

Speaker 1:

Hello, my friends. I hope you, and your loved ones are doing well. Welcome back to part two of a fly story, Barnard and Columbia edition. So I guess continuing the narrative, because that's exactly what we're doing. We heard from last episode, just a little bit of the background is when it comes to defining or how people define being fly and what that means to them. I think in this part, we're going to just focus on continuing that narrative, the nuances of the crevices of what a fly student or how a fly student defines being fly and what that means for different people and individuals. The first question that I have is when was the first time you heard the word fly? How nuance was the actual label?

Speaker 2:

Um, I think the first time was in college. I don't remember when, um, it was like a little bit before I started applying for colleges, but I was, when I heard the term, I was confused. Like, I was like, well, I know I'm low income, but what is like first gen II? And I guess then it made sense when they were like, Oh, your parents didn't go to college. So I was like, Oh yeah, that's like me, I guess like, most people didn't really use fly. It was just like, Oh, you're first-generation and you're low. And, or you're low income. Like, it was definitely separate, like, I guess, like I never really thought about like the overlap between the two, even though I was in both. Um, like I D I do identify as both, I guess, like, most people didn't really talk about being low income in high school.

Speaker 2:

And a lot of people in my high school are low income, but I don't know why people are, we're really ashamed of it. So I was like in the same boat where I was like, Oh, I'm not going to talk about it. But something that I'm really grateful for as like, as I've just like grown, is that I've become to embrace it and appreciate it. Because even if you start off and you're born low income, that doesn't mean you're gonna die and like finish off. Like, low-income like, there's a lot of things that you can do and work on. And like, that's something that like a college education provides you the opportunity to just like, I guess, like move up the scale, whatever. But first-generation like, I'll always be first generation because my parents, they, like, they didn't go to college. Like, and so, yeah, even though in high school, I was really like, I didn't really fully accept it.

Speaker 2:

Like just the low-income part. Um, I have like been able to accept it and like, I'm not ashamed. And like, I really embrace in, like, there are other people that like, can embrace this identity with me and talk about it openly. I think we're going to like my public boarding school before and just like feeling so it was a really small community and I didn't feel like being a fly student was like interfering with my experience there. Like, I didn't feel like that was one of my main focuses within my identity. Like, it was just kind of something that I could deal with when I went home. Um, because I had free food there. I had free housing, I had free, like, I could literally just do what I needed to do. And like, I still like, had to worry about my family and like pay for my dance classes on my own by like doing work study stuff.

Speaker 2:

But that was like, it, it didn't feel as big as it does at Barnard, but I just assumed because that was my residential kind of schooling experience. I'd be like, Oh, college is going to be, and then when I got to college, we had the fly or like pre-orientation and they were like, so y'all are going to go through some. I was like, they were like, it's going to be really hard. This is why you all, this is why you need all these resources. Like it's not easy. But also the other thing was when they say fly, they don't just mean low-

income students. They mean first gen students, and you can be either or, and so I was meeting a lot of people who identified as fly, but we're of like a very different class than I was. And even people who were within low income bracket at partner, but because it's so it's, it's a very wide margin. So if, if I'm here and someone's over here, we do not have the same experiences, but we still have the same generalized identity. So that's when something I'm really frustrated with, with the school. Cause I feel like it's not the same thing and they're definitely conflated the terms like first gen and then low income because they have really different experiences that go with it.

Speaker 3:

So this question really much starts at the, at my middle school and high school experience just because I went to a college preparatory school that for seven years of my, you know, primary school experience or whatever you call that, I was told that I was going to be prepared to sit next to students at schools like Barnard and Columbia and that with their different disciplinary ways of teaching. And um, longer days that we had that all of this stuff was gonna, you know, close the gaps that needed to be closed, to prepare us to sit in those seats. Um, and due to tracking, I realized that I don't know, within a few months of my time at, in sixth grade, I had created a reputation for myself that I would probably end up at a school like Barnard, whether I knew it or not, because that reputation, that reputation and that tracking follows you throughout your entire time there.

Speaker 3:

So once I got to Barnard, I thought that I was going to, you know, everything was going to be okay. Like I had been prepared. I had, you know, I had learned everything. I had went to every extra office hours that I was told to do, you know, like all of these things were ingrained in me and then I get to college and I'm like, hold on, wait, this is not the same thing. Like, this is rigorous quote unquote rigorous form of schooling that I had at my public free charter school. That all these people, all these teachers who had like a long legacy of like college in their families, et cetera, et cetera, they, um, they told me like, yeah, college is going to be the best experience. Like I loved it so much for me. Um, you're going to be so prepared. We've done all of these things.

