talk about it much. I will, like, watch videos about it make me mostly like, find out ways that I was like, creative. Like, if it wasn't that I was also good at art, like I was finding, like, I guess my major strong points and maybe try to pursue that. But um, I think maybe a key factor was that I know they write a lot. And I like writing. So I feel like maybe that was like a good connection to it.

Flor Carabez 11:48

So did it sounds like you were looking up like things that you're interested in assets that you had, and what occupations would fit with what you were good at? Is that what it was? Okay? Did you have to take an assessment in high school, like a questionnaire or anything where they asked you about your curiosities?

Tiffany 12:12

Um, yes, we did some. But I think mine was mostly all over the place. It was like ranking for everything. Those just like, whatever you take, you'll be good at if you excel, I guess.

Flor Carabez 12:27

Did you have any conversations with your family about what you were interested in pursuing?

Tiffany 12:40

No, I don't think we did. I think they really just were like, okay, whatever you do with when. They were just like, okay, as long as you get like a good job or like, do better than us. And as long as you're happy, then we're happy.

Flor Carabez 12:54

So there wasn't like an expectation of a specific occupation. Okay. Do you feel like your family is supportive of you being a criminal justice major?

Tiffany 13:08

Well, my mom, so we have to be a police officer first for three years before we do the actual job we want. She's a little bit worried about that, since there's like, a lot of like, on the news or videos where police officers been shot so she's a little bit like, worried about that, because she's like, I don't want you guys go to like the army and you guys are doing a job that's willing for you guys to risk your life, but she is like, but at some time, I know that that's something that you guys have spread your wings and like, explore and figure out what's good for you. So I can't like keep you chained.

Flor Carabez 13:43

So you're, you mentioned having step siblings. So is it your mom that remarried?

Tiffany 13:49

No.

Flor Carabez 13:50

It was your dad? okay? What is what how? What does your dad think about you majoring in criminal justice?

Tiffany 14:00

Um he just likes the idea. He's like, Oh, she's gonna be like, have a good foot forward show. Like she has a good character, like a strong character. So I feel like that would benefit her because no se deja por nadien. Like he says.

Flor Carabez 14:15

Okay, so it sounds like he might be supportive of you then. Okay. Before today, had anyone asked you to share your story about being in college, choosing your major or anything like that.

Tiffany 14:31

No

Flor Carabez 14:33

Okay. So, I noticed you haven't specifically mentioned your Latinidad. You talked a little bit about being first generation. How does your Hispanic descendency impact your experience with choosing your major or if it did?

Tiffany 14:53

Well, I guess for Mexican culture there's a lot of like like there's a lot of stigmas on what women should do. Like, there's always going to like in every family, I feel like the guys are more favorable than the woman. They're always expected to, like, clean to cook to take care of the children to do this and blah, blah. And I don't know, I feel like sometimes it does affect it, because it's very hard to explain to them how college is because they think its just high school. It's easy. You just get a grade and you pass on and then. Um, Since I'm LGBT, my family doesn't know because they're not really supportive. So I don't know. It's very hard.

Flor Carabez 15:48

So you described the gender roles, machismo and stuff like that? Do you find that in your family?

Tiffany 15:57

I don't think so. Because my mom no se deja. She's like, very like, upfront woman. She's just like, no pues si tu tambien tienes manos, ve a cocinarle las tortillas. But I sometimes I do see that with my brother, the 15 year old like, he's like, Oh, can I go to movies, y lo deja. But when I used to ask why you want to go? And it's still hard to like, have sort of like, can I go out? ay tu sabras.

Flor Carabez 16:32

Are they? Are they pretty? laxed with your sister too?

Tiffany 16:39

Yeah, I feel like once they start growing, they're like softer with the younger ones. And I'm just like, okay, that's not fair.

Flor Carabez 16:51

So, do you know that NLU is a Hispanic Serving Institution? Have you heard anything about that at all?

Tiffany 17:26

I know they're making like they made or like a group or something. And then they tried to like launch it and bring first students involved but I'm not sure.

Flor Carabez 17:38

So the Hispanic serving institution, the acronym is HSI. It's a designation. So designation is like a label, but there's money attached to it. So where this is all coming from is from the Department of Education. So the Department of Education is like in charge of all the schools. The HSI designation is given to colleges and universities that have at least 25% enrollment of full time undergraduate Hispanic students. So when they get this label, they get some sort of money that is supposed to help support the advancement of students. It's not specific to Hispanic students, but the university gets the money and then they can do what they need to do with it. So you didn't know about the designation? You know what it means now? Do you feel that the designation has impacted your experience here at all?

Tiffany 18:59

Can you put the question in a different format?

Flor Carabez 19:02

So let's say we didn't have the designation. Do you think that your experience would change?

Tiffany 19:12

maybe yes

Flor Carabez 19:14

how

Tiffany 19:16

I feel that we wouldn't have as many Latinos like we wouldn't be able to talk about what we're feeling like the experiences or like we wouldn't be able to find a better understanding of like, what it feels like or how it's different from other things that we have done. I feel like it will help us branch together better and it will like help us understand like the adequate steps that we need to take.

Flor Carabez 19:40

okay. Did your high school talk to you at all about how many Latinos we had at NLU?

Tiffany 19:48

No.

Flor Carabez 19:50

So what made you decide to come here?

Tiffany 19:52

Well, it wasn't my first option. I was gonna go away to Rhode Island.

Flor Carabez 20:02

that's far.

Tiffany 20:05

But it was too much tuition wise. And then the housing, I think tuition was like 17k. And then for housing was another like 16k. I was like, I don't have that much money.

Flor Carabez 20:17

Yeah.

Tiffany 20:17

And then I was investigating again. And I noticed that NLU is like, the most convenient from other colleges around here too,

Flor Carabez 20:28

like distance wise or

Tiffany 20:30

like money wise,

Flor Carabez 20:30

money wise, okay.

Tiffany 20:31

I mean, this is the same thing, I just take the train. And then I also like that, when I was looking into it, you guys had different groups, like organizations that helps like establish. I think one of them, the first ones I joined was the student advisory council. I just felt like, that was a really good step for students to understand better and be able to, like, express what they want to be changed. And I really liked that NLU wants to embrace everyone, and try to change different things in order to feel everyone welcome. Especially if they're like, first generations, minorities, etc.

Flor Carabez 21:13

When you were considering going to Rhode Island, what were you going to major in?

Tiffany 21:20

I wanted to do art,

Flor Carabez 21:22

you are all over. So you were ready to go if the money was right, you would have been in Rhode Island studying art. Okay, and what what was driving you to do that?

Tiffany 21:35

Well, I like drawing and I don't know. I thought it was like, a great way to express what you feel since sometimes. I have a hard time. Like, I feel like if I'm upset, you can maybe read me but other than that, I'm just by my own.

Flor Carabez 21:57

Okay. So if we would have had an art program, would you have majored in art?

Tiffany 22:05

If I had the chance? Yes. Or even if, even if it was a minor, I would like to have that.

Flor Carabez 22:12

So what would you say is your passion

Tiffany 22:17

For in general? like school wise life,

Flor Carabez 22:22

in general.

Tiffany 22:25

My passion.

Tiffany 22:28

I feel like I'm very caring. Like, even though sometimes I don't seem as I am, I am really caring about the people that I like, or like that I love and I'm also very persuasive on what I want. And I strive to like, get higher in life. And I think another pressure for me, it's like seeing the hard work that my mom did. Since I was little. I feel that that has pushed me to like strive in academically and strive to be a better person.

Flor Carabez 22:59

Okay. So doctor was an option, helping profession. Homicide Detective is your option right now that you're pursuing? Kind of a helping profession too, right? and then art was more of an expression. Okay. So then what made you choose? Because first you were you said Doctor, and then you were like eh, and then it was CJ and art? What made you decide to do CJ over art?

Tiffany 23:35

Okay, I'm a really big horror geek. I love horror. And I just like reading over cases and just finding like the clue or stuff like that. I just, I don't know, it's very interesting, like a very interesting subject. And I also feel that a lot of people don't like that job or aren't really sure about what it is. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 24:01

So would you say you're you've developed a passion because of the curiosity of okay, so you're still following something you're passionate about? Sounds good.

Flor Carabez 24:17

Do you feel like you're Latinidad that has influenced your decisions with your major, your major options, your academic major options?

Tiffany 24:28

I think yes. I think one of the reasons is, um, back then it was very taboo for a woman to have like a higher profession. It was mostly like you have to take care of the kids and clean the house. Then, I guess my mom was like the only one raising me out she was like a single parent. I guess she influenced me on like, not taking anything from anyone. And trying to like be the best that I can be so I think it did help me cuz I learned that if I set my mindset into it, I'll be able to obtain it. And I actually want to, I don't know, like, be like, Oh, she's like the first woman detective and a family or something like that.

Flor Carabez 25:13

So you want some validation from your family? Sounds good. With all the siblings that you have. Has there ever been any, like sibling rivalry or comparisons?

Tiffany 25:29

I don't feel like it because I feel like every single one of us is unique. And I think we all come together. But the second one, maybe I seen that. My step siblings, sometimes they don't like me, or they feel that I have everything handed, which is not true. I really work for what I have. And I

feel like they like get some type of feeling or like they just get mad over that. I'm in college or that they're, that's not the path that they want to take.

Flor Carabez 26:17

Have your parents whether biological or Step? Have they ever compared? Any of you to each other?

Tiffany 26:27

No, my mom doesn't like that. She says that that's like bringing hatred to another kid or like, telling them that they're not good enough. She always says that we all have our strengths and weaknesses and that we're all unique. And that's what makes us us. So there should be no comparison because no one's gonna be able to do like, let's say they're really good at building like, birdhouses, maybe the other kids not good at it. Maybe he's better at building Legos. Maybe he's not good at that. But they would try to help each other. I feel like that's something good that they have never like, made us feel less for if we're not good at it. She always like, if you can't do it. Try again. It's you're never gonna get it the first time. You just have to keep pushing yourself.

Flor Carabez 27:15

What about your biological dad?

Tiffany 27:19

I feel like maybe, but then he's like, Well, I don't know. At the end of the day, you guys are kids. So I feel like once you guys grow or like see how the world is maybe you guys will understand.

Flor Carabez 27:35

So he'll, he'll critique some things? And then he'll say, well, whatever. Okay, can you give me an example of like, when he did that?

Tiffany 27:46

I guess it comes with my stepbrother, since he's older than me. I guess one of the criticizes is that. Because he like goes from job to job to job. And then he's like, not good at it. But then when he comes over, he's like, Well was because you have to be smarter like the kids or esque, you're already too grown and you haven't done stuff like that. So I don't know. And then there are moments where I feel like my step sibling, like telling me like, oh, well, I don't know how you do it for school, school is just easy. Everyone should do that. And I was like, Well, you're not me. Because I remember one time I was tired, like from like, finals and like other school activities that I do and stuff. And then he's like, Well, I don't know how you're tired. It was just school. And I was like, well, it's not the same. I'd be waking up like at six to catch the train

because my train drags an hour. And you're telling me that is the same when you've been sleeping till two in the morning because you're playing a video game. I think it's very different.

Flor Carabez 28:44

So sounds like he minimizes your experience. Do either your step parent, do you have one stepparent or two?

Tiffany 28:55

One

Flor Carabez 28:56

does your step parent or either of your biological parents minimize your experience?

Tiffany 29:03

I feel like my parent, um, sometimes they say that I'm not ready for the world. Or like, okay, how do I say this, when they say that their kids are more smarter than me, or that they have better things but my mom always says that, umm, siempre vas a querer al nino... si son tus hijos los vas a querer mas. Vas a decir que son los mas bonitos o los mas listos. Pero cuando no son aveces se

enojan porque ellos no hacen lo que hacen ustedes. Um, but being honest, I think I already got used to that chaos on my family. So I just like, do me.

Flor Carabez 29:43

So your dad's the one that remarried?

Tiffany 29:46

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 29:46

Okay,

Tiffany 29:47

well, he's going on that process.

Flor Carabez 29:49

So you have a stepmom I'm guessing. So it's, it's your dad's the one that is has someone else

Tiffany 30:00

Okay, well this is weird. This confusing my two stepsisters, I guess it's from. Okay, so first my dad was married with the mother of my stepbrother the first one and then I guess they broke off or whatever. And then he went with other girls. So I don't know. I don't know what you want to call it our families....

Flor Carabez 30:20

Okay, gotcha. So he's got, he's got illegitimate children. Okay, that makes sense.

Tiffany 30:26

Yeah I don't know what you want to call them. So like half brother half sister.

Flor Carabez 30:30

Yeah, I feel you. Okay. So your mom and dad. They're not together

Tiffany 30:36

Um my dad's not in the picture since I was born.

Flor Carabez 30:40

Okay. So when you've been referring to your dad, is that your stepdad? Oh, okay. Now it makes sense. It makes total sense. Now got it? Okay, that makes a lot of sense.

Tiffany 30:56

Like once you get to know them it's worse.

Flor Carabez 30:59

I'm like the pieces are coming together now. So we talked a little bit touched a little bit about the machismo. In our culture, the police force hasn't been the healthiest relationship. Right? So how does that make you feel with going into that profession as a Latina?

Tiffany 31:24

Well, I guess at first, I'll probably receive hate. Because there's always like, I feel that sometimes people just see one perspective, but they don't see all the whole, like the whole interaction, which I feel which causes like the hatred towards us. And I don't know, I just want to like, if I can be able to change that, you know.

Flor Carabez 31:47

So if you could go back in time, and do college all over again. Well, one, would you do college all over again?

Tiffany 31:58

It's fun, but it's stressful. But I feel like I would.

Flor Carabez 32:04

And would you study the same thing?

Tiffany 32:07

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 32:08

Okay. So is there? What essential items do you want people to take away from your experience?

Tiffany 32:26

I guess it would be that don't ever give up for what you're strivingg. Like, I know, it's hard sometimes being a first generation minority. If you're gay, whatever. Sometimes I feel that that stresses us out. And like, makes us think if we're like adequate, or if we're able to push forward, I just feel that as long as we keep our heads up, and we try to like, push yourself or try to do it just because we like that passion. I feel that it would help us. Guess another key is, don't let your family stop you. If I know some people be like, but it's your family? Yes, I know. They're your family. And I know, they sometimes say stuff because they think it's the right thing. But I'll just say that. Don't let them influence you. Like, if that's you, that's what you should be. You shouldn't like stop yourself or change yourself just to appease everyone. Because I know I did that. And it didn't really like, benefit me. It just like drained me. And I don't know. I feel like if they love me for who I am, they'll support me. But if they can't, then you need to move on.

Flor Carabez 33:48

Facts. What haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Tiffany 33:53

Mmm. I'm not sure.

Flor Carabez 34:02

So there was a question that came up in another interview, where they wanted me to ask what have you learned in your college experience?

Tiffany 34:19

I think what I have learned is, I'm not afraid to take a challenge. Like yes, maybe at the beginning. It's a little bit like terrified because you don't know anyone. And I still don't know anyone like in my third year that much. But I think of it just like pushing myself and finding new ways I'm able to connect with other students or finding like, different organizations where I feel that I strive in I feel that that's what makes me feel like welcome. And then another one is that maybe don't like criticize, like if you're LGBT. I feel like that helps me.

Flor Carabez 35:01

being criticized?

Tiffany 35:04

Just like me, I mean, I never seen anyone be criticized enough. If there are I don't take that.

Flor Carabez 35:14

Okay. Do you feel like representation has influenced your decision with your career or your major at all?

Tiffany 35:31

Maybe.

Flor Carabez 35:32

How?

Tiffany 35:33

I feel like it's just like my status. Like, how I want people to view me like

Tiffany 35:38

like they say a quarter always has two sides to the coin. So I feel like if people hear that other stuff from you that you don't get to experience. Like, let's say someone says that it was she's lazy, or she's not on time, or she's rude. But you're the opposite of that. They'll never be able to find out who you are. Unless you push yourself or you push yourself through that door.

Flor Carabez 36:11

Do you feel like you have so you're describing resilience a little bit? Do you feel like you've had to have more resilience? Because you're Latina? And you chose this major?

Tiffany 36:27

I think I do. Because I feel like our minority is very criticized or they're always saying Oh, es que la mujer se deja por todo. Or oh, es que la mujer le tiene miedo a ensuciarse or stuff like that. And I feel that in this generation, they're viewed as less. Like I know, we have moved from like voting and stuff like that we have done so much more. But at the same time, I don't want people to like, represent me with the generation as much, you know, what I'm trying to understand?

Flor Carabez 37:08

So we've moved a little bit, we've had some movement with freedom as women. And in the Latino community, there's there's sayings or like these ideologies where women have to be submissive, they don't like to get dirty, they need to be at home. And it sounds like what you're trying to say is, uh, you don't want to fall into those ideologies. Okay. So do you feel like you have some pressure because you're, what you're trying to do is break those barriers.

Tiffany 37:50

I feel like when people see me what I'm working for, I always get questioned a lot, especially when it comes to my grades. They somehow seem as I don't know, if they think I'm dumb, or like, not smart, or like, I don't know, I just notice some guys, especially like some kids around the school, that are like, well, you don't look like that type of person who have straight A's.

