

Speaker 1:

Hello. I hope you, and your loved ones are all doing well. Welcome to part one of a fly story where you will be hearing from different Barnard and Columbia students sharing their experience being first-generation low-income students. As I mentioned in my introductory episode, which you should definitely check out if you haven't done so already, it's really short and it gives a little bit more backstory for why I decided to take on this project, because I don't want to sound redundant. So let me just give you a minute, click off real quick, scroll up introductory episode. Listen to that. I'll give you a minute. Don't worry. Let me take as possible.

Speaker 1:

Okay. We got it. Fantastic. I think before we start just one thing that I do want to reiterate, it's the element of keeping an open mind, right? These are people's stories. These are people's truths. And so I think the best thing that you can do as a listener is just, well, listen, right? You're going to hear opinions and you're going to hear a different vantage points, some similarities, some differences. And I think the caveat and the fun part of this is just hearing what are the similarities and what are the differences between people's opinions and how did they compare and contrast? Cause nothing is simple. All right. I think that's the biggest takeaway from this. Nothing is simple. There is complexities, there are nuances to this narrative and listening to these people talk about the nuances is going to be super fun. So let's get into it. Let's jump in. Let's dive in

Speaker 2:

Question number one. What does being fly mean to you?

Speaker 3:

Um, yeah, I think for me being fly, I guess I'm going to, I'm going to twist it in a positive note just because I know there's so many, like negative experiences that people talk about, which is fair. Like I think it is a difficult identity to navigate. I do see it a bit as being resilient and like sort of being like a dreamer, like I guess like growing up, I would always hear my parents talk about like I immigrate to the United States. So you could have bigger opportunities, more like being able to do things that I can never. And like, I really internalized that and it made me really dream big and have really big goals. Um, and so for a really long time, going to college was my biggest school. And it's so kind of is it's, it's one of my biggest goals to graduate college.

Speaker 3:

And it's, it's weird to think that like so many people were kind of like, I'm going to graduate college soon. Like this is part of life because at one point I didn't see myself going to college, let alone out of state college, um, let alone to Barnard. So yeah, like I do definitely think it's like a very resilient identity. I don't know with that. I also feel like we should take care of ourselves and know that it's like, we don't have to be perfect. We don't have to be resilient. Um, and we're more than just like being fly, um, like being frustrated and like, low-income feel like fly mean

Speaker 4:

Just being very like resilient and having like a very different like upbringing compared to most other Americans, if that makes sense. Cause I do believe most, um, why people are at least from my experience. Cause my parents are like immigrants and stuff like that. They're like rebuilding everything when they come here. But, um, I do know like for some families like fly means like, Oh, first gen going to

college in America, their parents could be PhDs and stuff like that. But at least for me, my parents never even like finished high school. So I mean just being very resilient and keep going, even when things are like, all right.

Speaker 5:

Uh, I think it varies from the situation, like, I guess the label comes from school because, um, I went to like public school growing up. So it wasn't really like, there was like often a really wide range of people from different economic and like Catholic social capital backgrounds. So I didn't really have to be like, Oh, I'm a fly student because it didn't my experience in public school. Like there were definitely things that I was experiencing that nobody else was, and it was harder sometimes, but I is not nearly on the scale that it is at college. So it's kind of something that I started to identify more with once I came to college because I was like, Whoa, my experience is now drastically different than, um, from those around me. Um, so I guess it's kind of something that the product of what the college gave me.

Speaker 5:

I mean the college came up with fly, like the, the acronym, I guess. And so I went to like a pre-orientation in the beginning of the school year and they were like, you're a flow student. I was like, okay, knowing that I had been low-income my whole life, but not realizing that it had a label and like a community with it. Yeah. So there's that, but then other days, I guess it's like when I'm working two jobs, it's like, I'm a fly here. You know? So it really depends. Um, I guess on the day, like how I perceive it and like how I view it, like positively or negatively. Yeah.