Speaker 3:

And then I get there and I'm like, hold on, wait, how these girls, how these people get in A's on their psychology tests. Like, what are they doing? Like, what am I missing? I'm sitting in the classroom, I'm doing my readings. Like what's missing here. How, how are these girls? Are the people that I'm sitting next to like yelling out after we get the exam, like, Oh, I got an, a era and I'm looking at myself, my tests and I'm like, I'm having a, but like I'm, I'm doing exactly what I was doing in high school. Um, so I'm like, what's the difference? Like, what am I missing here? And it took me the entire fall semester to realize that well, which isn't even that long. I, I I'm happy that it only took me the fall semester, but it took me to fall semester to realize that like these gaps, these opportunity gaps are real, like they're serious and they have consequences.

Speaker 3:

And there's absolutely nothing that democracy prep as a free public charter school could have done. Like within that framing, what they could have done to separate the gaps that they were promising me, that they were closing. And I think that a lot of their lack or their like their ignorance, not in a negative way, but their ignorance on their inability to close these gaps is due to the fact that it's a new school, um, that these charter schools are brand new. And they're like, literally we're Guinea pigs. Like quite

literally, like they're trying stuff. And then they're seeing what happens. And there wasn't much of a sample to pull from to see, okay, what happens after these kids leave the school, either that, or they weren't telling us it because, you know, that's a whole nother thing. They want to get us here. So that was that.

Speaker 3:

So that's why I speak about my first-year experience as like, very much like, just so many revelations about how this entire structure really works, like how it really goes down and which is also how I crafted my definition of FLI and why I decided to fall into that bracket for me. Because again, like my mom had went to college and my mom, like I saw her do it. Like I was there with her while she was experiencing it. Um, while she was sitting down taking hours to write essays and I'm like doing the same length essays in like less time. And I'm like, what's taking you so long. Like what's up with that. And then I get to college and like, all, like, this is not the same. Like nobody told me that this is as different as it is. So yeah, that is definitely how it comes. I think in order to talk about my freshman year experience, I really have to think about middle school and high school and the kind of school that I went to and what they told me they were doing for me and how that actually translated into like, not nothing, but like, it just, wasn't what they wanted it to be.

Speaker 1:

Hmm. Opportunity gaps are real. This is not the same thing, you know, is college the best experience you had? These are questions that are running through my mind as I listened to individuals, which is spoken. And can you talk about your transition into college and your experience while you were on campus?

Speaker 3:

For me, like, I'm like a P student. So basically like my transition from the summer Opie session to a classroom that, you know, I think I felt that people have like the fly identity and also other identities, like who look like me and who are different. Um, kind of like, I was like comfortable in that space in the summer. And then like going into a classroom with people who don't necessarily look like me. And I think also like reflecting back on this, I think what made me like feel uncomfortable was like the discourse that I should be uncomfortable in this space and sort of that like projection of, well, this is how you're supposed to feel when you're in this place. That's not meant for you. You know? And I think it's useful to give like fly students that tech, or like, it was useful for me to know that like, this place is not built for me, but sometimes it allows you to perpetuate like the stereotypes of like what this place should be. So I was already coming into the classroom, what these assumptions about people I really came in with this defense mode already of my identity. That's not to say that like, you know, like I don't feel uncomfortable for a particular reason because I feel like there are some specific, you know, instances where it wasn't just because I was the only person of color in the classroom.

Speaker 3:

Yeah. I do

Speaker 2:

Think that going to the pre-orientation was helpful in some ways. Um, it connected me with some of my good friends and people to share my experience with and also have solidarity with. Um, I think that like my experience with it was they were telling me that I was going to have a really hard time. And they

were telling me that I needed all these resources, but it could be done if you hard work and grit and accessing all these resources and using all your time to use all these resources will help you succeed. And I was just like, yes, I'm glad they had that for me to like, come to if I wanted to. But I went through the rest of my semester going into each class and being like, okay, this is why this is going to happen. Like, I'm just gonna, this is going to happen to me.