Flor Carabez 38:18

So they're expecting for you to be not academically savvy.

Tiffany 38:23

Yeah. And they don't know me that much. Like they just see me and they're like, you don't look that smart.

Flor Carabez 38:28

Are they Latinos?

Tiffany 38:30

No, African American.

Flor Carabez 38:31

Okay. So do you feel like it's because of that or is it because you're a girl?

Tiffany 38:36

I feel like it's because I'm a girl.

Flor Carabez 38:38

Okay. Do you get that same reaction from any male or female identifying folks in your family?

Tiffany 38:51

No, not really. They always think I'm smart.

Flor Carabez 38:54

Okay.

Tiffany 38:55

They're like, okay, look at the Brainiac.

Flor Carabez 39:07

Does your family show interest in what you're studying? Or like? Do they ask you questions about anything related to your major or your career?

Tiffany 39:18

My brother's tried asking me questions, but they just look at my work. And they're like, I don't understand it it's too much writing. I'll just let you be. um, and my mom is just like, she's worried about the first steps but I feel like they don't ask me anything because they're like, well, she gots this she almost done she's good. And I don't know. I feel like sometimes it's very hard to explain to them like, I need you guys to be silenced. I needed to be silenced or get out the house. 'Cause then they're like, but it's not that hard. It's just writing. No, it's not just writing.

Flor Carabez 39:55

So do you feel like...They are supporting you in a way that they know how?

Tiffany 40:04

Yeah. I think, since I'm the first generation, they don't really know how to approach it or like, what to ask. So they're just like, have you eaten anything? Like, they're like, have you eaten? Have you slept? Have you? Do you need a break? Do you want to play game? I think that's like their way of like, we're here for you if you need anything,

Flor Carabez 40:24

okay,

Flor Carabez 40:25

Um, in other interviews, there's been mention of the extended family like las tias or los tios, you rolled your eyes, and them comparing their kids like comparing there's a comparison of los primos almost like a competition.

Tiffany 40:25

type of way.

Tiffany 40:48

Who's the best one who's gonna go? Who's gonna get more money you or them?

Flor Carabez 40:52

So does that resonates with you?

Tiffany 40:54

Um, well, my uncle, not really, he's always been supportive of me and my cousin. He's like, Go, if you ever need help ask her or stuff like that.

Flor Carabez 41:03

Ask her Don't ask me.

Tiffany 41:06

We could talk about movies. But, I don't know, anything else. My aunt, we used to be close, but she sort of moved a lot. So now like our connection is somewhat dismissed. Um, also, since my cousin might like my tias, knows that I'm gay. She sort of doesn't like that. So like, no one in my family knows. Well that's not my cousin. Like the one from my uncle. His daughter is weird. What I feel like sometimes, they don't mean to, but they're like, oh, it's because they already went like a real estate or they're like, an a top engineering school and stuff like that. And I'm just like, Okay, what does that got to do with me? I'm talking about you something else and changing the topic.

Flor Carabez 41:51

So it sounds like they indirectly compare. Do you feel like the like your family in general focuses more on your sexuality, and less on your school endeavors?

Tiffany 42:07

Well, I'm not allowed to date.

Flor Carabez 42:13

Is it because they know that you're gay? Or is it just

Tiffany 42:16

in general. No, they're against that.

Flor Carabez 42:19

Okay. So why don't they allow you to date?

Tiffany 42:21

Um, because my mom thinks it's a big distraction. And I think like, since she got pregnant at a young age. She doesn't want that, like, thing to happen to me, I guess.

Flor Carabez 42:31

Okay, so in general, since they don't know,

Tiffany 42:34

yeah, my stepdad just like, he doesn't really care. But man, I feel like, like, I don't know, it's hard,

Flor Carabez 42:46

So they're, the way that they are, quote, unquote, supporting you is by restricting you of specific lifestyles, to make sure that in their eyes that you're on track to graduate that you're not distracted with other things. Okay. Do you feel like that adds a level of pressure?

Tiffany 43:10

I does. Cuz I mean, I guess like, if they do find out or if they figure it out, it could either be good or go bad. You know, there's not like, Well, I wouldn't like that. But I guess you know, like, we love you or, like, it just feels pressure because I guess it can lead into arguments. And then this is like, life in general. It's hard. Just trying to maintain afloat and trying to like do stuff. It's hard.

And I guess if they knew they'd be like, Oh, you're gonna distracted and blah blah bla. and like a eso no te mandamos. and you're supposed to do a better thing for us. Por eso venimos aqui que para like un better futuro, y no haces caso, y blah blah blah. So I just feel like there's like pros and cons.

Flor Carabez 44:03

And what they're saying it sounds like the you have the entire family, the entire family's potential on your shoulders with this degree. And with so when we're looking at identity, you now have youre a Latina woman, gay woman. How does that? Did that influence or impact your decision with your major at all? Or do you feel like it will?

Tiffany 44:44

I feel like maybe, maybe, yes, maybe no. They'll maybe yes. Maybe they'll, since I'm that, they'll probably like be, like, she probably won't do a good job or like, they'll criticize. But sometimes I feel like no cuz that'll just build me better. If I could go through other stuff and then I know I could push myself to be better. And sometimes I just like proving people wrong.

Flor Carabez 45:11

So it sounds like your fuel is the resilience that you have to have in all of these aspects of your life with all of your identities combined. Okay. Do you have any questions for me?

Tiffany 45:29

How was it for you? Like, your first experience?

Flor Carabez 45:33

With

Tiffany 45:35

School, everything?

Flor Carabez 45:36

Oh, girl? Um, so the reaction I get from the students here, I it always humbles me, because I have to remind myself that no one knows what you go through. Right? So like, when you I don't know if you're thinking about grad school at all. But when you start your job, they're not going to know anything. All they're going to know is your transcripts, whatever your transcript shows, if you end up having to submit that and well your appearance, como llegas, right? So I it took me

six years to get my undergrad, I started off. And after my freshman year, I was academically dismissed. I SAPed out. First generation of Guatemalan and Mexican my dad was born in Mexico, my mom was born in Guatemala My dad only finished his freshman year of high school, my mom had a sixth grade education at the time. So I am the oldest of three. So it's four of us total, I have an illegitimate sister in Mexico, and I have two older siblings that were from my mom's relationship in Guatemala. I've never met my sister in person, the one in Guatemala and my brother, he came to this country when he was I think, like 18, or 19, or something. So at that age, I, he was already that age when I got to know him, but I didn't know of either of them. Growing up. I don't even remember how old I was. I was probably like, five or something. But in either case, high school, I was decent, elementary school. I was really good up until third grade, third grade through eighth grade was trash. High school, I was okay. And then college, I did terrible. I experienced severe depression. But I was undiagnosed because you don't go to therapy, you know. My parents were having a lot of problems because of my dad's daughter that lives in Mexico. And they had me mediating that entire problem. So I would get phone calls from my mom, like, Habla con tu Padre or whatever. Yeah. So breakup, depression, stress, failing classes. So I had all these things happening at the same time. And I was academically dismissed. That those three years after that were terrible. I went to Daley in the south side to get my associate's degree, I leaned on my who's now my mentor. From the Upward Bound program, I was in high school because at the time Facebook had just started. So it was using it like a diary. I was like, I got kicked out, I don't know what to do. And she had sent me a message, basically telling me like, how to go about transferring, getting my associates and stuff like that. went through all that finished, but got my Associates, my mom got diagnosed with breast cancer. That semester, I was finishing with my Associates, and I was supposed to go to NIU. And at that time, I didn't know

how to support her, but I wanted to so I told her that I was gonna take a break from school and I was gonna stay home to help her or help them with at least one of those be less, you know, and she was like, No mija, I want you to go get your degree. She's like, if anything that's going to help me. So I'm like, alright. I started with being a Biosciences major, because I wanted to be a pediatrician. And I wanted to be a pediatrician because I wanted to help kids, kids that were getting abused. I wanted to be the first advocate for them, but biology was just not my forte. When I went back, I was still majoring in that and I was failing again, and I was like, No girl. You are not about to get kicked out again. So my sister that's a younger than me had actually told me about got this other program that NIU had. Because I was in DeKalb. And she told me that it was a Community Leadership and Civic Engagement major. So she's like, you've been in all these organizations since high school, you facilitate workshops like this is, this is what you do already. So I decided to switch my major because I'm like, I can't fail like I need a degree period. So I switched, and that was probably the best decision I ever did. So I graduated from undergrad in 2014. I graduated from high school in 2008. Right after that, I got my masters in 2016 took a break, and then I started my doctorate in 2020. Yeah, when the pandemic started. So, long story short, that's been my experience. Yeah. Do you have any other questions?

Tiffany 51:05

No.

Flor Carabez 51:07

Okay. So I'm gonna stop recording now.

Richie

Sat, Mar 25, 2023 12:42AM • 39:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, feel, conversations, helped, college, siblings, point, wanted, supporting, shared, knowing, therapist, surgeon, high school, mental health, told, hispanic, work, hispanic serving institution, doubted

SPEAKERS

Richie, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:01

All right recording. Alright, so thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study I'm conducting. I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor, you know this already, and I'm a doctoral candidate here at National Louis University. I'm one term away from graduation. The reason why I'm conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience, I feel and I've noticed that students go through different

things when it comes to switching or changing their major or choosing their major. The experience is different for everyone. And after reading through a lot of articles and blogs, I found that universities need a little more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to just share what they're going through. I'm hoping the results from the study will help elevate students stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is. And I thank you for your vulnerability and advance. For transparency, I'm going to go over how this whole thing's gonna play out. So to protect your identity, through the questionnaire, you chose Richie as your pseudonym. So this name will be used instead of your actual name so that no one can connect what you're sharing with you specifically. And hopefully, this will also push you to be as honest as possible about your experience. I have one central question that this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow up questions for clarity. I just want to make sure that I am documenting your experience in the way that you experienced it and not just by what I'm interpreting it to be. So I just want to make sure I'm doing your story justice. As I'm asking questions, take your time responding, feel free to ask me any questions. Although this will be more of you sharing consider this like a conversation. Like I'm trying to get to know you a little more. You might see me writing notes as you're sharing your story. And this is just for me to be able to note some questions that I might want to remember at that at the end, or at some point, I might be taking note of your body language. And it's just so that I can add more details to what I'm writing about when I'm writing it. But just know that I am giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I'm recording your verbal responses with my phone to analyze the answers later. Once I'm done with the entire project, I'll discard all of the voice recordings. And

finally, if you want a copy of the results, I can email them to you just make sure that you email me with your request. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Richie 02:52

No, I do not.

Flor Carabez 02:53

Alright, cool. So Richie, how far are you in your undergraduate program?

Richie 02:59

I am four years in my undergrad. I am going to graduate this June. So I'm very excited about that.

Flor Carabez 03:06

Yes. All right. And what are you getting your degree in,

Richie 03:09

in psychology with a minor in criminal justice.

Flor Carabez 03:12

Nice.

Flor Carabez 03:13

So what made you decide in majoring in criminal justice or majoring in psychology,

Richie 03:19

I wanted to major in psychology because it was more so I kind of switched around a lot as when I was a child. So I wanted to be like a surgeon at one point or veterinarian. But then I started to realize, you know, going to therapy and one of the things that I went through as a as a as a young person kinda opened my eyes, like maybe I have more of a purpose and then also going through like going to church and stuff it really opened my eyes and also to see that I made an impact in people's lives. And it was it was really astonishing. And then knowing that it was like a mental impact. So from there, I finally decided on like I want to do something with mental health counseling, I want to be a therapist of some sort for young people. So that's where I decided to major in psychology.

Flor Carabez 04:14

So going back to the surgeon, how old were you when you're you were talking about becoming a surgeon?

Richie 04:22

I was about 10 years old i i believe. i just found the human anatomy very interesting. And I just felt like you know me being surgeon it would be really nice.

Flor Carabez 04:36

Did you have like toys or what prompted you to consider surgery or a surgeon as an occupation?

Richie 04:43

Well, what made me really consider that is moreso the... how can I say this?

Flor Carabez 04:48

You can say it in spanish too

Richie 04:51

Oh okay. No, but I think it was just more so like seeing just like how the body works and just like the different functions of it. So I just found that very interesting. It was just really, it was just really astonishing to me. And I also watched like a lot of medical shows, I guess. Okay, so it was. So those are like the main things.

Flor Carabez 05:10

Nice. So you had a little bit of exposure through television on what people can do with with the body specifically.

Richie 05:18

Yeah. And I also wanted to like help people in a way. So that would be the way to do something.

Flor Carabez 05:24

All right. So then 10 years old, you're talking about surgery, and then something starts happening. And you're like, I still want to help people. And you started considering therapist, was this because of your exposure to having therapy or having a therapist?

Richie 05:43

I will say, I will believe I will say yes, because that really opened my eyes because I was really depressed. And growing up in a Hispanic household, you know, the mental health isn't like very talked about that much, or I should say isn't taken very seriously. Now, especially during my time as well. And also with you know, like my mom not knowing about like, what disorder I have, I am diagnosed with ADHD. So a lot of the times I would get in trouble for not paying attention in class and stuff, which really weighed down on me and really made me depressed. And I also feel like I didn't make a lot of friends. So then that's when I fell down that road of I did, I did a lot of bad things. I wanted to be part of a gang I wanted to, you know, I wanted to hurt people. I wanted to hurt myself at one point. Almost followed through with, but I guess things happened for a reason. And things didn't go the way they were supposed to be at that time.

Flor Carabez 06:39

So with the wanting to gain membership in the gang life, what was pushing you to do that?

Richie 06:47

I just felt like I wasn't getting attention at home, I was just craving that attention. You know, I just wanted someone to, to love me, or to say like, they're my family or to call somebody my

family. I just felt like it was more so about, you know, having respect and having people who care about me, because my older brothers were always together. And my, my older sister, she was always doing her own stuff. And my parents were always arguing or doing other things. And I just felt like I was kind of shoved to the side. And also getting in trouble and saying, you know, just being told stuff like porque no puedes poner atencion? No jueges con tus manos. It was it was really, you know, it really hurt because it was like, I felt like something I couldn't control at that time.

Flor Carabez 07:33

So you're the youngest.

Richie 07:35

I'm the fourth youngest I'm the second youngest. So out of five. I'm the fourth youngest.

Flor Carabez 07:40

Okay. All right. So you're number four.

Richie 07:43

Yes.

Flor Carabez 07:43

Okay. Your youngest sibling? How old? Are they?

Richie 07:47

She is 17.

Flor Carabez 07:49

Okay,

Richie 07:50

she's, she's also in her senior year of high school. Right now.

Flor Carabez 07:53

Nice.

Flor Carabez 07:54

Do you feel like well, let me backtrack out of all the siblings, how many of them decided to go to college?

Richie 08:04

They actually all of them did at one point, but some of them couldn't continue because something happened, or, or, you know, due to financial issues, as well. so my brother, one of my brothers has an Associate's. so i He's, he's the first one to graduate. But I'm going to be the first one with a bachelor's in the family. So

Flor Carabez 08:25

congrats.

Richie 08:26

Thank you.

Flor Carabez 08:28

Well, with that being said, Do you feel like there's a sense of like sibling rivalry, or any friction within your relationship with your brothers and sisters, because you are going to be the first one with a bachelor's?

Richie 08:49

I will say possibly, because my brothers could have, well, all of my siblings could have done it, but I felt like you know, something kind of blocked them. And I felt like, I also felt I also felt scared at one point that I wasn't going to graduate. But I feel like there is a kind of little bit of hate. Because, you know, I'm really excited about graduating. So you know, maybe I overshare sometimes that I'm going to graduate. I'm gonna be the first one in the bachelors, or the first one with a bachelor's in the family. So I just feel like it's really exciting to to express that because it's, it's, it's really a big accomplishment for myself. Because I was doubted a lot in high school, and even sometimes in college and elementary,

Flor Carabez 09:34

who was doubting you?

Richie 09:36

I will mostly say when I was in elementary it would be teachers. I think my my parents started doubting me at one point because of how I wasn't paying attention in class and stuff. And my siblings too, because I was really slow with math. That was why, well I still kind of am a little bit slow with math because math isn't my strong suit, but going forward I think in high school, my teachers as well, some of the people, I have met some of my peers. My parents started believing me a little bit more. But my older brother was the one who doubted me the most in finishing. And then when it came to when I actually became a college student, I felt like people started doubting me less and less, but it would be the people I socalled friends at one point. And they said that I wouldn't be able to finish college cause it, because I told them I was a special education student in high school. And from the from there then they insinuated by, I guess they were trying to tell me but like not tell me directly. But they told me I wasn't going to graduate college because of my condition.

Flor Carabez 10:52

And now you're going to rub it in their face.

Richie 10:54

Yeah, I am.

Flor Carabez 10:56

Did your parents ever compare your siblings with you? Or vice versa? Was there any comparison?