Speaker 6:

So for me, when I think of fly, I think of two scenarios. So when I first started university of Rochester, um, the school where I started my freshman year or my first year of college, um, we never used the term ply. We used the term Freestone, low income, not even an acronym. It was just first gen low income. And there's a center in Rochester that was called Kerns. So we never even used the word first gen low income. We substitute desert identity with Kerns because Kearns is like, the place is like, you know, Oh, you have a prom point and go to Cremins, Oh, I'm a current scholar. I am, um, you know, it's like a euphemism to some extent, like a metaphor, but you know, some people are like, I am first gen low income and I'm current. So for me, that's like the first thing that comes into my mind.

Speaker 6:

And it's something kind of beautiful in the sense that in Rochester, there are actually students that are coming from various backgrounds and it kind of really showcase what fly meant to everybody else. For me fly meant at Rochester. Um, being the first in my family, um, to go to college, to go to a, an elite institution, to first my family, to go to college without worrying about finances, uh, to the first, my family to go to college or university and majoring in an area that is now stereotypically, um, you know, pre-med business or econ or engineering. So I think for me, like fly is like breaking the sort of boundaries that are kind of interpreted onto you and that you have to, you know, matron pre pre-med or, you know, you have to be XYZ, um, STEM like area because, you know, you got to make a bet. You gotta, you know, you gotta break the, all the feelings they're up there because you know, the world's not cute. Uh, so for me, it's like, when I tell them like, I'm blind to like, okay, your fly, you know, your writer, or are you gonna have a life? I'm like, you know, don't worry about that. That's, that's my thing

Speaker 7:

I've always battled with, if I be technically a flight student and not like first-generation low income, just because of the first-generation aspect of it. Um, because my mom technically did go to college, but when I sit and think about what that, what her college experience means in relation to my, I decide to define myself as a fly student, just because my mom did go to school. And I was a part of that experience with her. She went when I was like in middle school, in high school as well. But when I think about certain ideas about my experience at Barnard, whether it be just, I mean, in plain hindsight, how much it costs to go to Barnard compared to like her also like equally fantastic CUNY education and equally rigorous CUNY education. I'm like, this is like a very different life. So for me, I guess first generational income comes, I think as a definition that has to be defined by each person's experiences with college and what their family's lineage or legacy in terms of college.

Speaker 7:

And also recognizing that while someone may have had someone in their family go to college, that doesn't necessarily mean that those people had the same ex or had an experience that could aid them in ways that will make them aware of all of like the weird small parts that, that are part of going to a school like Barnard, um, and a school like Barnard that's in direct relation with the school Columbia. So I guess when defining FGFI, what I'm saying in short is for me, it means that I have a parent who has went to college, had don't have a parent or a family member who has went to a top liberal arts college, like Barnard. And I think the fact that that is a conversation and I still fall into an income bracket of like low income. It just goes to show how weird the parallels between like higher ed are in terms of like CUNY Sunni's IBS and that whole weird conversation of just like what higher ed really is. So keeping all of that in mind. Did you know this identity existed prior to coming into college?

Speaker 4:

I think I didn't under or even know, like there was that identity until like my first semester of college, it was releasing, um, student government elections because, you know, like identity politics, like everyone's throwing out, like I want to help marginalized students on campus. And they were like, Oh, a low income LGBTQ and like, or like fly students. But like I, myself never even heard that term before. So I had to like be research and I realized like they were talking about me, if that makes sense. Cause in my middle school, I mean high school, I would say most of the demographic where like upper middle class students. And at the time, like in my, you know, how like in public schools, in New York city, like you can do like free or reduced lunch, which is, which means I, you go to cafeteria, you get free lunch. So it didn't hit me until I got to college. I realized that there was only like six low-income students in my high school. So like, and you know, who are the low income students because we were eating the free lunch. But like during that time I thought it wasn't normal to eat free lunch. You know what I mean?

Speaker 7:

That's a really great question because in my high school, like almost everybody is fly. If they're not like low income, at least they're first generation. But like, I would say like at least like more than 70% of the students are, um, fly probably closer to like 90, but I want to reach out. Like, I don't want exactly because I don't know everybody's story. And in high school, everyone was like, everyone looked the same as me. Everyone identified in like a very similar way, at least in the application college application process. Mostly everyone had the same questions, the same struggles. And since like English is my second language, like writing in general and writing my personal statement was like difficult for me. Like I'm not the, like the best writer. I, I just don't like to write. I prefer, I remember a math problem or something.