Speaker 2:

And I'm just going to have to deal with it. And this is why this is happening. This is, and just like constantly have that in the mindset of my entire presence here on campus. Like that was the first thing I heard when I got to campus it wasn't like, hi, welcome to Barnard. We're so excited because you're so smart and hardworking and we want you to be here. It was like, hi, welcome to Barnard. Y'all are gonna have a time. I know that's not what they intended. And I I'm nervous to say that almost because I know they did put a lot of work into it. And I am grateful for a lot of different parts of it. Even just meeting all the deans and things like that. But I do think that a lot of it made me just like pessimistic about me being a Barnard.

Speaker 2:

And just like, I'm like, if the faculty is telling me I'm going to have a hard time better, no, I'm going to be having a hard time. And like I said, I, I really think that the intention is so good. And I think it's something for representation and it's something for community for fly students, which is so huge and I'm glad they have it. But I do think that the program could be improved in a way that helps students maybe include students like own stories more rather than like you said, generalizing under one story, like, you'll, you all are going to experience this, but like hearing students' stories because it's a two way thing. Sure. I can understand the resources they have for me, but how are they going to know what I need as an individual if they don't hear my story. So like, I'm, I wish that there was more dialogue and more time for me to share my ex I don't even talk, I don't, I never talked about my experience once I was just listening to like lectures about the resources they have, which is amazing. And I'm glad the resources that resources exist, but I would've loved to share my experience with other people at my table and the Dean, because then I would have felt actually supported and heard.

Speaker 4:

Well, I definitely remember when Oop did not have book grants every semester for students. Um, it was just your first year or first year, first semester, which I was like, that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard, but, um, I felt like that was just such a horrible resource. Cause I'm like, how are you going to let us rely on a resource for one semester then be like, Nope, get off your training rules, like time to just ride your bike with no like support, which I'm like, how like this is so Tom, I was like, this is stupid. And like, I mean, now they finally do that, like book stipend for every semester. But another thing that also kind of irks me is like how much advocacy came from the students for them to do that. And no acknowledgement of that. Like at all whatsoever, like I remember going into the office and constantly complaining I'm would be like, you have no resources.

Speaker 4:

Like when are you going to give us like books for all semesters? And they just kind of just did it and like, just didn't acknowledge anyone's work or effort into like talking to them and like being gas lit by them constantly about it, which kind of like infuriates me. But at the end of the day, I guess, like, I'm really happy that the resources are there now. But another thing that I just don't like about Barnard, like every

resource I have is, does exist for questions. You have to go and ask for like, if not just easily requestable or like just, just stare for students, you know what I mean? Like you're expected to go advocate for yourself and go argue with someone or go ask someone in person and like basically reveal yourself, which I don't think there's any shame in like saying you're poor and fly, but like, it really just like leaves the space for someone to totally just dismiss you.

Speaker 4:

Like, for example, the medical, uh, grant that's offered for Fermin an and for the health services, like you could get help with paying copayments. Like that's not something that's well advertised, first of all. But also you had to go and ask the director of, um, like the health services for that. Like, you have to ask someone, you can't just like request it online or even just automatically be assigned in some way that grant, because of like your identity or like whatever. And I think that leaves a lot of like space for students to not go and ask because they think it is a difficult thing to ask. And I think as far as students, we were, we grew up like kind of being told you are super strong and you could do things on your own and you shouldn't ask for help. And so it's already hard for us to ask for help.

Speaker 4:

And then you put us in a situation where it's like, the only way you could get help is to ask for help, which even though knowing that that's the difficult thing for us to do, which I'm like, how is that productive? Like, like how has that productive? So I guess, like, that's what I'm talking about. When I think about it, it's like a, more of a systemic thing in the way that they decide to run resources and the way they decide to advertise resources, which is very poorly done. And like just the way that they give too much power to certain specific people to determine like whether you could get help or not. And the worst part is you definitely don't even find out about these resources until you're an upperclassmen, which I'm like, I think as an underclassman, like you really like are just lost SU so long

Speaker 2:

During an ESOP. Um, the orientation, one thing that I noticed what off the bat was the way how I talk the way, how I, um, elaborate that we have to communicate with other folks. It was a bit weird because growing up in your city, you know, we have near explaining that now, you know, is, is a Veeam. Um, but there's some means of communication that isn't very rigid. Isn't like talking like, Oh, the sorts of society that we live in is Scott, Scott, Scott, Scott, Scott, like very robotic, very elitist sort of like language that, you know, it's only spokes, you know, say like, I'm not going to name names, but you know, there are some people during orientation. I was like, okay, I'm just going to put that in my head to not talk to those people or not get on their bad side because like what's going on.