Richie 11:03

I feel like yes, I feel like, especially with like one of my older brothers. He was, he was pretty, he was one of the smartest in the family. And so I was, I guess, since I couldn't like pay attention. It was hard for me to pay attention. It was kind of, I also tend to process I guess, information a bit more slower than others. So it was really hard to also to kind of navigate through it. It was really hard to to be my own person. It was always like be like your brother, be like your brother porque no eres como to hermano? It was, you know, it really hurt because I wanted to be my own person. I wanted to be someone to be like, someone to look up to me. Because nobody looked up to me, not even my little sister at one point. So I just felt like I was really shoved to the side. And I was always, you know, looked down upon and I guess always kind of insulted in some way.

Flor Carabez 12:00

What now? Is this the brother that has the associates?

Richie 12:03

Yes.

Flor Carabez 12:04

Okay. So was it because he had an associates that they would compare you to him?

Richie 12:10

I just felt like it was his overall grades. It was moreso during high school and elementary, because he had better grades than I did. He had like A's and B's and all I had was like C's B's and sometimes D's. And it was always, it was always hard for me to kind of, you know, be like, Oh, I got C's, it's an accomplishment. My mom always told me that I wasn't doing enough in my classrooms.

Flor Carabez 12:37

So in your case, you had an older sibling that had navigated some of the college experience before you. So you're, you're both still considered first gen for what I'm defining as first generation. Did your older brother support you in your college navigation at all?

Richie 13:00

He did.

Richie 13:01

He was very he was one of the supportive I will say he was very supportive of me and going to college. And making sure I chose the right one. And you know, kind of helping me with like, what the FAFSA stuff is and trying to just try to like find a job as well to work during school as well. And kinda like look at what what the finances are just kind of like what to expect. And like the college, you know, I went to university and he went to City College. So he told me he I might I might just have to be ready for whatever comes.

Flor Carabez 13:37

Okay, so he helped you with FAFSA stuff, choosing the college, was there anything else he helped you with?

Richie 13:44

I think also with it was also like supporting me, you know, making sure that I would I would continue on and just keep going and keep driving. Because he told me that I have I have a drive like never before like even even if I have some barricades or some some things that blocked me. I still do my best to work my way around it. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 14:12

So you mentioned work. Are you working right now?

Richie 14:16

Yes, I am.

Flor Carabez 14:17

Have you worked here all four years?

Richie 14:19

Not my four years. I started. I started a maid sophomore year during the winter term.

Flor Carabez 14:24

How many hours a week? Do you work?

Richie 14:28

20

Flor Carabez 14:28

20. And you've been full time?

Richie 14:31

Part time, I work for the school?

Flor Carabez 14:33

No, but school wise.

Richie 14:35

Yeah,

Flor Carabez 14:35

You've had full time classes?

Richie 14:37

Yes.

Flor Carabez 14:38

Okay. Okay, cool. So let's backtrack to the point where you're thinking about what schools you're gonna go to. You're at the point in high school where you're like the conversation started, alright, like, what are you going to do once you're done with us? Can you paint the picture for me? Well, what were the conversations like? Did you have to go to any programs? Did you have a go to person or like what was what was that whole point in time looking like?

Richie 15:11

it was, it was really scary. I feel like it's an experience for everybody. I feel like it was really scary for me because how, how much pressure there was in how many schools I've tried to apply, and how many how many of them I was declined from, I think I applied to seven schools, I was declined from four of them. And so it was really it was kind of really, it was really hurtful as well, it was emotionally draining. Knowing that some schools didn't want me because of my SAT scores or of my grades. It was it was really hard to kind of unfathom or break down what

happened. The person I would go to was my school counselor, she helped me with trying to see what other options I could do, or like what I wanted to do, I guess, a career. And I kind of told her what I wanted to do. So she had an idea, like what schools have, what options or what schools have, what type of programs. So she was really, she was really big with like supporting me, was trying to trying to help me navigate through the gateways and stuff. So I felt like it she was one of the main helpful tools. And the conversation of like, what I wanted to do, I already knew, what I wanted to do it was just like, where I wanted to go and achieve my goal, or have the have the supporters that helped me with. So it was just really it was kind of hard to see like what school was best for me and what fitted my criteria.

Flor Carabez 16:44

What did that, so I don't know if what, but did do you have conversations about your, your occupational goals with your family at all?

Richie 16:58

Not really, like occupational goals, like how?

Flor Carabez 17:02

like what you wanted, like your career goals, like what you wanted to do for work, because you started with surgery. And then you switched to therapy. Did you, were, were you having any of these conversations with your family?

Richie 17:15

Yeah, I was. I did have these conversations with them.

Flor Carabez 17:18

So what did what did those conversations look like?

Richie 17:21

So I mean, I would tell my mom, like in the beginning, I guess she was she was kind of against it.

Flor Carabez 17:26

Against which one?

Richie 17:27

against trying. Well, well, first, she was against the very she was very against me doing being a surgeon, because she told me that if I can't focus on, like, if I can't focus on my classes, how am I going to in the surgery room. And she was a little skeptical about me becoming a therapist. But as she saw, I really enjoyed learning about, you know, psychology and stuff. And she really seen like how excited I was for for the school and she seen how, how much I have improved as well. She started to she supported me a lot more as the years went by.

Flor Carabez 18:04

Cool. So what does her support look like, now?

Richie 18:09

She's just really excited. She just wants me to, she wants what's the what's best for me. So she's, you know, she's asking like questions, like, oh make sure you know, they have a good hiring demand for people with this degree, because she has been told by one of my cousins that she does that they graduated with a degree and they didn't do anything. And I'm guessing that kind of scared her in a way thinking that I wasn't going to be able to find a job with my degree. So it was important for me to, to reassure her about these things, and I just kept telling her that, you know, I'll find something, you know, I have people who are gonna support me and, and everything will

be okay, so I just had, I had to kind of like, reassure her a lot that what I was doing is what I wanted to do, and eventually I would get what I wanted.

Flor Carabez 18:56

So you've talked a lot about your mom, do you have another parent that is involved?

Richie 19:03

Not really. I mean, I would have this conversation, somewhat with my dad, but you know, he was never as present as I would want him to be. Like, I love him. He's a great person. But you know, sometimes the choices he makes, I don't really don't love them that much. But, you know, overall, he is a good supporter. He is supporting I know he's supporting me, but you know, he just he's just not showing me as I would want him to.

Flor Carabez 19:28

What does his support look like?

Richie 19:31

He just keeps telling me like, you know, if I'm still in school and how well I'm doing and that if I every need anything from him, he could, I can let him know. And you know, I think that's about it.

Flor Carabez 19:47

It sounds like your your parents aren't together.

Richie 19:52

It's a very complicated relationship between them. So it's it's very, it's very complicated. So I really can't like define it. What type of relationship they have. It's really, well, even to this day, it's confusing for me. So, yeah, I can't figure it out.

Flor Carabez 20:06

Is he present? Like physically in your house?

Richie 20:09

Yeah, yes.

Flor Carabez 20:10

Okay, so it sounds like maybe you don't have a lot of these conversations, then.

Richie 20:17

Yeah, cuz he's there in the house a lot of the times, but he's just not there, like, majority of the day, like majority of the day he'll be out and then he'll just come at night and just go to sleep.

Flor Carabez 20:27

Pretty much work.

Richie 20:29

Mmm I, think so.

Flor Carabez 20:30

Okay,

Richie 20:31

I hope so.

Flor Carabez 20:32

How does it make you feel? The way that your parents are individually supporting you? How does it make you feel?

Richie 20:42

It doesn't make me feel that well, because, you know, I've always seen families as together and everyone supporting each other. Like, as the mother as a father, I wish, I wish, I would see more of a good example of them of like, Oh, what a relationship should look like. But I'm at least glad I have a little bit of understanding to see that, you know, things don't work don't work out all the time. So it's important to, I guess, kind of navigate through it, it was really hard. And it's still kind of is, but you know, it's I guess it's just something that happens.

Flor Carabez 21:19

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 21:21

So, psychology, you, you still ended up doing a helping profession, that's why you wanted to be in surgery. Your your counselor was helping you navigate applications and stuff. So you knew you wanted to be a therapist, how in depth were those conversations about, I guess, like getting from high school to being a therapist,

Richie 21:49

It was a lot because I know, I did research on my own knowing that I had to, how do I say, I had to, I had to go back to graduate school. So then I had to look a little bit more, more further ahead, which kind of stressed me out because I was looking at graduate schools, but I was told just take it one step at a time, because I don't want to stress myself too much. And I feel like that was one of the biggest things was like, I really want to get to my end goal without like, you know, like, calming down and making sure I take the right steps and the right path first. So with that, I just kind of learned how to take it one step at a time and to become a therapist, or counselor, you know, it's going to take time, so then I have to be patient with that process.

Flor Carabez 22:39

At any point since you started with your, your major, did you think about switching?

Richie 22:48

I did not think about switching, actually. It was it was something like I was really dedicated myself to it was just really something I was very passionate about.

Flor Carabez 22:57

Sounds good. Okay, so going back to your Latinidad, you you mentioned earlier being Hispanic and how sometimes because of the culture and the dynamics that come with it, it can make the college going experience or even choosing your major, a little different. What pieces do you feel like, from your Latinidad, what pieces influenced your experience with choosing your major?

Richie 23:32

I just feel like I related to a lot of other of my peers and a lot of my old friends, because they were also Hispanic and they also struggle with like anxiety, depression and stuff like that. And then being part of also a Hispanic household. They were also kind of like shoved to the side or just told oh just stop, you know, you're just over exaggerating, or stop acting like that, why you do that. I just feel like it was really it was it really amazed me to see like how, how much the Hispanic culture, especially the Mexican culture, how, you know, how it's not normalized to talk about, like mental health within the household. And I realized that because I went through it and

going through the depression I did and, and the downfalls that I I've been through, you know, it wasn't very, it was very, it was very hard. And that's when it opened my eyes. And it's like, well, that, you know, I want to hopefully be an advocate on day to, to the mental health of the Hispanic community.

Flor Carabez 24:35

So the mental health taboo within the Latino community is kind of what inspired you even more?

Richie 24:43

Yes.

Flor Carabez 24:45

Nice. So did you know that NLU is a Hispanic Serving Institution?

Richie 24:54

I did not know that, to be honest, no.

Flor Carabez 24:56

Do you know what do you know what Hispanic serving institution is?

Richie 25:00

I'm not aware of it.

Flor Carabez 25:01

Okay. So you might at some point hear of like HSI as a thing. So the Hispanic serving institution, the acronym is an HSI. It's a designation. So it's a label that the Department of Ed gives to colleges and universities that have at least 25% full time undergraduate enrollment that are Latinos or Hispanic. So aside from getting that designation, they also get funding for whatever the university needs. So the universities and the colleges have to renew that status every year for them to continue getting that funding. So I believe we received ours in 2016. And we've been able to renew it every year since. Now that you know, what it is, do you feel like it's impacted your experience at all here?

Richie 26:03

I don't think so. But like, at the same time, it's good to see that, you know, that, that we're being helped in a way, you know, everyone's being helped in the individual individualized way. And I'm just glad that I got the resources that I got from here. So it's just really nice to see that, you know, we're being taken a little bit more seriously now, I can say. So it's really nice to see that, and, you know, to say that, that we're being helped, and that we're being supported, you know, from people who might not even know, but people believe in us. And that's what I find very amazing.

Flor Carabez 26:40

Do you feel like it impacts your major experience at all?

Richie 26:45

I feel like I have, I feel like I have more of a purpose now to keep going and to for sure, further my education in this, so one day, I hope someone could look back at me and be like, you know, he's a role model. And he helped me get through the hard times, just like someone else helped me.

Flor Carabez 27:03

That's beautiful.

Flor Carabez 27:08

Um, before today, had anyone asked you to share your story?

Richie 27:16

I have, yeah, I have shared my stories with a couple of people. I've also shared in the church that I volunteered in as well, to kind of also get that message out that you know, I struggled to the point. And I also I struggled with a lot of mental health. And with decision making as well. And with knowing what path was best for me, and I just kind of want to normalize, it's okay to mess up, you know, without missing up, we won't know what is truly right for us. So I've just felt like, that was just like, the whole thing that I that I've done in that I wish to continue to do.

Flor Carabez 27:54

So at what point did you pivot from thinking about joining a gang to being more focused on your academics and helping people and, and even, it sounds like your relationship with the church?

Richie 28:11

I feel like, you know, just seeing the things that they would do, and the things that they would tell me to do. It was really tragic. It just, it just wasn't for me, but you know, to have some sort of respect, or to have some sort of, like attention or some sort of family. It was really, it was really hard for me because, you know, we did a lot of bad things like back then when I was a child, I did a lot of horrible things, you know, attack random people, you know, I steal from them in a way and it was just, it's just, people will look at me and see that, that was not me. And that was not that type of person. But no, those choices, you know, I can't undo them. And I want to make it up to maybe not them directly, but like my community. And I guess you know, going to church really opened my eyes about how how God has given me another chance and almost fought almost you know, committing suicide at one point. And to see that I got that second chance and to make things right, not just for myself, but for others. And I just felt like you know, that was just a big message that I got, I just felt like you know, I can I can do something if I can help people and make them realize and see that it's okay to mess up and it's okay to have regret then that, that is what I wanted to do.

Flor Carabez 29:36

Do you feel like your your commitment to the church aligns with your major?

Richie 29:46

I would say so. Yes. Because sometimes it's really important to see that you know, people you know, it's good to see the different types of, how do I say it, options that people have with coping with mental health. One of my aims was, you know, praying and, you know, asking God, like, What is my purpose, and I just feel like, you know, people just do everything their own ways, and, excuse me, but it was, it was, was really, it was really good to open my eyes to that, because then it was really, it's just what helped me get through the hard times. And I feel like it'll help other people get through the hard times just kind of like giving them like, here's these options, you know, you don't have you don't have to like either of them. But you know, it's just good to always have them out there.

Flor Carabez 30:38

What essential items do you want folks to take away from the experience that you've shared today?

Richie 30:46

Be be open minded, you know, I was very closed minded at one point, and I just feel like, you know, it's kind of like, understanding other people and just seeing where they come from, it really helped me understand people, and especially with the profession I want to go to into, it takes a lot of, you know, being open minded, even though you and I may not agree with everything that they might say, you know, it's, it's important still to, you know, disagree with

them, but like, not let it get to you. But to both sides to get it, let it get to the emotions, because they let that happen a lot. And it really kind of, like deteriorate some of my friendships, but sometimes, you know, it's just okay. Like, it's, it's, it's, it's okay to disagree.

Flor Carabez 31:30

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 31:33

Earlier, you mentioned that your cousin had told your mom, that they had a hard time finding a job after they graduated. Some participants have shared that, there's comparisons sometimes amongst the primos or primas, does that resonate with you as well?

Richie 31:52

Yeah., I was also told that. Because they had other jobs. I don't know what other type of jobs. But like, there were, some of them were nurses, some of them were. Some of them were going to school at that point. And I guess I told my mom that I want to become a therapist, and she was like, there's not a lot of people out, there might not be a lot of people hiring for that. So just just make sure you're careful with like, what you choose. But, you know, kind of, I was always compared, like, you see, like your cousin, your cousin got his degree, but hasn't done anything

with it. So it's like, why do you want something that might not be out there? You know, that was also you maybe maybe she was like, Maybe you should do something else, like be a nurse assistant, or be maybe a doctor if you can. Because those people, they still help people, but it never really stuck with me. I wanted to help someone, someone like with their mental health. So that was kinda like they just compare me like, oh, you can help people another way, or see what happened to your cousin, you know, you don't want to have a degree and then not find a job afterwards.

Flor Carabez 32:57

So your mom's big biggest concern is accessibility to work.

Richie 33:08

Yeah, I feel like I felt like that was her biggest thing was like the hiring demand of what what my degree can can give me.

Flor Carabez 33:18

Other participants, and even myself, as a first gen Latina have felt a immense pressure from the family, like the success of the community and the family is on us because we're the ones getting this degree. Does that resonate with you at all?

Richie 33:42

I feel like it does. You know, I felt like I felt the pressure maybe a little bit differently, because instead of focusing on, on my family's well being she was more focused on what our reputation will look like. So it was really hard to kind of navigate to that. And I feel like that's why I fell down with my mental health struggles because my mom was more so focused on me wanting to succeed and not making sure I was emotionally well, and it was it was really hard to navigate through that but you know, I feel like we do have high expectations of like finishing. I wasn't expected that much to to have like a good, like to have good grades or anything because I was kinda like failing. So my mom was just saying like, as long as I passed, I guess or as long as I got through the year, then that that would that would matter.

Flor Carabez 34:36

So has she asked you since you started college, about your grades, your classes or anything?

Richie 34:41

she has, and I have told her that how I'm doing.

Flor Carabez 34:45

So what is her reaction?

Richie 34:47

She's really like, I mean, it opens everyone's eyes and my family because I'm going from like having CS B's. And now I have been having a lot of good grades. I've been having straight A's at some points. And I've been having, you know, I've been having good grades overall. So I just feel like, you know, I have improved overall like, like tremendously. And to see that, you know, people in my family, my siblings, they just really, it amazes them, and it surprises them as well. Because knowing that I have this disorder and to see that I succeeded. It's really, like, how do he do that? Or it's like, it's kind of, it's kind of hard for them to process it in a way.