Speaker 7:

It was similar struggles between all of us, but then coming to Barnard, everyone had a totally different story and finding those fly students was harder. Like not everyone was like, Oh yeah, I struggled with just like the college application process or I struggled writing that essay we had to do or this, this and that. And it was more like, Oh, that was so easy. Like that, that like I D I wrote that, or it was like, like, I'm just going to go spend a hundred dollars on this restaurant every single day of the week or something like that. Like money was just for everyone that I saw. Like, it was just like, not something that they had to really think about, but, um, in high school I always loved with my parents. So I was always there at home and eating out wasn't really an option.

Speaker 7:

It was like there's food at home, there's food at home. And so like, it was just like really different to see just the, they experiences from high school to college. But I wouldn't say it was like shocking or like something that I felt bad about for myself, because I try to be really, really grateful for everything that I have. And like, even if it's not like a lot of top brand items or whatever, like that doesn't really matter to me. Like at the end of the day, I was really grateful to be getting an education at Barnard. And I was really, really happy to be in New York city. And so, although I saw all of these differences between fly and non fly, like I've always known that there are non fly people out there. So it wasn't really a shock. It was just more like, wow, they don't really have to limit themselves when they want to do things. Like they can just go out and do it. Like whenever

Speaker 3:

In high school it was different because a lot of us were first gen and low-income, but it wasn't an existing identity. Like no one identified like that. It was just kinda like, but it was interesting too. So like in my school, most of us were like poor. Um, but no one talked about being poor, but there were a few students who were pretty wealthy or I wouldn't say like wealthy, like in Barnard wealthy, but definitely like solid middle-class like in Wolof. And I think that that identity you, um, when I was in high school was interesting because I, it wasn't talked about, so it, it was like weird to see other like, wealthy, like, I guess, like middle class people, um, talk about applying to college and making it seem so easy. And I, for me, I was really surrounded by those identities, like people who were pretty well off because I was like in student government and like AP classes, which often tend to be dominated by white people and people who are better off.

Speaker 3:

Um, and so like, it was weird to see that and think like, Oh, there's something wrong with me when there wasn't. And like, actually more students in my high school were going through what I was going through than what they were going through. And also like just the fact that like, our administration was completely white, even though most of my school was mostly, it was predominantly Latinex, but like, there was not a single Latinex administrator. Um, and even for you or teachers, like who identified like that. And so none of them really accommodated us and like talked about our identity in any way. So like, when we were applying to college, they kind of were just like, you're going to go to the state school. You're going to go to a trade school. Like, that's all they gave us. That's everything they gave us, nothing else.

Speaker 3:

And so I think for me, my identity in high school really solidified like as a fly student, when I got, got into a college access program where we started talking about this, we actually started talking about what does it mean to be first in your family to go to college? What does it mean to be like low income? What does it mean to be poor? Um, and just really like talk like, like them letting us know, like, this is an identity like this exist. And like, just talking about that experience and like meeting so many other fly students from across the country and like talking about their experiences too, um, that they've been going through in high school. And that was like a really empowering summer for me, where I was able to go through that college access program. But at the same time, I think coming back home after that program was difficult, because then my eyes were open and I, I saw the identity for everything.

Speaker 3:

It was, I was finally seeing all the flaws within my school and I just remember feeling so angry my senior year of high school, just like this intense anger and like sadness, because I'm like, wow. Like the school is really setting us, setting us up to fail. Like they really didn't do anything for us. Um, and it was just, yeah, like, and I still think, I haven't really like, let go of that anger that I have from home and like the anger that I had from like that high school and like that community, um, just because of just like, cause it's just also, like, I think it's like, we learned this in college and now I know what was happening, but like, they really just blamed you. If you didn't get into college or blamed you, if you didn't get into like a job, um, a stable job or something, they would really blame it on students and calling them lazy and like that's and putting no responsibility on the high school itself, which is obviously wrong in many ways.