Speaker 2:

Um, and, um, and then, but then I also met like some, what you would consider to be flies and during the, um, the multicultural affairs, um, meeting for the free shares. So funny thing, one thing that, that the first thing that is, um, alienated me and when I seven to Columbia was that, um, I'm a transfer student was applied. So for Columbia, when they were doing and stuff and all the orientation, they were putting along their sources to first year, it's, you know, rightfully so now these students, um, this is there for truly like for those who are clues during their first year out of university or college, or even at an elite five Ivy league institution, you know, of course you should be putting a lot of more resources towards them. You need to cultivate their foundation, need to, you know, bring them and make them feel that this is a space that's meant for you as well.

Speaker 2:

Maybe for transfers, we already have like, you know, gone through a process for a year, you know, for those who are coming from many colleges, you know, we already know what the balance of like college classes are. Like, you know, maybe Columbia thought that it's a right for them to generalize us into this one bubble of already having experience. So I can like understand that, like, you know, we already have experienced, they don't, there doesn't have to be that sort of like handholding, if you will, to, you know, walk around that this is Columbia does work hard, just like, because they already know like office hours, like all these sort of things I like, because we have to utilize those resources to even apply for transfer. And, but there's also a part of me that felt very upset and very like, I don't know, heartbroken when I was like, I know Columbia tries to advertise at this institution that, you know, the door's open, just come through and, you know, we can give you all the resources that you need.

Speaker 2:

We'll like nourish you we'll help you bring to whatever path you want to undertake. So that was, you know, that's sort of like rally versus expectation. You know, it, it was a slap in the face. It was like, I was talking to a fellow transfer student and we were like, you know, wow, like, do we not exist? Like in their eyes? Do we RHS, you know, folks that w because we already know how to move around in her right. Drive around the highway, like orange, if, you know, driving down the highway, when we do we know when stick, like the next highway, or like, something like that, you know, you know, I felt like that was a little weird on dare part, because maybe it's because I had a lot of expectations that aren't being met. You know, I tried to like, rationalize that sort of thing. You know, that the first thing that comes into mind, like when anxiety happens, you're like less,

Speaker 3:

Um,

Speaker 2:

Those are the biggest, like starting point.

Speaker 3:

Yeah. So I feel like when I first arrived on campus, it wasn't very like a supportive environment. If that makes sense. Like, I felt like we were promised a lot more than what the school actually delivered, especially my first year. But, um, I do think Barnard is somewhat of a, how do I say it, like responsive? Like, they're very responsive to student input, but it does take them a while. Like you need to like, keep pushing them and holding them accountable. Like, like, for example, like this semester with like the whole thing going on with like Corona and housing. So they originally like promise students housing, and I'm currently living in like school dorms. And it's really crazy, you know how they said that, Oh, because of housing being canceled for students, they going to adjust your financial aid as well. So I compare my financial aid, you know, before and after, like, after they canceled my housing, versus if I were to live in dorms right now, there was like a \$7,000 difference. And I feel like normally, like school that's like, okay, like FAFSA, that's something out of your control. But I noticed if you actually go into your tuition, they also cut your Barnard college grant, which I think is kind of ridiculous. Because as a Travis school, you definitely have a lot more money you like in your endowment, especially because I worked in the finance chair of my school. So like, I know you haven't been, if that makes sense.

Speaker 2:

I do think there have been like some kind of flake gymnastics I've had to do to make things happen. Um, even just like in order to get my dad's education, which was really important to me, I had to like work to work, study jobs and like on top of like going to school and like leaving campus, my high school campus, like I'm breaking the rules to leave campus by myself, just because I didn't want to pay for an Uber. Like, like, just like things like that, where I wouldn't have had to do those, if I had had the money just to maneuver and pay for my dad's classes. But like, that's not super of an obstacle because I don't have to do my dad's classes. But in terms of like college, I think that something that was a big obstacle for me was that I was told, like, going back to like, kind of the lies that were told, I was told that if I worked hard to apply to a good Jillian scholarships, then it would help pay for my college.