Flor Carabez 35:31

How does it make you feel?

Richie 35:32

Makes me feel great. It makes me feel like cuz in the beginning, you know, when I joined wrestling, my sophomore year, people doubted me a lot, because I was kind of skinny. But I

follow through. Through my sophomore year, all the way through my senior year I finished. And then that's where more of my thrived where I just love people who doubt me. Because then when I actually complete it, I get to, you know, I get to say, I did it,

Flor Carabez 35:45

And you get the bragging rights.

Richie 35:55

Yeah, I get to brag as much as I want. And just be like, you know, when I get my own house, when I get everything, you know, you guys are invited to come in. And just to show how much I have succeeded, and I just wish to succeed even more in the future.

Flor Carabez 36:12

What haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Richie 36:17

Oh, that's a good question. I feel like... I feel like how determined I was how, how much? Like how much it took me to finally be like, Okay, I have to, I have to thrive, I have the energy, I have

the will to go through it. I just feel like I had a lot of I have a lot of people who doubted me and it kind of hit me in a way. But at the same time, you know, I was also told that like, Why? Why are you going to give in to the people who are doubting you? Because then that's proving them right. You want to prove them wrong.

Flor Carabez 36:55

Who told you that?

Richie 36:57

My coach did actually. He he told me because I was I was kind of struggling in the beginning with like everything, like the partying and stuff. But then as soon as like he told me why do I want people to doubt me and let them win, I guess that kind of that kind of like, finally gave me the spark to, not just like in in my sport, but just like in general. Like in my academics. It really gave me more of a purpose to like, you know, here's where I started, go out there and prove people. And I did and I did pretty good in the sport as well. And I just felt like you know, just with that I feel like I have a lot of thrive. And I have a lot of energy. And just like when I want to dedicate myself to something I feel like I can always go through it and I can always just stick to it and accomplish it. It might it might not be as fast as everyone else. But I finish the race. So, that's all that matters to me.

Flor Carabez 37:55

So it sounds like your primary focus is just finish the race and you get fueled by the haters.

Richie 38:02

Yeah, that's what that's what really helps me a lot because I just, I don't know. Like even n wrestling like people would doubt that I would win against somebody and that that really just that was just like that was just a spark that was like, alright. I loved when people doubted me like even in I wish I had that mentality also in elementary because then that bring me down. But like, when I was when I was a junior going into my senior year I that's when the that's when it switched. That's when I was like, You know what I love when people doubt me, because then I have more of a purpose to do it. And then once I prove them wrong, I have bragging rights. So it's just it's all that matters to me. So.

Flor Carabez 38:03

that was junior into senior year of high school?

Richie 38:46

Yes.

Flor Carabez 38:49

Cool. Anything else?

Richie 38:53

I think that's, not that I can think of. But that's it as of right now.

Flor Carabez 38:58

All right. Let me stop recording

Richie

Sat, Mar 25, 2023 12:42AM • 39:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, feel, conversations, helped, college, siblings, point, wanted, supporting, shared, knowing, therapist, surgeon, high school, mental health, told, hispanic, work, hispanic serving institution, doubted

SPEAKERS

Richie, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:01

All right recording. Alright, so thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study I'm conducting. I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor, you know this already, and I'm a doctoral candidate here at National Louis University. I'm one term away from graduation. The reason why I'm conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience, I feel and I've noticed that students go through different things when it comes to switching or changing their major or choosing their major. The experience is different for everyone. And after reading through a lot of articles and blogs, I found that universities need a little more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to just share what they're going through. I'm hoping the results from the study will help elevate students stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is. And I thank you for your vulnerability and advance. For transparency, I'm going to go over how this whole thing's gonna play out. So to protect your identity, through the questionnaire, you chose Richie as your pseudonym. So this name will be used instead of your actual name so that no one can connect what you're sharing with you specifically. And hopefully, this will also push you to be as honest as possible about your experience. I have one central question that this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow up questions for clarity. I just want to make sure that I am

documenting your experience in the way that you experienced it and not just by what I'm interpreting it to be. So I just want to make sure I'm doing your story justice. As I'm asking questions, take your time responding, feel free to ask me any questions. Although this will be more of you sharing consider this like a conversation. Like I'm trying to get to know you a little more. You might see me writing notes as you're sharing your story. And this is just for me to be able to note some questions that I might want to remember at that at the end, or at some point, I might be taking note of your body language. And it's just so that I can add more details to what I'm writing about when I'm writing it. But just know that I am giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I'm recording your verbal responses with my phone to analyze the answers later. Once I'm done with the entire project, I'll discard all of the voice recordings. And finally, if you want a copy of the results, I can email them to you just make sure that you email me with your request. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Richie 02:52

No, I do not.

Flor Carabez 02:53

Alright, cool. So Richie, how far are you in your undergraduate program?

Richie 02:59

I am four years in my undergrad. I am going to graduate this June. So I'm very excited about that.

Flor Carabez 03:06

Yes. All right. And what are you getting your degree in,

Richie 03:09

in psychology with a minor in criminal justice.

Flor Carabez 03:12

Nice.

Flor Carabez 03:13

So what made you decide in majoring in criminal justice or majoring in psychology,

Richie 03:19

I wanted to major in psychology because it was more so I kind of switched around a lot as when I was a child. So I wanted to be like a surgeon at one point or veterinarian. But then I started to realize, you know, going to therapy and one of the things that I went through as a as a as a young person kinda opened my eyes, like maybe I have more of a purpose and then also going through like going to church and stuff it really opened my eyes and also to see that I made an impact in people's lives. And it was it was really astonishing. And then knowing that it was like a mental impact. So from there, I finally decided on like I want to do something with mental health counseling, I want to be a therapist of some sort for young people. So that's where I decided to major in psychology.

Flor Carabez 04:14

So going back to the surgeon, how old were you when you're you were talking about becoming a surgeon?

Richie 04:22

I was about 10 years old i i believe. i just found the human anatomy very interesting. And I just felt like you know me being surgeon it would be really nice.

Flor Carabez 04:36

Did you have like toys or what prompted you to consider surgery or a surgeon as an occupation?

Richie 04:43

Well, what made me really consider that is more so the... how can I say this?

Flor Carabez 04:48

You can say it in spanish too

Richie 04:51

Oh okay. No, but I think it was just more so like seeing just like how the body works and just like the different functions of it. So I just found that very interesting. It was just really, it was just really astonishing to me. And I also watched like a lot of medical shows, I guess. Okay, so it was. So those are like the main things.

Flor Carabez 05:10

Nice. So you had a little bit of exposure through television on what people can do with with the body specifically.

Richie 05:18

Yeah. And I also wanted to like help people in a way. So that would be the way to do something.

Flor Carabez 05:24

All right. So then 10 years old, you're talking about surgery, and then something starts happening. And you're like, I still want to help people. And you started considering therapist, was this because of your exposure to having therapy or having a therapist?

Richie 05:43

I will say, I will believe I will say yes, because that really opened my eyes because I was really depressed. And growing up in a Hispanic household, you know, the mental health isn't like very talked about that much, or I should say isn't taken very seriously. Now, especially during my time as well. And also with you know, like my mom not knowing about like, what disorder I have, I am diagnosed with ADHD. So a lot of the times I would get in trouble for not paying attention in class and stuff, which really weighed down on me and really made me depressed. And I also feel like I didn't make a lot of friends. So then that's when I fell down that road of I

did, I did a lot of bad things. I wanted to be part of a gang I wanted to, you know, I wanted to hurt people. I wanted to hurt myself at one point. Almost followed through with, but I guess things happened for a reason. And things didn't go the way they were supposed to be at that time.

Flor Carabez 06:39

So with the wanting to gain membership in the gang life, what was pushing you to do that?

Richie 06:47

I just felt like I wasn't getting attention at home, I was just craving that attention. You know, I just wanted someone to, to love me, or to say like, they're my family or to call somebody my family. I just felt like it was more so about, you know, having respect and having people who care about me, because my older brothers were always together. And my, my older sister, she was always doing her own stuff. And my parents were always arguing or doing other things. And I just felt like I was kind of shoved to the side. And also getting in trouble and saying, you know, just being told stuff like porque no puedes poner atencion? No juegues con tus manos. It was it was really, you know, it really hurt because it was like, I felt like something I couldn't control at that time.

Flor Carabez 07:33

So you're the youngest.

Richie 07:35

I'm the fourth youngest I'm the second youngest. So out of five. I'm the fourth youngest.

Flor Carabez 07:40

Okay. All right. So you're number four.

Richie 07:43

Yes.

Flor Carabez 07:43

Okay. Your youngest sibling? How old? Are they?

Richie 07:47

She is 17.

Flor Carabez 07:49

Okay,

Richie 07:50

she's, she's also in her senior year of high school. Right now.

Flor Carabez 07:53

Nice.

Flor Carabez 07:54

Do you feel like well, let me backtrack out of all the siblings, how many of them decided to go to college?

Richie 08:04

They actually all of them did at one point, but some of them couldn't continue because something happened, or, or, you know, due to financial issues, as well. so my brother, one of my brothers

has an Associate's. so i He's, he's the first one to graduate. But I'm going to be the first one with a bachelor's in the family. So

Flor Carabez 08:25

congrats.

Richie 08:26

Thank you.

Flor Carabez 08:28

Well, with that being said, Do you feel like there's a sense of like sibling rivalry, or any friction within your relationship with your brothers and sisters, because you are going to be the first one with a bachelor's?

Richie 08:49

I will say possibly, because my brothers could have, well, all of my siblings could have done it, but I felt like you know, something kind of blocked them. And I felt like, I also felt I also felt scared at one point that I wasn't going to graduate. But I feel like there is a kind of little bit of

hate. Because, you know, I'm really excited about graduating. So you know, maybe I overshare sometimes that I'm going to graduate. I'm gonna be the first one in the bachelors, or the first one with a bachelor's in the family. So I just feel like it's really exciting to to express that because it's, it's, it's really a big accomplishment for myself. Because I was doubted a lot in high school, and even sometimes in college and elementary,

Flor Carabez 09:34

who was doubting you?

Richie 09:36

I will mostly say when I was in elementary it would be teachers. I think my my parents started doubting me at one point because of how I wasn't paying attention in class and stuff. And my siblings too, because I was really slow with math. That was why, well I still kind of am a little bit slow with math because math isn't my strong suit, but going forward I think in high school, my teachers as well, some of the people, I have met some of my peers. My parents started believing me a little bit more. But my older brother was the one who doubted me the most in finishing. And then when it came to when I actually became a college student, I felt like people started doubting me less and less, but it would be the people I socalled friends at one point. And they said that I wouldn't be able to finish college cause it, because I told them I was a special education student in high school. And from the from there then they insinuated by, I guess they

were trying to tell me but like not tell me directly. But they told me I wasn't going to graduate college because of my condition.

Flor Carabez 10:52

And now you're going to rub it in their face.

Richie 10:54

Yeah, I am.

Flor Carabez 10:56

Did your parents ever compare your siblings with you? Or vice versa? Was there any comparison?

Richie 11:03

I feel like yes, I feel like, especially with like one of my older brothers. He was, he was pretty, he was one of the smartest in the family. And so I was, I guess, since I couldn't like pay attention. It was hard for me to pay attention. It was kind of, I also tend to process I guess, information a bit more slower than others. So it was really hard to also to kind of navigate through it. It was really

hard to to be my own person. It was always like be like your brother, be like your brother porque no eres como to hermano? It was, you know, it really hurt because I wanted to be my own person. I wanted to be someone to be like, someone to look up to me. Because nobody looked up to me, not even my little sister at one point. So I just felt like I was really shoved to the side. And I was always, you know, looked down upon and I guess always kind of insulted in some way.

Flor Carabez 12:00

What now? Is this the brother that has the associates?

Richie 12:03

Yes.

Flor Carabez 12:04

Okay. So was it because he had an associates that they would compare you to him?

Richie 12:10

I just felt like it was his overall grades. It was moreso during high school and elementary, because he had better grades than I did. He had like A's and B's and all I had was like C's B's

and sometimes D's. And it was always, it was always hard for me to kind of, you know, be like, Oh, I got C's, it's an accomplishment. My mom always told me that I wasn't doing enough in my classrooms.

Flor Carabez 12:37

So in your case, you had an older sibling that had navigated some of the college experience before you. So you're, you're both still considered first gen for what I'm defining as first generation. Did your older brother support you in your college navigation at all?

Richie 13:00

He did.

Richie 13:01

He was very he was one of the supportive I will say he was very supportive of me and going to college. And making sure I chose the right one. And you know, kind of helping me with like, what the FAFSA stuff is and trying to just try to like find a job as well to work during school as well. And kinda like look at what what the finances are just kind of like what to expect. And like the college, you know, I went to university and he went to City College. So he told me he I might I might just have to be ready for whatever comes.

Flor Carabez 13:37

Okay, so he helped you with FAFSA stuff, choosing the college, was there anything else he helped you with?

Richie 13:44

I think also with it was also like supporting me, you know, making sure that I would I would continue on and just keep going and keep driving. Because he told me that I have I have a drive like never before like even even if I have some barricades or some some things that blocked me. I still do my best to work my way around it. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 14:12

So you mentioned work. Are you working right now?

Richie 14:16

Yes, I am.

Flor Carabez 14:17

Have you worked here all four years?

Richie 14:19

Not my four years. I started. I started a maid sophomore year during the winter term.

Flor Carabez 14:24

How many hours a week? Do you work?

Richie 14:28

20

Flor Carabez 14:28

20. And you've been full time?

Richie 14:31

Part time, I work for the school?

Flor Carabez 14:33

No, but school wise.

Richie 14:35

Yeah,

Flor Carabez 14:35

You've had full time classes?

Richie 14:37

Yes.

Flor Carabez 14:38

Okay. Okay, cool. So let's backtrack to the point where you're thinking about what schools you're gonna go to. You're at the point in high school where you're like the conversation started, alright, like, what are you going to do once you're done with us? Can you paint the picture for me? Well, what were the conversations like? Did you have to go to any programs? Did you have a go to person or like what was what was that whole point in time looking like?

Richie 15:11

it was, it was really scary. I feel like it's an experience for everybody. I feel like it was really scary for me because how, how much pressure there was in how many schools I've tried to apply, and how many how many of them I was declined from, I think I applied to seven schools, I was declined from four of them. And so it was really it was kind of really, it was really hurtful as well, it was emotionally draining. Knowing that some schools didn't want me because of my SAT scores or of my grades. It was it was really hard to kind of unfathom or break down what happened. The person I would go to was my school counselor, she helped me with trying to see what other options I could do, or like what I wanted to do, I guess, a career. And I kind of told her what I wanted to do. So she had an idea, like what schools have, what options or what schools have, what type of programs. So she was really, she was really big with like supporting me, was trying to trying to help me navigate through the gateways and stuff. So I felt like it she was one of the main helpful tools. And the conversation of like, what I wanted to do, I already knew, what I wanted to do it was just like, where I wanted to go and achieve my goal, or have

the have the supporters that helped me with. So it was just really it was kind of hard to see like what school was best for me and what fitted my criteria.

Flor Carabez 16:44

What did that, so I don't know if what, but did do you have conversations about your, your occupational goals with your family at all?

Richie 16:58

Not really, like occupational goals, like how?

Flor Carabez 17:02

like what you wanted, like your career goals, like what you wanted to do for work, because you started with surgery. And then you switched to therapy. Did you, were, were you having any of these conversations with your family?

Richie 17:15

Yeah, I was. I did have these conversations with them.

Flor Carabez 17:18

So what did what did those conversations look like?

Richie 17:21

So I mean, I would tell my mom, like in the beginning, I guess she was she was kind of against it.

Flor Carabez 17:26

Against which one?

Richie 17:27

against trying. Well, well, first, she was against the very she was very against me doing being a surgeon, because she told me that if I can't focus on, like, if I can't focus on my classes, how am I going to in the surgery room. And she was a little skeptical about me becoming a therapist. But as she saw, I really enjoyed learning about, you know, psychology and stuff. And she really seen like how excited I was for for the school and she seen how, how much I have improved as well. She started to she supported me a lot more as the years went by.

Flor Carabez 18:04

Cool. So what does her support look like, now?

Richie 18:09

She's just really excited. She just wants me to, she wants what's the what's best for me. So she's, you know, she's asking like questions, like, oh make sure you know, they have a good hiring demand for people with this degree, because she has been told by one of my cousins that she does that they graduated with a degree and they didn't do anything. And I'm guessing that kind of scared her in a way thinking that I wasn't going to be able to find a job with my degree. So it was important for me to, to reassure her about these things, and I just kept telling her that, you know, I'll find something, you know, I have people who are gonna support me and, and everything will be okay, so I just had, I had to kind of like, reassure her a lot that what I was doing is what I wanted to do, and eventually I would get what I wanted.

Flor Carabez 18:56

So you've talked a lot about your mom, do you have another parent that is involved?

Richie 19:03

Not really. I mean, I would have this conversation, somewhat with my dad, but you know, he was never as present as I would want him to be. Like, I love him. He's a great person. But you know, sometimes the choices he makes, I don't really don't love them that much. But, you know, overall, he is a good supporter. He is supporting I know he's supporting me, but you know, he just he's just not showing me as I would want him to.

Flor Carabez 19:28

What does his support look like?

Richie 19:31

He just keeps telling me like, you know, if I'm still in school and how well I'm doing and that if I every need anything from him, he could, I can let him know. And you know, I think that's about it.

Flor Carabez 19:47

It sounds like your your parents aren't together.

Richie 19:52

It's a very complicated relationship between them. So it's it's very, it's very complicated. So I really can't like define it. What type of relationship they have. It's really, well, even to this day, it's confusing for me. So, yeah, I can't figure it out.

Flor Carabez 20:06

Is he present? Like physically in your house?

Richie 20:09

Yeah, yes.

Flor Carabez 20:10

Okay, so it sounds like maybe you don't have a lot of these conversations, then.

Richie 20:17

Yeah, cuz he's there in the house a lot of the times, but he's just not there, like, majority of the day, like majority of the day he'll be out and then he'll just come at night and just go to sleep.

Flor Carabez 20:27

Pretty much work.

Richie 20:29

Mmm I, think so.

Flor Carabez 20:30

Okay,

Richie 20:31

I hope so.

Flor Carabez 20:32

How does it make you feel? The way that your parents are individually supporting you? How does it make you feel?

Richie 20:42

It doesn't make me feel that well, because, you know, I've always seen families as together and everyone supporting each other. Like, as the mother as a father, I wish, I wish, I would see more of a good example of them of like, Oh, what a relationship should look like. But I'm at least glad I have a little bit of understanding to see that, you know, things don't work don't work out all the time. So it's important to, I guess, kind of navigate through it, it was really hard. And it's still kind of is, but you know, it's I guess it's just something that happens.

Flor Carabez 21:19

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 21:21

So, psychology, you, you still ended up doing a helping profession, that's why you wanted to be in surgery. Your your counselor was helping you navigate applications and stuff. So you knew you wanted to be a therapist, how in depth were those conversations about, I guess, like getting from high school to being a therapist,

Richie 21:49

It was a lot because I know, I did research on my own knowing that I had to, how do I say, I had to, I had to go back to graduate school. So then I had to look a little bit more, more further ahead, which kind of stressed me out because I was looking at graduate schools, but I was told just take it one step at a time, because I don't want to stress myself too much. And I feel like that was one of the biggest things was like, I really want to get to my end goal without like, you know, like, calming down and making sure I take the right steps and the right path first. So with that, I just kind of learned how to take it one step at a time and to become a therapist, or counselor, you know, it's going to take time, so then I have to be patient with that process.

Flor Carabez 22:39

At any point since you started with your, your major, did you think about switching?

Richie 22:48

I did not think about switching, actually. It was it was something like I was really dedicated myself to it was just really something I was very passionate about.

Flor Carabez 22:57

Sounds good. Okay, so going back to your Latinidad, you you mentioned earlier being Hispanic and how sometimes because of the culture and the dynamics that come with it, it can make the college going experience or even choosing your major, a little different. What pieces do you feel like, from your Latinidad, what pieces influenced your experience with choosing your major?

Richie 23:32

I just feel like I related to a lot of other of my peers and a lot of my old friends, because they were also Hispanic and they also struggle with like anxiety, depression and stuff like that. And then being part of also a Hispanic household. They were also kind of like shoved to the side or just told oh just stop, you know, you're just over exaggerating, or stop acting like that, why you do that. I just feel like it was really it was it really amazed me to see like how, how much the Hispanic culture, especially the Mexican culture, how, you know, how it's not normalized to talk about, like mental health within the household. And I realized that because I went through it and going through the depression I did and, and the downfalls that I I've been through, you know, it wasn't very, it was very, it was very hard. And that's when it opened my eyes. And it's like, well, that, you know, I want to hopefully be an advocate on day to, to the mental health of the Hispanic community.

Flor Carabez 24:35

So the mental health taboo within the Latino community is kind of what inspired you even more?

Richie 24:43

Yes.

Flor Carabez 24:45

Nice. So did you know that NLU is a Hispanic Serving Institution?

Richie 24:54

I did not know that, to be honest, no.

Flor Carabez 24:56

Do you know what do you know what Hispanic serving institution is?

Richie 25:00

I'm not aware of it.

Flor Carabez 25:01

Okay. So you might at some point hear of like HSI as a thing. So the Hispanic serving institution, the acronym is an HSI. It's a designation. So it's a label that the Department of Ed gives to colleges and universities that have at least 25% full time undergraduate enrollment that are Latinos or Hispanic. So aside from getting that designation, they also get funding for whatever the university needs. So the universities and the colleges have to renew that status every year for them to continue getting that funding. So I believe we received ours in 2016. And we've been able to renew it every year since. Now that you know, what it is, do you feel like it's impacted your experience at all here?

Richie 26:03

I don't think so. But like, at the same time, it's good to see that, you know, that, that we're being helped in a way, you know, everyone's being helped in the individual individualized way. And I'm just glad that I got the resources that I got from here. So it's just really nice to see that, you know, we're being taken a little bit more seriously now, I can say. So it's really nice to see that, and, you know, to say that, that we're being helped, and that we're being supported, you know, from people who might not even know, but people believe in us. And that's what I find very amazing.

Flor Carabez 26:40

Do you feel like it impacts your major experience at all?

Richie 26:45

I feel like I have, I feel like I have more of a purpose now to keep going and to for sure, further my education in this, so one day, I hope someone could look back at me and be like, you know, he's a role model. And he helped me get through the hard times, just like someone else helped me.

Flor Carabez 27:03

That's beautiful.

Flor Carabez 27:08

Um, before today, had anyone asked you to share your story?

Richie 27:16

I have, yeah, I have shared my stories with a couple of people. I've also shared in the church that I volunteered in as well, to kind of also get that message out that you know, I struggled to the point. And I also I struggled with a lot of mental health. And with decision making as well. And

with knowing what path was best for me, and I just kind of want to normalize, it's okay to mess up, you know, without missing up, we won't know what is truly right for us. So I've just felt like, that was just like, the whole thing that I that I've done in that I wish to continue to do.

Flor Carabez 27:54

So at what point did you pivot from thinking about joining a gang to being more focused on your academics and helping people and, and even, it sounds like your relationship with the church?

Richie 28:11

I feel like, you know, just seeing the things that they would do, and the things that they would tell me to do. It was really tragic. It just, it just wasn't for me, but you know, to have some sort of respect, or to have some sort of, like attention or some sort of family. It was really, it was really hard for me because, you know, we did a lot of bad things like back then when I was a child, I did a lot of horrible things, you know, attack random people, you know, I steal from them in a way and it was just, it's just, people will look at me and see that, that was not me. And that was not that type of person. But no, those choices, you know, I can't undo them. And I want to make it up to maybe not them directly, but like my community. And I guess you know, going to church really opened my eyes about how how God has given me another chance and almost fought almost you know, committing suicide at one point. And to see that I got that second chance and to make things right, not just for myself, but for others. And I just felt like you know, that was

just a big message that I got, I just felt like you know, I can I can do something if I can help people and make them realize and see that it's okay to mess up and it's okay to have regret then that, that is what I wanted to do.

Flor Carabez 29:36

Do you feel like your your commitment to the church aligns with your major?

Richie 29:46

I would say so. Yes. Because sometimes it's really important to see that you know, people you know, it's good to see the different types of, how do I say it, options that people have with coping with mental health. One of my aims was, you know, praying and, you know, asking God, like, What is my purpose, and I just feel like, you know, people just do everything their own ways, and, excuse me, but it was, it was, was really, it was really good to open my eyes to that, because then it was really, it's just what helped me get through the hard times. And I feel like it'll help other people get through the hard times just kind of like giving them like, here's these options, you know, you don't have you don't have to like either of them. But you know, it's just good to always have them out there.

Flor Carabez 30:38

What essential items do you want folks to take away from the experience that you've shared today?

Richie 30:46

Be be open minded, you know, I was very closed minded at one point, and I just feel like, you know, it's kind of like, understanding other people and just seeing where they come from, it really helped me understand people, and especially with the profession I want to go to into, it takes a lot of, you know, being open minded, even though you and I may not agree with everything that they might say, you know, it's, it's important still to, you know, disagree with them, but like, not let it get to you. But to both sides to get it, let it get to the emotions, because they let that happen a lot. And it really kind of, like deteriorate some of my friendships, but sometimes, you know, it's just okay. Like, it's, it's, it's, it's okay to disagree.

Flor Carabez 31:30

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 31:33

Earlier, you mentioned that your cousin had told your mom, that they had a hard time finding a job after they graduated. Some participants have shared that, there's comparisons sometimes amongst the primos or primas, does that resonate with you as well?

Richie 31:52

Yeah., I was also told that. Because they had other jobs. I don't know what other type of jobs. But like, there were, some of them were nurses, some of them were. Some of them were going to school at that point. And I guess I told my mom that I want to become a therapist, and she was like, there's not a lot of people out, there might not be a lot of people hiring for that. So just just make sure you're careful with like, what you choose. But, you know, kind of, I was always compared, like, you see, like your cousin, your cousin got his degree, but hasn't done anything with it. So it's like, why do you want something that might not be out there? You know, that was also you maybe maybe she was like, Maybe you should do something else, like be a nurse assistant, or be maybe a doctor if you can. Because those people, they still help people, but it never really stuck with me. I wanted to help someone, someone like with their mental health. So that was kinda like they just compare me like, oh, you can help people another way, or see what happened to your cousin, you know, you don't want to have a degree and then not find a job afterwards.

Flor Carabez 32:57

So your mom's big biggest concern is accessibility to work.

Richie 33:08

Yeah, I feel like I felt like that was her biggest thing was like the hiring demand of what what my degree can can give me.

Flor Carabez 33:18

Other participants, and even myself, as a first gen Latina have felt a immense pressure from the family, like the success of the community and the family is on us because we're the ones getting this degree. Does that resonate with you at all?

Richie 33:42

I feel like it does. You know, I felt like I felt the pressure maybe a little bit differently, because instead of focusing on, on my family's well being she was more focused on what our reputation will look like. So it was really hard to kind of navigate to that. And I feel like that's why I fell down with my mental health struggles because my mom was moreso focused on me wanting to succeed and not making sure I was emotionally well, and it was it was really hard to navigate through that but you know, I feel like we do have high expectations of like finishing. I wasn't expected that much to to have like a good, like to have good grades or anything because I was

kinda like failing. So my mom was just saying like, as long as I passed, I guess or as long as I got through the year, then that that would that would matter.

Flor Carabez 34:36

So has she asked you since you started college, about your grades, your classes or anything?

Richie 34:41

she has, and I have told her that how I'm doing.

Flor Carabez 34:45

So what is her reaction?

Richie 34:47

She's really like, I mean, it opens everyone's eyes and my family because I'm going from like having CS B's. And now I have been having a lot of good grades. I've been having straight A's at some points. And I've been having, you know, I've been having good grades overall. So I just feel like, you know, I have improved overall like, like tremendously. And to see that, you know, people in my family, my siblings, they just really, it amazes them, and it surprises them as well.

Because knowing that I have this disorder and to see that I succeeded. It's really, like, how do he do that? Or it's like, it's kind of, it's kind of hard for them to process it in a way.

Flor Carabez 35:31

How does it make you feel?

Richie 35:32

Makes me feel great. It makes me feel like cuz in the beginning, you know, when I joined wrestling, my sophomore year, people doubted me a lot, because I was kind of skinny. But I follow through. Through my sophomore year, all the way through my senior year I finished. And then that's where more of my thrived where I just love people who doubt me. Because then when I actually complete it, I get to, you know, I get to say, I did it,

Flor Carabez 35:45

And you get the bragging rights.

Richie 35:55

Yeah, I get to brag as much as I want. And just be like, you know, when I get my own house, when I get everything, you know, you guys are invited to come in. And just to show how much I have succeeded, and I just wish to succeed even more in the future.

Flor Carabez 36:12

What haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Richie 36:17

Oh, that's a good question. I feel like... I feel like how determined I was how, how much? Like how much it took me to finally be like, Okay, I have to, I have to thrive, I have the energy, I have the will to go through it. I just feel like I had a lot of I have a lot of people who doubted me and it kind of hit me in a way. But at the same time, you know, I was also told that like, Why? Why are you going to give in to the people who are doubting you? Because then that's proving them right. You want to prove them wrong.

Flor Carabez 36:55

Who told you that?

Richie 36:57

My coach did actually. He he told me because I was I was kind of struggling in the beginning with like everything, like the partying and stuff. But then as soon as like he told me why do I want people to doubt me and let them win, I guess that kind of that kind of like, finally gave me the spark to, not just like in in my sport, but just like in general. Like in my academics. It really gave me more of a purpose to like, you know, here's where I started, go out there and prove people. And I did and I did pretty good in the sport as well. And I just felt like you know, just with that I feel like I have a lot of thrive. And I have a lot of energy. And just like when I want to dedicate myself to something I feel like I can always go through it and I can always just stick to it and accomplish it. It might it might not be as fast as everyone else. But I finish the race. So, that's all that matters to me.

Flor Carabez 37:55

So it sounds like your primary focus is just finish the race and you get fueled by the haters.

Richie 38:02

Yeah, that's what that's what really helps me a lot because I just, I don't know. Like even n wrestling like people would doubt that I would win against somebody and that that really just that was just like that was just a spark that was like, alright. I loved when people doubted me like even in I wish I had that mentality also in elementary because then that bring me down. But like,

when I was when I was a junior going into my senior year I that's when the that's when it switched. That's when I was like, You know what I love when people doubt me, because then I have more of a purpose to do it. And then once I prove them wrong, I have bragging rights. So it's just it's all that matters to me. So.

Flor Carabez 38:03

that was junior into senior year of high school?

Richie 38:46

Yes.

Flor Carabez 38:49

Cool. Anything else?

Richie 38:53

I think that's, not that I can think of. But that's it as of right now.

Flor Carabez 38:58

All right. Let me stop recording

Vanessa and Julio

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, feel, tias, parents, college, school, teacher, career, latino, students, happy, told, younger, carpentry, thought, mom, caring, latino male, good, questions

SPEAKERS

Vanessa, Julio, Flor Carabez

Flor Carabez 00:02

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study I am conducting; I genuinely appreciate your time. As I mentioned in my initial email, my name is Flor Carabez, and I am a Doctoral candidate here at NLU; I'm one term away from graduation! The reason I am conducting this study is because in my personal and professional experience I have noticed that choosing an academic major is different for everyone. And after reading through various articles

and blogs, I found that universities need more input from students to know what resources are needed, and some students are craving a space to share their experiences. I'm hoping the results from this study will help elevate students' stories and add to higher education literature. With that being said, I hope you realize how valuable your story is, and I thank you for your vulnerability in advance. For transparency, I will cover how this will play out. To protect your identity, I will use the pseudonym you chose in the screening questionnaire. This will be the name I will use instead of your actual name so that no one can identify your story to you. I have one central question this conversation is revolving around, but I might decide to ask follow-up questions for clarity. I want to ensure I am documenting and understanding your experiences the way you experienced them, not just by my perception. As I am asking the questions, take your time responding, and feel free to ask me any questions. You might see me typing or writing notes as you share your story. Sometimes I will get an idea for a separate question, or I might take note of your body language. Just know that I am giving you my undivided attention. Additionally, I will record your verbal responses with my cell phone to analyze your answers later. Once I am done with this assignment, I will discard the voice recordings. Finally, if you want a copy of the results, I'll gladly share them; just email your request. Now that all the housekeeping stuff is out of the way, do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Vanessa 02:03

What made you want to like conduct this research to begin with?

Flor Carabez 02:07

Yeah, so I'm, I'm first generation Latina. And when I started school, when I started undergrad, I knew that I had to go to college, because that's just the way I was raised. There was no other option. Either you go to college, or you're going to move out pretty much. Initially, I wanted to go into pediatrics to become a doctor for little babies. And the idea behind that was that I wanted to help kids specifically if they were getting abused or getting mistreated, I wanted be their first advocate because as a doctor, you see their entire body, you ask them questions, and especially kids, usually they'll just say things, right? So if I were to hear something, then I would be the first advocate for them. But Elementary and high school, I was not that academically savvy. So when I got to college, I thought that there was going to be some sort of miracle where I could just still become a doctor. And I quickly found out that that was not the case. So with my experience, and then being a success coach here and hearing, as a coach, my students telling me what drove them to do their majors. Sometimes it's because they're passionate about that specific topic. Other times it's because someone told them that they wouldn't be good at something else. So I thought it was interesting to kind of gather that because then we'll we're looking at persistence and retention, like how many students are graduating and how many are flunking out, we're not asking these other questions, you know? So there might be some nuggets in the stories of what maybe we can do better as a university to help support so that way, if you do want to be a math teacher, but maybe you feel like you're not good at math, maybe there's something we could do about that. So you can still fulfill your dream. Without feeling like okay, well, maybe I should be a psychology teacher or something, you know, because you might not be passionate

about that. Or if you're passionate about just making money, then we could talk about what that looks like, you know? So yeah, I just I want the newer generations or like future students to study something that they are going to feel fulfilled with whatever it is. Yeah. Does that answer your question?