Speaker 2:

And to some extent, I think that was true. But once I start, once I received scholarships, um, that would go directly to my tuition. Um, they took away like financial aid took away the amount of grant money they're giving me. So my EFC didn't change. And granted, my UFC is super low for a lot of people, but like my paying for it, mostly paying for it mostly like by myself, I needed that EMC in a day, especially after putting so much time into all that. So many applications, just like that was a huge barrier coming into school because I thought I wouldn't have to work as hard to get money during the school year as I had to. Um, and like, even with a fellowship that I've been applying to, there have been barriers with this as well, because in order to get the money from the fellowship, which like I said, half the money isn't even like, it doesn't change my UFC, like part of it is a stipend, so that does help.

Speaker 2:

But the part that goes directly to my tuition does it just evaporates. But for that, I have to like take classes to fulfill that scholarship. So that's taking up more of my money in a sense, because I'm having to take a class to refill it, like fill up a requirement that I wouldn't like I'd have room for another class that would actually go towards my major or like something I'm actually interested in. Don't tell the fellowship people, cause I still need that money. But just thinking about those things and just how difficult that's been when I work really hard to get something. And then I just don't get what I'm told I'm going to get. So

Speaker 1:

All of this makes me wonder what is at the root of this transition into the Columbia Barnard world, right? You guys have talked about transitioning into college after high school and finding your space on campus, learning how to advocate for yourself. But what is it about Columbia or Barnard that makes this transition as complex as it is

Speaker 2:

Columbia? It's more like the sort of meme where people are walking around and they just expect you to just master things. They just expect you to just fly without never like learning what flying means. It's like that sort of meme where it's like from UC Berkeley names where they're like three schools, there's like Stanford, UCLA, and like UFC, like, you know, there was a parent and a child and they're all taking care of the child, but you're like a UC Berkeley. If they're two birds, the mud of the bird is like throwing the check away, like fly. So it's like, that's what it kinda reminds me of. It's like Columbia just expected us to just mold into the Columbia community to automatically like adopt a facade of that. Everything's all right. Columbia really expected to just, you know, move around and maneuver, expecting that they are

coming from, you know, all these sort of like resources and privileges, you know, it's a Columbia, it's like, they're sort of places like, yeah, welcome to my palace.

Speaker 2:

We have all the maids and servants for, but you're just standing there, like, why do I have to use a mater of servants or like a servant, you know, like w why can not just talk to them? Maybe like, why can't use them as my mentors? Like, you know, it's like, that's sort of like expectation of class that's imposed onto, but when you come from a place that like, you know, like, Hey, like w w what I have to use this for in here. Like, like, what does that mean? If she never came from that sort of lifestyle, it's a very like, jarring experience, a very jarring interaction. So I kept getting that from Columbia. Columbia was just, that's her place. It's just like, you know, we have all these resources use it, but like, if you're not gonna tell your students who, you know, if you're not going to choke his inclusivity and like actual, like interactions with these sources that, you know, showcase inclusion, then what's the point of, you know, broadcasting our faces, our narratives when we're just being tokenized for no reason. I'm sorry. Like, are we just sitting there just because we're like, Oh yeah, you just took us in because, you know, we had a really awesome, like, sad story that you can use for your donors, but in reality, like God knows what's happening to us because we're just, you know, having our own mental breakdowns. And you're just like, they're there. Like, it's, it's a, it's a really weird experience and I, I'm not gonna lie. I actually did leave a very, uh, nasty aftertaste in my mouth.

Speaker 1:

We're going to stop here for now. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to part two Oh five of a fly story, and I hope you stay tuned. I hope that this journey, and I hope that I'm, you know, guiding you along this journey and make you're making sense of this narrative, because it is like I said, complex, and it is interesting. And I'm excited to hear more because there's more to come in part three. So stay tuned. It's coming really, really soon. If you have any comments, questions, concerns you want to reach out to me about the project. Please just email me@eightsuitechatsatgmail.com. And if you want to follow along to not just the audio portion, but like some visual pieces and art pieces and written work, then definitely check out the Instagram at eight suite chats. So that's where everything's going to be posted. And I mean, I'm considering doing a website, but I will keep you all posted as to when that comes out, where it was a work in progress. Everything's a work in progress. My life is a work in progress, but, um, thank you so much once again, and I will talk to you soon. Peace.