Vanessa 04:32

Yeah, it does. Thank you.

Flor Carabez 04:34

Any other questions before we move on?

Julio 04:37

I don't think so. Okay.

Flor Carabez 04:39

All right. So I will start with Vanessa. How far are you in your undergraduate program?

Vanessa 04:46

So I am like a junior, like a third year in wait undergraduate? Yea. So I'm going to get my bachelor's soon. I actually got my associate's degree at a young age, like, my junior and senior year of high school, I was already going to community college at Daley. So I was able to get my Associates very early. And I was very, like, glad I got the opportunity to do that. Because it like, help, like, reach my potential, because I never thought I was like, pushed in school, really. So whenever like, I wasn't being challenged, I would like do the bare minimum for everything. So, um, now, it helped a lot because I don't have to pay that much. I'm actually paying nothing because of like my financial aid. So it helped me a lot, because I'm already gonna get my bachelor's pretty soon, maybe like in a year or two. And I'm doing it like at no cost. So yeah.

Flor Carabez 04:46

Okay, nice. What about you?

Julio 05:46

So the exact same story, where my junior and senior year, I took also classes at Daley and other like community colleges, so I got my associate's degree again, early. And so when I came here, you know, they told me like, Oh, you'll graduate, like in two or three years, since you essentially have all the credits that you need, you can just start taking like your, I guess, like, specific,

Flor Carabez 06:12

like, major specific?

Julio 06:13

Yeah, exactly. So I can just start taking those. So again, I'm also a junior The only issue though, is that, so what I want to be, I want to be a math high school teacher. So I'm taking classes in secondary education and math. However, those classes aren't ready yet. So I'm not sure when I'll take those classes or when I'll graduate, because it's a possibility that it can be extended, just because since they're not ready, I can't take those classes yet.

Flor Carabez 06:42

Okay. So you're majoring in education, secondary education. And what is your major?

Vanessa 06:48

Computer science and information systems.

Flor Carabez 06:50

Nice.

Flor Carabez 06:51

Okay. And what was it like when you were choosing your major initially?

Vanessa 06:56

So I felt like I always enjoyed really computer science, like ever since my freshman year of high school, I found it very interesting, because I did a lot of like, app development, or like prototypes and web designing. So I thought it was very interesting. And it kind of challenged me to, like think outside the box of oh, how can I make this code work? Or how can I, you know, use it to help other people. So when I heard about, like, the pathway that I did to get my associates, it was in computer science, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do for college, but I knew I had to go or something. I felt like my parents really wanted me to, because they wanted me to do something more in life, they would always tell me, I had a lot of, like, potential in school, or I would always hear other people telling me like, Oh, you're so good in school, but it's like, I personally didn't want to keep going to, you know, further my education. But since I already got my Associates, they were like, very advocate, like advocating me to pursue my education to get like more money and stuff, especially since I'm like a woman in STEM. So I went to get my bachelor's. I was very hesitant to begin with because, yeah, it's cool that I'm gonna go for like

schooling but I know it was hard, because what if I couldn't pay financially and I wouldn't want my parents to pay for me. So I tried to, you know, apply to a school that would give me the most financial aid or I wouldn't have to pay that much out of pocket and apply to scholarships. And so that's why I came here, to NLU, because it gave me a lot of financial aid, so I didn't have to pay anything. And it helped me, you know, further my education, like my bachelor's degree. What else? Yeah, I think that's like the baseline of it.

Flor Carabez 08:54

So initially, you didn't want to go to college.

Vanessa 08:56

I, no. I didn't really want to, I thought, like getting my associates degree was like, a good enough accomplishment that I actually did, you know, try, especially at a young age. I thought it was like, Oh, she graduated with her associates. And she's also like, 18, you know, that's like a double accomplishment. Because I like pushed myself so much. And it was very stressful because it was during COVID. So I had to, like, sometimes teach myself how to code. I had to teach myself how to get through my classes, because sometimes the professors wouldn't help me really. So yeah, I was already you know, I feel like I fulfilled a lot of things that I thought were missing internally, but it was very hard when other people told you like, Oh, why don't you want to go further? Like it never felt like it was enough. And you know, I don't want to prove to other people I can do it,

but it just feels like a lot of outside people from my life are always like, Oh, why can't you, you know, go the extra mile. Um, and that's where like, I always have a conflict with myself, because it's like, Well, I'm happy personally, but it just feels like I can make other people you know, around me, like, Stop putting their, you know, I feel like they put whatever

Flor Carabez 10:11

their expectations?

Vanessa 10:17

their expectations on me.

Flor Carabez 10:19

Okay, what about for you? What was it like choosing your major?

Julio 10:25

So, well I didn't it didn't start with I guess choosing a major just choosing a job, like what I want to do and then what major coincides with that, like I know, at first, similarly, I didn't want to go to college. At first, I just wanted to start working. So what I had in mind was like a carpenter or

something in the trade. But I had that conversation with my parents, and just my family. And they're like, no, like, why don't you want to go to school? You know, like, why would you get into a trade? And even if I told them, like, I will start making money, like, immediately because they pay for training, they pay for your classes. So yeah. Like, it's not school school, I'm still I still have a career. I'm still doing something. But they were very much like, you know, and there were people in my family, they were like, Yeah, you should absolutely do that. But you know, the fact that some of them like, for example, my parents were very much like, no, don't do that, hurt. So it made me like, decide or think like, maybe I should do something else. So then after that, I started deciding, like, Okay, what do I like to do? And what do I personally like see myself doing. And besides carpentry, I thought about a teacher. And then also thought about like a physical therapist where, the reason behind both of those were I just want to help people, whoever it may be. And then the next struggle was deciding where to go. Because both of them, obviously, were careers that I wanted to do. However, there's things to think about, like money, like paying for it. And then like the amount of time that it would take to actually be in that career. And even though I was two years ahead, technically, I still potentially had many more years to think about. So I was just stuck thinking about where to go. And again, it was a conversation that I had with my parents and those around me where they were very much for the physical therapy job because you're essentially a doctor. And I think to many like Latino parents or that generation, they, they see doctor or any job like that, and they immediately want you to do that because of the money, or just because of the high like status quo, like, Oh, my son's a doctor, or like, my daughter did this, this and that. But then I told them, like, No, I think I want to be a teacher. I finally like landed on teacher. And they were again, just like with the carpentry. They're like, No, like, why do you want to be a teacher? Like, you know, you're gonna put

yourself through all this stress? You know, teachers don't get paid that much. And I told them, like, listen, like I, I'm doing it because I want to. You know, it's something that I very much value, and it's something that I feel like can be very fulfilling. And, you know, being a male or Latino male, I bring a lot to the table, mainly because we need not only just teachers in general, but male, Latino teachers. And when I told them that they were finally like, okay, like, yeah, then you should do it. But it was very much hard to have those conversations, especially when people that are so close to you, disagree with you. But I'm happy that like now, as I'm like getting through my education and my career, they're more open to it.

Flor Carabez 13:42

So when you, earlier you mentioned that you were looking at careers, and then backtracking to figure out what, what major would coincide with that. And when you were talking to your family about carpentry, because in your head, that was a career. It's is it? Am I correct in interpreting that for them, that wasn't a career?

Julio 14:05

Yeah. Because I'm assuming, to me, or, well, maybe I'm wrong. But the way that I always interpret it was like, it isn't a career unless I go to school. And because of that school, I got a job. And then to them it's then a career, because I'm assuming whenever I told them carpentry, like I remember like way back when I was in high school, I always thought like a carnicero, a butcher,

was like a cool career. Like it seemed interesting, but when I told them they're like, no, why do you want to work like in like in a Pete's or something cutting up meat and giving it to people? So yeah, I think in my head, they didn't see it as a career.

Flor Carabez 14:41

Okay. So career means you went to school for it, like specifically college to get to that even though like a trade you still have to go to school to get your special license or whatever, but that doesn't count for your parents.

Julio 14:57

Yeah, that's the way that I interpreted it whenever I I would have those conversations with them.

Flor Carabez 15:02

What did well, what was? Why were you inclined initially to carpentry?

Julio 15:07

It was just another thing that I like to do like I'm very hands on. Like, again, with physical therapy and teaching is something where you're always using your hands, you're always

interacting. So when I saw carpentry, I was like, I always use my hands, I would always do handywork, and I could potentially help people. Like, if I become further into the carpentry work, I can like build a house or work on houses. So it was just like an accumulation of all the things that I like to do. But again, I'm assuming they just didn't like it, because of the not going to college to be in that career.

Flor Carabez 15:45

And you said that with teaching, you will still feel fulfilled? Because you're helping? Okay. Is there a specific demographic that you want to work with?

Julio 15:57

It's, this is hard, because the thing, I'm, so, I specifically chose high school teacher, but the thing that's so heartbreaking is like, in any grade, they need, like teachers, and in any like, classroom, yeah, they need, like representation, again, a Latino male. So it's hard, because it's one of those things like, I wish I could just be in every classroom be everywhere at once, but I can't. So I ultimately decided High School, mainly because I feel like that's the age where I personally probably needed somebody the most that looked like me to tell me like, Hey, you're enough like, you do whatever you want to do. You know, and again, that's where, like, senior year, for example, is when you really start to think about like, Oh, what am I going to do? And again, I feel like if I had someone that not only looked like me, was just like, understood, like, hey,

whatever you want to do, it's enough, as long as it's what you want to do. Like, it doesn't matter what outside voices tell you like, hey, you know, don't don't do that you're not going to school for it. Or like, why don't you aim higher? It's like, whatever you feel like is fulfillment, that should be fulfillment.

Flor Carabez 17:08

That makes sense. So on the thing of fulfillment. You went, didn't want to go past associates. But you felt this layer of pressure from external expectations. Do you feel fulfilled with majoring in CSIS?

Vanessa 17:30

So relating, like back to what he said, um, like, I initially before, like, Oh, when I was younger, I was very creative. I always liked art. But when I, you know, what career can you do with art? You know? You can say you're an artist, but it doesn't pay good. And many people won't take you seriously because they don't believe it's like a real career. So that's what kind of like pushed me back to like, Oh, I like doing something with art. But the only way that I could get paid probably good would be doing graphic design or something. And even then, it's still like, iffy job to some people. And I also wanted to do cosmetology because I liked helping people, you know, I want to make them look pretty, feel pretty. And I was really, like, stuck on that. But, I remember like, one time my old like, advisor, I told her how I wanted to, you know, go into

cosmetology after my Associates, and she kind of made it seem like, oh, like, why are you gonna go if you already have an Associates? Or you're gonna get an associates. Like, she was kind of saying, how, why did I, you know, put so much effort into my associates, if I'm just, you know, go do a different job that has nothing to do with it. And yeah, it's, it's kind of like backtracking in a bit. But I just, you know, I could always have that associate's and put it like, as a side job, like, or I could maybe do cosmetology for a while, and then later in the future, I could, you know, work for a company or something. It's always like a backup plan. And that's how I believe that in even still that I'm like doing computer science and stuff. If I work for a company, I'm not going to always be there, like throughout the rest of my life. And I wouldn't want that. That doesn't make me happy. So that's why I would like to work for a company for a few years, maybe like 10-20 max, depending on how it makes me feel and if I enjoy it. And if it doesn't, then I can always, you know, change my career or my job into something that will actually make me happy and satisfied.

Flor Carabez 19:47

So it sounds like when both of you were deciding on like what to do, your family, like your parents, had a very high, have the opinion and almost like the end-all-be-all. And then for you, it sounds like you had a counselor that was kind of sort of there trying to help you thought partner. Did you have someone at school too?

Julio 20:14

I don't think so, like at school. Okay, so I had obviously I told them like, Hey, these are the three things that I want to do. But I would definitely say that they were more understanding, like, especially when I brought up the teaching, mostly, like, almost everybody was like, Yeah, you should absolutely become a teacher. And it's mainly because I'm surrounded by teachers. So they might have been biased. But even then they were still like, yeah, teaching is like a great profession, you should absolutely do it. And like, obviously, it goes without saying that they did say the same things my parents did, like, but just know, like, you know, this has a bunch of problems. It comes with a bunch of responsibilities. Are you ready for that? And I was, and I would tell him like, yeah, absolutely. Like, I wouldn't do it if I wasn't, or if I didn't think I was ready. So they were definitely more open to it. And they were very much more understanding and more like, yes, like, we'll help you. So they were definitely more supportive, in a way, and they didn't take as much convincing as my parents did. But, again, they were like, some conversations were like, Are you sure you want to do it, but it felt more like? You know, I'm just letting you know, because you need to know it, as opposed to like, I'm telling you, are you sure? Because you shouldn't? In a way, if that makes sense.

Flor Carabez 21:40

That makes sense. So Julio, you mentioned your Latinidad. You mentioned being a Latino male. And that also played a role in you choosing between physical therapy and teaching once, once your parents threw out your trade out the door.

Julio 21:57

Right.

Flor Carabez 21:59

Vanessa, you mentioned more so your womanhood being a woman in STEM, did your Latinidad at all play a role with you being in STEM?

Vanessa 22:09

So I feel like it did, because I remember when I was, you know, in elementary school. I was, I mean, I guess you could say born in the ghetto, you know. And I grew up like, in like La Villita, Little Village. So most of my, you know, school years, it was like all around a lot of gang violence and everything. And like, you never you always saw people that like look like you. They're all Latino, Latina. But once I got older, and I moved out of that area, I like realized, you know, there's like other people out there other people who aren't like me that have different opinions and biases. And especially like when it comes to STEM, you always see like, men being in STEM, whether it's math, it's science, technology, it's always like revolved around men. And you know, I never saw them, any woman being like, oh, like, I'm a scientist, or I'm a biologist, or I'm a computer programmer. So I felt like, I would like to see more women in STEM. And I did, I went to this one program that was in the Science, the Museum of Science and Industry. And in high school, we would go and talk to other women who are scientists, but

every time I would talk to them, they were mainly like, biologists, and I'm like, Oh, I like more computer science and like, science, science. So I always wanted to see someone who was either like in engineering or in computer science. And it wasn't until like, probably like a year or two ago, where I met someone who did like a similar career that I wanted to do. And it was very helpful because like, seeing them makes me believe, you know, I could do it too. You know, and also being Latina. Like, recently, like, you see more people of power becoming like different races, like Black, White, or Brown. Before it used to be many like White people, and now it's becoming more like diverse. And I like seeing that because it's like, you know, we could help support our people and help show that like they're capable of doing much more than what we're told that we can. Because I feel like we are limited of resources. And there's so many people that probably do have potential to, you know, do what they want to do. Reach their goals, but they're just not provided the things that they need in order to reach it. And I've been in like different like, studies or I've helped, like do research to find out how to help people in those areas. That's why like, I want to be in, you know, in computer science, but I like more like the project management type. Or I want to become like, some sort of tutor or something like I want to share my knowledge with like other people who don't have those resources, especially like younger generations, or even people who are like homeless. And that's why I wanted to, like, help them out. So they could, you know, get that resource that they lack.

Flor Carabez 25:44

I know you mentioned about your Latinidad a little bit, but do you want to add more?

Julio 25:49

More like in depth?

Flor Carabez 25:50

Yeah, if you want to?

Julio 25:54

Well, I feel like well, the main reason why it's so like, important, especially in teaching was again, like, not just me, but I've heard stories around like from other people where they don't see, like, especially a teacher, they don't see a teacher that looks like them until like way later. Like, for example, for me, growing up, like I did have Latina women, or just women in general, but I never really had a male teacher, and then even less a Latino, male teacher. So you know, just the fact that I grew up never like seeing myself in a teacher. And just, in general, like really made me think like, I can make a change or an impact if I become one, or if I like help contribute to help solve the problem, because again, I didn't see one until my second year of high school, and I've heard stories where people they don't see one until like college, which is even way later. So again, the whole reason why in teaching, it means a lot was because you don't see many, like even, like, for example, I'm in a program, like for teaching, it's called Golden Apple and I don't

like being in those meetings, I stand out a lot. Like, you know, mainly it's a bunch of ladies, maybe a few Latinos, but mainly like white, and you don't see any men or barely any. And then then a person of color, you know, black or brown, even less. So it's just one of those things where I got into it again, because it would mean a lot to students to see themselves in me. But it's also because I want to bring more representation to the field.

Flor Carabez 27:42

So with NLU being a commuter school, you don't stay on campus. Well, do either of you stay on campus? Okay. So do you feel like your Latinidad, because of la cultura, do you feel like it plays or it adds another layer to your experience as a student?

Julio 28:03

Can you elaborate more or like

Flor Carabez 28:05

so

Julio 28:06

rephrase it?

Flor Carabez 28:06

I've had past participants that have shared that parents don't understand that they're tired, because they have homework or that there's maybe, um, certain expectations because of their, their gender, and being Latinx. I don't know if any of that resonates with either of you. Or if your experiences are similar to maybe what your friends are going through, that might not be Latinx.

Vanessa 28:35

So for me, I am the oldest of three younger siblings. And I'm, um, from my younger sister, she's eight years apart from me, and then the rest are like younger than that. And so I've always been very independent, because my mom was a single mom. And she had raised me while she was really young, too. So it was hard, like, because she was trying to raise me the best she could. But I would also have to be very independent. Like she kind of treated me like as an adult in a way where I had to know how to do certain things. I had to do them. And that's why I feel like she had a lot of expectations for me, especially my grandma because she was a teacher. So she would always be like, Oh, you have to be prepared for next year. And that's why I always felt like I was ahead of everyone. But I felt so bored because like since I was so ahead, I had nothing else to do. And it was challenging for me as a kid because all you want to do is just play you know, and I believe I didn't really have that many friends. I was like the only kid for a while and my mom

would it, was so strict where she wouldn't let me go outside because she feels like something bad is gonna happen to me. So I felt like I was so isolated from the beginning, where, you know, as I grew up, I just felt like more and more expectations were put onto me because I had to take care of my younger siblings, and even so now I, like, get so tired with college, but my mom's a little more understanding. But I still feel like I have to take care of them. Like when I'm not at school, I feel like it's my responsibility. And like, even though she doesn't tell me that, like, Oh, you're supposed to do this, and that I feel like it's expected of me. And so it's hard, because, you know, I feel like I'm still living my teenage or young adult years, while being a semi mother of three. And it's very challenging, because, you know, I want to live my own life, but how is how am I going to separate that without my mom being like, Oh, you don't want to be with us anymore. And I feel like that's a challenge for many like, all, like, older sisters, or every, like daughter that's in, you know, in their family, I feel like they're always expected to be like the caring one, or they have to take care of the younger siblings, it's always expected of them because they're gonna potentially be a mother in the future. And so that's where like, I resonate with some people, because I sometimes do hear stories that they always like, have to take care of their siblings, or they have to be cooking and cleaning and making sure everything's maintained in the house. So I definitely understand that and I connect with other people who, you know, have the same story to me.

Flor Carabez 31:45

So do you have to cook and clean?

Vanessa 31:47

I occasionally, like have to cook, but sometimes my dad will. But if, I feel like if I sometimes don't cook, then there won't be food in the house. And so that's why I feel like I have to go buy something, or I have to provide when my mom can't. I also help my mom clean, because she's recently, she gets like very sick easily. And so I feel like I have to clean and help her whenever she needs help. Because you know, she's so young. But sometimes she scares me how sick she gets. So sometimes I do get worried, like, oh, that I have to take on that role. Like if she's not here.

Flor Carabez 32:30

Make sense.

Julio 32:32

And then for me, I think the same thing, like responsibility is a very big thing. Like, I'm the youngest. So I have, I just have a younger brother who I do have to take care of. But other than that, I have four older siblings, and I don't really interact with them, because they're not in the house. But the responsibilities that I do, like feel, is that I work for part time I work at a retail store. Because money has always been like an issue. It's always been like tight at the house. I was

like, I need to work just in case like if my parents ever need anything or my little brother. And again, obviously I have school. So I have like homework, whatever assignments I have. Then I have work. And then again, like if my little brother ever needs something, my parents ever need something, then I have to do it. Like if I need to clean if I need to, like just whatever they need, I have to be available. And sometimes it's stressful, because it's like, I have to balance everything. And I can't fall behind on anything. Because obviously if I don't go to work, I'm gonna lose my job. If I don't do well in school, I'm gonna get kicked out. And so that can sometimes get to me. And what's even worse is I remember like, my dad, I don't remember, specifically the whole situation because it was a while back. But it felt like he didn't appreciate me, or in the sense that he didn't he didn't fully realize how many responsibilities I have. And the sense that like, you know, again, I have to I have to go to school, I have to make sure I'm like on top of my stuff. And I have to make sure that I'm doing my best at work to not lost my job. And despite all of that sometimes it feels like to them I'm not responsible yet. And I'm not sure if if that's just because they don't fully understand what it means to be in college or they don't fully understand what it means to work and do college. I'm not sure like what it is specifically. But sometimes it does feel like I'm not an adult, or at least in their eyes. I'm not an adult yet. Like they still see me as like, oh a kid that you know is under your roof.

Flor Carabez 34:51

So what would you define an adult as

Julio 34:57

An adult, that's hard because to me, I guess an adult is just someone who like, I guess, despite the odds, they still try to do their best. And obviously, like age plays a role, like, well, actually, I don't think age can play a role. I feel like an adult, you can be an adult, even at like a really young age. Like, if you have all these responsibilities and you're able to maintain them, you're able to just like, keep going, I feel like you have what it takes to be an adult. And what sucks is obviously like I have I have encountered people in my life who Yeah, they're 20/30, whatever, but they don't act like adults. Like, you know. Like, I don't, I don't want to throw shade, obviously. But sometimes my older siblings, like, yeah, they're adults, they're older than me. But sometimes it's like, why are you acting like a child? Or why? Why aren't you doing what you're supposed to do? Like, for example. Like, like, just in general, like, they don't act the way they do, or they're just like, not supposed to. And sometimes it feels like, despite being the youngest one, I have to be the adult. And so it just sucks that, you know, they can't do what they're supposed to do. And yeah, I'm supposed to, I guess make up for it. In a way.

Flor Carabez 36:28

Did either of your older siblings go to college?

Julio 36:34

My, my older brother, he's going to college. And my three older sisters, they didn't go. But one of them is like going back to school like she's currently in, in I don't remember which Community College. I know she was at Daley, but then she moved to another one. But despite those two, the other two, no, they didn't go to college.

Flor Carabez 36:52

So did any of them finish? They're both still going the ones that are going.

Julio 36:57

Yeah, my older brother, he's going to be a junior.

Flor Carabez 37:00

Okay.

Julio 37:01

And then my oldest sister, I'm not sure exactly where she's like at yet. But yeah, they're still both going, they haven't finished yet.

Flor Carabez 37:10

Do you feel, and this is for both of you. I know you're siblings are like lightyears smaller. Do you feel like your parents create like a sibling rivalry, because you're in school, or like your quote unquote, on track since you went right after high school or during high school?

Vanessa 37:36

I feel like I kind of feel like my mom does place me like, you know, at a higher expectation of where she wants my siblings to be. I feel like she kind of tells them that she's given up on them. I don't know. I don't know. That sounds like, it sounds horrible. But it's because I how I was academically when I was younger. They're not at that level, if you know what I mean. But they need a lot more help and like tutoring and stuff. And my mom was like, you know, why can't you be like your sister, your sister didn't need my help. When in reality, you know, I probably needed so much help but I just never told her. And with my siblings, I help them. I try to explain to them how to do certain like, assignments. But my mom, she kind of like doesn't really provide them with that much, you know, resources in a way, where, like, she was always told me like, oh, you can't have C's or if you have B's, it's okay. But you know, you should get straight A's. The same thing with my siblings, like she always wants them to get A's or do really good. Now, she's been a little more lenient with my younger siblings, because she knows that sometimes we do have trouble with understanding certain concepts, which I like, but you know, she has to understand, you know, not everyone's good at, you know, all the subjects. Like even though I did like good

in school, I was never that good in English, because I always tell my sister how English doesn't have like one specific right answer. It's very flexible, where as long as you explain how you got to your conclusion, it will, you know, be right or wrong. But with math, it's more like, oh, it's only one answer. It has to be that one answer. If you don't find it, then you're completely wrong. And so I told my sister like, you know, just because you're not good in school doesn't mean you're like not gonna be good in life. You know, you could be good in different aspects. And I kind of don't like the way some schools teach their students because they're always Like, Oh, if you are a bad kid, or if you never arrive on time, or if you know you do all these things to prove your bad, then you're not going to be good in life. And I always hear stories where like, people are so bad in school where they don't think they're gonna do something good in a career. But in reality, they're able to get like a very successful job. And I told my sister that because I don't want her to believe that, since she's really bad in school, she's not going to succeed. And I told her, there's many ways you could still get a job. And that's why I like when there's certain careers that don't require education in order to be accepted. So yes, sometimes my mom does, like, raise expectations on them. But I tried to, to, what's like the word for, I try to reassure them, and I try to reassure them that, you know, even though they're not doing so well, that it's fine. We could get them help. I try to make them you know, I don't want to seem like the cocky, older sister. I'm very like caring for them. And yeah, sometimes we might fight or whatever, but I still want them to do better in life. Yeah.

For me, I love this question. With oldest sisters, Absolutely not, I don't feel like there was any rivalry like I mainly got along with them. Or I hardly saw them because my sisters even though they didn't go to college, they did like start working and stuff like that. So it'd be like an occasional like here and there where I'll see them. But for my older brother, absolutely. I know, when I was younger, in elementary school, I was horrible. In the sense of behavior, and schooling, I want to get C's DS, you know, almost so my parents absolutely would tell me like, why can't it be like your older brother, he was a straight A student for as long as I can remember. And so it definitely made me feel horrible, because it's like, why aren't I as good as him? You know, and I know definitely going into high school. Like, that's when I decided to flip it around. Like, I'm just like, hey, you know, like, why aren't you doing your best? You know, why don't you just start doing what you're supposed to be doing. And I did eventually become like a A & B, like, student. And now that I have my associate's degree, I technically graduated before my brother. So my brother, for example, he's technically a sophomore, and I'm a junior. So I'm ahead of him now. And in my head, you know, obviously, it feels good, because technically, I'm the one on top now, I'm the one that's gonna graduate sooner, I'm the one that's gonna get my masters and probably like my doctorate. And, like, I am happy in a way, or like, satisfied. But I'm also upset, or I guess, sad in the way that like, why did we have to be put against each other? Because like, admittedly, I did grow up like sort of despising him, even though it wasn't really his fault. Because again, like, they just put it in my head, like, you're not as good as him. Or you're worse than him. Like, why aren't you as, why can't you just like, be him? And it definitely made me like, not like him. Because again, like, why, why do they say all this? Why do they gloat about you so much, and what's so wrong with me? So I definitely felt like bad about myself. And I definitely felt like I wasn't as capable as him. But obviously now, I understand,

like, you know, we both have our talents we both have, we're both different people. You know, he can do whatever he wants to be successful, and I can be whatever I want and be successful, and I'm just happy like, now, my parents are finally like, okay, you know, like, like me, he's gonna go do off whatever he's gonna do, my other son is gonna do is gonna go off and do whatever he's gonna do. Like they're both are their own people. So that's what I'm happy about. And then with my younger brother, I don't think so I'm happy to say like, they're not as hard. As they were with me and my older brother. They're definitely well, first of all, he, he's a good student, like he gets good grades, and I'm happy like he behaves. So he's the complete opposite of me. He was more like my older brother in the younger years, and I hope he continues that way. But I am happy to see that my parents aren't like, Oh, why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? They're more like, yeah, like you're doing great. Like, keep going.

Flor Carabez 44:47

Why? Well, first question, were you doing your best back then when you weren't getting the straight A's?

Julio 44:58

Admittedly, no. But this was because, I really can't tell you why. Like, I think I was just being a kid. Like I didn't care about school, I more or less just wanted to go to school to see my friends or to just goof off as opposed to doing my like homework and stuff like that. So it was a sense of

like, oh, it was technically my fault. You know, like, it was all on me. And I can admit that it was on me like, I should have done my best I should have actually like cared more in that sense. So that's why like, back then, it feels better knowing that it was my fault, as opposed to like, Oh, I thought I was doing my best yet, I keep failing in that way. But then that's why when I got to high school and stuff like that, I realized like, Oh, when I do my best, I'm as capable if not more capable than my older brother.

Vanessa 45:52

Can I add something?

Vanessa 45:53

I just, like, I feel like there's also rivalry between, like, your cousin's too, in a way. Because I know my grandma. Like she'll like tell everybody like our business. She goes to like her friends. Oh, did you hear my granddaughter already got her associate's? And she's only 18. Or she'll, like tell everybody like people that she probably don't even know or, like, knows for a while. And it's like, why do you do this? And then like, I remember when I was getting my, like, I was graduating. I had like, a big party. And I don't know, I'm not the person that likes to, you know, be praised so much. Yeah, I don't like when people gloat about like my accomplishments because it makes me feel like some type of way if on how other peoples might feel. Because at the time, I think one of my cousin's she was barely getting. It was her first year of college.

Flor Carabez 45:53

Yeah.

Flor Carabez 46:55

Yeah,

Vanessa 46:55

Another one, she was finishing her associates at the time, too. And they're like two, um one or two years older than me. And I don't know if like they feel some type of way because like, they would always be like, Oh my gosh, like, she got her associate's. Why can't you do or um, I remember one time my Tia she told me like, Oh I remember when I went to college, I wasn't really good at school. And then she said how she wants her daughter's to go to college, too. But like, she knows that some of them aren't good at school. And I'm like, Oh, that's okay. Why are you telling me this? You know, I felt uncomfortable. And that's why like, for me, I don't like when, you know. I'm gonna be proud of my accomplishments. But when other people say and like, bring others down negatively. That's where I'm like, you know, that's the line. I don't like, making other people feel less than, you know?

Flor Carabez 47:55

Las tias, well in your case, la abuela. But las tias toxicas are a thing. you're so you're you said your grandma was a teacher, or

Vanessa 48:06

Yes, she is a teacher. But she teaches, before she used to do. What's, umm, special ed? And then she was like, sub substitute or she would be walking around the school, but it was meant mainly Elementary, like, pre K through fifth grade. But now she's mainly a preschool teacher.

Flor Carabez 48:25

Is it here?

Vanessa 48:26

No, not here. It's it's a school and Little Village.

Flor Carabez 48:31

Okay. Well, I meant like in the US.

Vanessa 48:34

Oh, yes. Yes.

Flor Carabez 48:35

Did she get her education in the US?

Vanessa 48:37

She actually went back to school, trying to get like some more education to get certified. But she had to stop her classes because she said it was too overwhelming for her. Because she's already like, at an older age, and for her to do it virtually. And then to have work. And so she the way that they teach math now is very different than it was back then. And she would always tell me, like, Oh can you show me how to do this? She was she's she always saw me as like, very smart. And so like, whenever I bring up any issues that I have, she's like, why if you're so smart, and just like that doesn't matter. Like I could still be stressed I still have anxiety and stuff. It doesn't matter if I'm smart. And that's where like she needs to still like remember that. Um, I try telling her like you know, just because I'm you know, very good in school doesn't mean that I'm good at everything but but yeah, it's even with like my education or like minor things. She's She tells everyone like, Oh, my granddaughter does this. She's so good at this. Or she always tell me like

you're so smart or you're this and that and this like, those are to me they kind of not feel like backhanded compliments, but it's like a compliment but I I don't really want to receive I don't know how to explain it.

Flor Carabez 49:28

It kind of adds a layer of pressure.

Vanessa 50:04

Yeah, it's like, oh, if I if I don't answer, like smart, then what is she gonna think of me? You know? So.

Flor Carabez 50:12

Should, umm. So she went to college in the US?

Vanessa 50:16

Yeah, she went like for a little probably, like, a semester or two maybe max, maybe like a year. And then she stopped. Because she's a teacher. It's because back she would volunteer at the school back then. And back then you didn't really need a cert, like a license or whatever. She

worked. She helped volunteer at the school for a while. And then she went into special education. She did her like, what was it? Like?

Flor Carabez 50:50

It's like a certificate?

Vanessa 50:52

No. One of my tias is a daycare. She does a daycare. So she helped observe and assist her. And so she kind of got like most of her experience from that. So she was teaching so she's eligible to still teach. But they told her that she would need at least to get like, a more certified and education. And she did. But she got what she was supposed to. But they told her if she wants to keep going. And she said that she didn't really want to because it's really difficult for her. But yes, she's able to still teach at school and stuff.

Flor Carabez 51:27

But yet here she has all these expectations for you.

Vanessa 51:30

Yeah.

Julio 51:30

Right.

Flor Carabez 51:32

Do you have cousin rivalry?

Julio 51:36

Cousin rivalry? I don't think so. Because well, first of all, I don't really have many cousins that are my age. Most of them are either younger or older. So there isn't anyone that I can, I guess, like directly compete with like with my brother. But most of my cousins, either didn't go to school, or are just working like, Well, I do have a cousin that's currently at UIC. And he is like studying to like have a career. But like in that same family, those other two cousins. They're just working. They didn't go to college as far as I can recall. And then the ones younger than me well they're younger than me, obviously, they're still like going, like through high school and stuff like that. But yeah, so I don't really have cousins, it was mainly just my older brother and I growing up.

Flor Carabez 52:28

Do either of your parents do this thing where they'll they try to show you off? Like oh mi hija esta haciendo this, or mi hijo esta haciendo that? or?

Julio 52:43

I'm not sure because they might not do it in front of me, if that makes sense. Because I know absolutely. For my older brother cuz the thing about my older brother, the whole reason why he was so gloated about a lot was one, he was a straight A student, he was a good student. He was like at the honors program at the school, too. And he's also really good at instruments like he he taught himself how to play five instruments. Yeah, so he, he, like, built himself up. And he became really good at music and all that. So you know, obviously, doing something that's so great or so like, amazing. My parents would gloat about him all the time, and I would hear it, because sometimes they'll do it in front of me. For me, I think they gloat about me now just because again, I have my associate's degree already and I got it early. But other than that, I don't think they gloat about me becoming a teacher. I think I only heard it one time where my mom did say like, I will start teaching soon because I'm ahead, but other than that, I don't think I've heard them say like, oh, yeah, my son is going to study to become a teacher. I don't think I've heard them say that before.

Flor Carabez 52:49

Do you think that would be different if you were studying something else?

Julio 54:07

Absolutely. Like again, if I became a physical therapist, I feel like they would tell everybody.

Flor Carabez 54:14

Because you'd be Doctor.

Julio 54:15

Yeah, I'd be a doctor. But since I'm a teacher, you know, like again, I could be wrong, but just like from what I've heard from like being around their conversations No, I don't think I've heard them like glat about me becoming a teacher.

Flor Carabez 54:33

What about you other than your abuelita?

Vanessa 54:35

My mom, I'm kind of glad my mom she isn't like that she's she's very more reserved, especially like with other people. She isn't really tell other people her business. So me and her like the same. We don't like you know, making it very vocal. The most that she'll do she like, she has my degrees like up on, like, a shelf and stuff. And that's like how I'm like, Oh, she's proud of me. No. But my grandma on the other hand, no, she's very, like telling everyone and stuff. And it's like, oh, thank you, but it's like, I don't like that type of attention. Like with people I'm familiar with, like my family, I'm okay with it. But when it's people I don't know, it's like, why is someone telling me like, Oh, congratulations, when I don't know who they are. So, um, yeah, my grandma's very much like that. Some of my tias are like that, too. But they're not as extra.

Flor Carabez 55:39

Do you see it genuinely? Like, do they congratulate you genuinely? Or is it.

Vanessa 55:45

Yeah, no, they do. I think they're, like, very proud of me too. Yeah, I don't know. Cuz I've always been like, very distant from my cousins. I don't really see my cousins often, especially when we were younger, they would always hang out with themselves, like as a group and I would be like, the one isolated. So when they see me, I feel like they're like, oh, you know, you're gonna do something so good, especially in technology. And the tia I told you that her

daughter's she would like them to go to college. On the one that's a year older than me. She's, I think, gonna complete her associate's, like this summer or this year. She's doing the same major as me.

Flor Carabez 56:32

Oh, nice.

Flor Carabez 56:32

Oh, you gotta love your family. Right?. Alright, so changing gears a little bit. Did Do either of you know what a Hispanic serving institution is?

Vanessa 56:32

So, um, I feel like, one time she did tell me like, Oh, if my daughter needs help, can you help her? I'm like, Yeah, I'm completely down for it. Yeah, so tias they tell me that they're like, happy for me and everything. One of them she's, she's very, like vocal about stuff, too. She she would always tell me stuff about like her brothers, because she has two younger brothers. But they like went to college. One of them dropped out the other one. I don't know if he's still going. But she would always tell me like, Oh, that's good. Like, you're a woman, you're going to college. You're you know, being your own boss. And then she like, talks, you know, smack about her brother.

She's like, can you believe it like, my brothers are like, men are supposed to be the man of the house and this and that. And they're not doing what they're supposed to do. And it's like, okay, you need to like calm down, you know? Like, you shouldn't be telling me this type of stuff. But yeah, I feel like my other tias are happy for me.

Julio 57:51

I mean, you know, dissecting the word Hispanic Serving Institution, I'd assume is just like, specifically tailored to Hispanics to help them more like to provide them with resources.

Flor Carabez 58:05

Good assumption. Did either of you know prior to coming to NLU that we were a Hispanic Serving Institution?

Julio 58:18

Yeah, remember? Yeah, I mean, like, I would remember, like, they'd bring up like the programs and stuff like that. Yeah.

Vanessa 58:27

Oh, yeah. That's true. They had different what's it called? Those things?

Flor Carabez 58:35

Oh, organizations.

Vanessa 58:37

Yeah, they had different like clubs or whatever.

Flor Carabez 58:39

Okay.

Vanessa 58:39

For like, Latinos. Yeah.

Flor Carabez 58:41

So did that sway? Did that influence your decision to come here? Given the major that you were pursuing?

Vanessa 58:51

I think it did. I feel like well, I based it off of what I would like in a college like, I wouldn't want to go to a huge College. I'd rather have something that's more small that I know I would get the resources I'm, I need in order to be successful in the future. That's what my focus is mainly on. I was a little scared, like going to, you know, a different state, mainly because, you know, there might be different people, different cultures and races. And that's like culture shock to me, because it's like, I always been around. Latinos, mainly, maybe like a few African American people. But it's always been like that, Latinos. So if I were to be in a group of like, a bunch of, you know, Asians or White people, I would be like, Oh, I don't know where I belong. I feel like secluded because especially like, if they don't do as much events like NLU does they do it to include everyone. And that's what I like. But other schools, I don't think they really do that. And so I'm, I might have been exposed to a lot of other things that make me uneasy. But yeah, it didn't make sway my decision coming here.

Julio 1:00:15

Sort of the same, I really just focused on making sure that our school had my major, you know, the money wasn't too much they had the resources. But again, sort of similarly, like, even though

I didn't consciously, like focused on it coming here, it does feel good knowing like, all my people are here, you know, there are representative, there is representation, there is like an effort to make sure like people feel welcomed. So that's something that I can definitely appreciate, like being here now. Before. No,

Flor Carabez 1:00:48

gotcha. So the Hispanic serving institution is a designation. So it's like a label, right. And it comes from the Department of Education. So the Department of Education will give colleges and universities this label that also comes with some money, because that institution has at least 25% Hispanic enrollment that are full time in the undergraduate college. So once the universities received this funding, then they use it for programming resources for the entire institution. Every year, the institution has to reapply for the designation, so it's not guaranteed for life, you got to do it every year. Do you feel like now that you know what it is? Do you feel like that designation has influenced your experience as a CSIS major or as an education major?

Flor Carabez 1:01:53

Yeah, take your time.

Julio 1:01:54

Right. So when you mean like influencing my major, like, what specifically or like how?

Flor Carabez 1:02:05

Like, if we didn't have it? Would it have made a difference? Now that you know that we do have it? Does it make a difference?

Julio 1:02:14

I'm not sure mainly because I don't really know, like, what it looks like to have that label, like what it brings, however, like, I have met wonderful people here that are again, like Latino, or like Hispanic that are in my field. And it feels wonderful talking to them, obviously, because not only am I talking to a professor or someone that has experience with teaching, but again, they're also like my people, you know, I can I feel comfortable going up to them and asking any questions that are like, beyond education, like if I have any personal questions, like for example, how did you feel like becoming a teacher, while also being like Black or Brown? So definitely having that like, personal connection, like made me feel more reassured.

Vanessa 1:02:59

I think it's helped a lot. Because, you know, I'll be in my CIS classes. And I'll get along with some people, you know, that are I made a friend actually recently. And she's Latina, too. And

sometimes, like, we'll talk about Oh like, what, where we went to school, or like, just any background that happened in our day, right? And sometimes, like, she'll tell me something in Spanish, and it's like, good to have like that, you know, flexibility, because, you know, you could talk to someone in English, but like, I feel like when you talk to someone in another language, like, especially like, your native language, you're able to connect to them on a deeper level. And sometimes, you know, there's some teachers or, what are they like? What are they called from Braven?

Flor Carabez 1:04:12

Like the coaches?

Vanessa 1:04:13

Yeah, like coaches will make some jokes in Spanish, or they just know because it's like from our culture. And so I feel like that does help provide more like vulnerability. And that's what I like, because if I were to, you know, go outside, you know, there's a lot of different people around, but if there's music playing like at a Sears or something and it's like, like salsa music or something, you could tell like you connect, you connect with someone because of the way you know, they're grooving or jamming or something. So it does help like, bring the community together.

Flor Carabez 1:04:55

Before today, had anyone asked either of you to share your story, whether that be about your life or specifically about being a student, or specifically about your experience at NLU?

Vanessa 1:05:11

Yeah, I think so. Um like for the undergraduate Honor Society.

Flor Carabez 1:05:16

okay.

Vanessa 1:05:17

Um also when I'm doing like interviews for like jobs or like applications and stuff, also at Braven. They mainly focus on Oh, you have to understand who you are, where you came from, what your strengths are, what makes you so you can identify yourself and separate yourself from other people. So yeah, that that's mainly the, you know, times I've done.

Julio 1:05:47

Yeah, the exact same. We were both in a Braven class. Are you familiar with the class?

Flor Carabez 1:05:52

Yeah.

Julio 1:05:52

Okay. Yeah. So there they have a very big thing on like, telling your story. So definitely, like, we have had some practice being like, oh, yeah, like, you know, being Latino, Latina, and then what it means to, like, carry that title with us.

Flor Carabez 1:06:09

And what essential items do you want folks to take away from the experiences that you've shared today?

Julio 1:06:22

What I would say is just like, don't forget who you are, obviously, like, I know, well, don't forget who you are. And even though like, it is tough, like, for example, again, like, you know, admittedly, like it hurt, like, so much having those conversations with my parents and not being

supported, sort of being diminished throughout my life being told that I'm not as good as someone. And then, you know, being in a career getting into a career where people don't really look like me, it could all be very overwhelming, heartbreaking, and whatnot. But I'm so happy that I'm Latino, like, you know, if I could go back, and let's say, I could just somehow erase those conversations, like have smoother, easier conversations or pick a different field where the majority is Latinos, and males, I would have probably not done that, mainly because I wouldn't be who I am now. Like, without it without the hardships.

Vanessa 1:07:20

So some, like key takeaways, I would say is like, obviously go for opportunities that you think would help you or benefit you in the future. Also, to not really listen to what other people tell you, because it's your life, it's how you're going to live it. It's how, what makes you happy and what you see yourself doing, rather than what other people want to see you do. Because if you're not gonna be happy in like your career, then why are you doing it at that point, you're gonna be miserable every day. And so that's why you got to find something, even if it's like a give and take like, there's some things that you love. Some things you don't like, but it's it has to be something that you're willing to do.

Flor Carabez 1:08:10

Do? Do you both feel currently supported by your parents?

Vanessa 1:08:17

I think my mom supports me she. Once I got my Associates, she was already like, you know, she's been happy and proud of me. She doesn't tell me she does. She's not the person that tells me like, oh, you need to do more you need to do more. She's, umm that's what I love. Because I honestly thought she would always tell me like, oh, you need to do better you need to do better but she's not the person that tells me that there's other people. That's why it's like, my mom knows who I am. She's seen me grow up. So for her to finally accept me and finally, like, be happy with what I'm doing. It makes me feel accomplished. That's why when other people tell me who don't know me and say like, why don't you do more? It's like, well, you don't know what I'm what I've already done. You know?

Julio 1:09:05

Yeah, I definitely feel more supported. Like again, like my parents telling them like all like, this is why I'm gonna become a teacher. This is what it would mean to not only me, but my future students. They're more like, okay, yeah, like that sounds like a good career a good reason to do it.

Flor Carabez 1:09:19

How What does support look like from your parents?

Vanessa 1:09:27

You see, like, my mom, she's not like, she won't show you that. She won't tell you or show affection. But she cracks a lot of jokes. So when she's able to joke with me or she's able to be vulnerable sometimes she'll tell me like thank you for doing this or thank you for helping me and I've recently noticed she she used to be super like angry and grumpy now she's more like, laid back and chill which I like. And whenever I don't go to school, she's always like, Oh, do you want to go somewhere? Let's go hang out. And she wants to spend more time with me. And so that's where I'm like, Oh, she is supporting me.

Julio 1:10:11

Yeah, the same way my parents aren't like, oh, like, let me hug you like the type of parents like, occasionally, obviously, they will. Or they will say, like, blatantly like, I love you and stuff like that. But even when they don't, you know, they deal with me. Really, you know, like, you know, they bring me to school, sometimes they take me to work, they pick me up and stuff like that. And just in general, like, if I ever need anything, like, I do count on them to like, help me whatever it may be, like, financially, like, obviously, before I had a job, they would like, give me money, like to take the train, and stuff or even to eat. But then now even though like I can support myself now financially, and you know, I could drive whenever like I could or when I want. I do know, like, if I were to ask them, they would 100% Like will help me.

Flor Carabez 1:11:03

You get those two hugs for the year Christmas and New Year.

Julio 1:11:08

And birthday.

Flor Carabez 1:11:09

And birthday. All right, and what haven't I asked you that you think I should know?

Julio 1:11:21

Like, anything?

Flor Carabez 1:11:23

Anything.

Julio 1:11:24

I think well, you did great. First of all, I think definitely an emphasis, like, on gender, because I feel like being a Latino male and being a Latino woman. Like those two are very different. And I didn't really talk about much about what it's like, being a Latino man, specifically, but yeah, absolutely. Just like the emphasis on like, yeah, like Latino as a whole. But what does it mean? To be like a man like how in your family? Do they perceive you as a man? And when Aren't you one? And the same thing? Like, as a woman? Like, when do they see you as like, Oh, you're reaching your womanhood? You're actually being an adult woman as opposed to like, on are you still like a girl?

Julio 1:11:24

okay.

Vanessa 1:12:14

Yeah, I feel like bouncing off the idea. It's very, it's funny, because he's doing something that you know, you see most women doing and I'm doing something that you see most men doing. And so it's funny how like, we like switch our careers. And I feel like yeah, an emphasis on how

Flor Carabez 1:12:39

your gender role?

Vanessa 1:12:40

Yeah, but wait sorry I was elaborating more, but I forgot.

Vanessa 1:12:49

So how, oh my God I'm trying to remember. Um how Yeah, women shouldn't always be like the stay at home mom, or like a caring, they could always be like, you know, the manager, they could always be like, the business woman. And men can, you know, be caring, they could be at the house if they want to. They could be more caring. Because yeah, men are viewed as more like, oh, you need to take charge. You're the leader of the House, and not really seen as a caring caregiver. And women are like, Oh, they always have to be at the house. They always have to be very caring and supportive and have kids and stuff. Well, you know, that doesn't always happen. Sometimes women want to, you know, do their own thing in life. Sometimes men they want to be Yeah, maybe like a stay at home dad or something.

Julio 1:13:39

And then the only like, last thing I think, unless you have anything else. The other last thing would be like if we ever been stripped, like from our Latino or Latina,

Flor Carabez 1:13:50

Latinidad?

Julio 1:13:50

Yeah, cuz I know for sure. Like, I obviously have, like, I'm happy that I've never felt like, I guess questioned. But I know like, obviously, some people they might grow up feeling like they're not Latino. Like whether it be maybe a language barrier. Like obviously, some people do grow up, not speaking Spanish or whatever language it is. And sometimes they might feel like, Oh, I can't speak the language, how am I Latino or how am I this? And yeah, I feel like or maybe outside forces. Like for example, again, I'm gonna be a teacher. I'm gonna be surrounded mainly by people that don't look like me. And I might feel like, like, damn, like, like, I feel like I'm not I can't be like, who I want to be. Because again, like I'm not with with my people, essentially.

Vanessa 1:14:36

I felt that sometimes I contradict myself, because it's like, oh, I'm Latina. But I was never raised really speaking Spanish at the house like everyone would speak Spanish around me, but they never taught me how to speak Spanish. They were never like, Oh you need to speak like this at home. They would always, um, my great grandparents would always try to understand me, and I

understood them, but they were never like, oh, no, you need to speak Spanish to us or anything. They wouldn't reinforce that. So once I grew up, it's like, I know I understand Spanish, but to speak it, it's sometimes hard. And so that's why sometimes I'm like, Am I really considered Latina? If I can't really speak it, you know? I've gotten better though. So that's good.

Flor Carabez 1:15:23

You practice?

Vanessa 1:15:24

I practice. Yes.

Flor Carabez 1:15:26

All right. Anything else? Okay, well, thank you both.

Julio 1:15:32

Absolutely

Appendix F: IRB Approval

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122 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60603-6162www.nlu.edu
P/F 312.261.3121

March 8, 2023

Flor E. Carabez

Dear Flor E. Carabez:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has received your application for your research study "*Dreams Deterred: A phenomenological study on Latinx Undergraduate students choosing their academic majors*". IRB has noted that your application is complete and that your study has been approved by your primary advisor and an IRB representative. Your application has been filed as Exempt in the Office of the Provost.

IRB: ER01225

Please note that the approval for your study is for one year, from **2-Mar-2023** to **2-Mar-2024**.

As you carry out your research, you must report any adverse events or reactions to the IRB. At the end of your approved year, please inform the IRB in writing of the status of the study (i.e., complete, continuing). During this time, if your study changes in ways that impact human participants differently or more significantly than indicated in the current application, please submit a Change of Research Study form to the IRB, which may be found on NLU's IRB website.

All good wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Shaunti Knauth, Ph.D.
Chair, IRB