Speaker 3:

Um, but I think now in college it's still not great. I still think that part, it doesn't do a good job at like supporting fly students, but I think it's different because they think it's like, it's like a weird gaslighting. That's different from what I experienced in high school being like, we know you're fly, but look at these little minuscule resources we have. And I'm just saying, but this is what we need. It's like, but we have this sort of thing. Um, which is like, it's, it's weird because it's more of like, they do recognize that we're flying, which is one thing that my high school definitely never did, but they also still kind of like, wow, like we're amazing for you and recognize the and sort of thing. Um, and even providing some resources, but not like adequate BL resources. So I think there's a little different and I think in Barnard, I dunno, like I definitely learn to embrace being fire a lot more.

Speaker 3:

I think it's also just comes with like, spaces that I've been in like an SGA where I'm constantly like advocating for different like resources for my students. Um, or it just seems more natural to just embrace that identity. But I think at the same time, it's really difficult because it's, we're in an institution that like recognizes that we're fly and that we have struggles that come with that, but don't want to provide you the adequate support that you need, even when you ask for it. And then it's like lead so uncomfortable conversations where people constantly told me to get a job, even though I have so many. And like, and just things like that, like that, I'm just like, I don't know how this is still happening. Well, actually I do, but like, you know, it's just not perfect. So I guess, yeah, I guess that's like the difference. It's kind of like both of them offered me, like gave me experiences where it's like challenging to obviously like navigate this identity. Um, but I think like with college I've been able to actually embrace identity and like even know what it is.

Speaker 5:

Well, I think that, like I said, I went to public school so I didn't have to pay for anything. And I, I mean, I never had like sat tutoring and I never had like a nice computer until I could afford it myself, like from my own work. And I always had work plus school. So there were things that I was experiencing that other kids weren't experiencing. Um, but then I also went to like a public boarding school, super weird. I don't even, it's like it's called the North Carolina school of science and mathematics. I'm not even, I mean, I'm kind of as that person, but drifting away from it's basically, it's like every, like people apply from all over North Carolina. Um, if you, if you're a resident of North Carolina, you can go and um, they pay for it. It's like completely free. I lived on campus for free. I had food for free. The food was, but it was free.

Speaker 5:

And so like, I didn't, I, when I was working, I wasn't paying for the current situation I was in. I was like, I guess, paying it forward and like having something that I could use later and like use for things that I wanted to, rather than just pay to exist in an institution. And so I think there's that, um, like when I lived at home, I saw my low-income status more just because of where we lived and like my parents' jobs and like how often they had to work and me working too. Um, and then, but in college I already can, my social capital and my economic capital raising like so much. And it's honestly scary to think that I'm making more than my parent does. Like my one singular, like that is spooky. So for sure, like, there's that difference, but just in the general, like, um, experience of being a fly student at Barnard it's I definitely have felt that anger, like you were saying, and I just don't want to be angry all the time, but it's so hard when you're like juggling so much just to be there while other people can, like, I guess like party and like still do just as well in school as me when I'm working really hard to be there and to do well there.

Speaker 5:

So

Speaker 3:

Before Barnhart life and in the high school, because I mean, coming from a tier one tier one school is where most of the students that attend that school is either on, um, government assistance, essentially. I mean, most of the school, I mean, everyone knows like, okay, this is the students that we're working with again, which is why I never realized that I was flying, that I was first gen low-income student. And I always, I never really had to advocate for myself because those resources were always there. Right. In terms of, um, everything being free. Like I, and I don't recall ever having to pay for anything like trips were free. Teachers kind of already knew what was going on. So they would always like reach out, like, like I always felt like I had that support in high school, which is, which is fairly interesting and what I went to Barnard and what you've said was very true.

Speaker 3:

Like, it appears that, um, to them, like these are the resources you just have to reach out and essentially it's a hundred percent on you to advocate for yourself. Right. So it's like, you have to take that ownership. Like, no one's gonna, and I think that's college in general. Like, no one's going to come. If you miss a class, no one is going to come knock on your door. Maybe your friends, but no, one's gonna come knock on the door and say, Hey, like you missed these classes or, Hey, um, you know, we're, we're seeing that you have, um, I don't know, like your, your grades are lowering. Like how can we be able to help you? Like there, you don't have that personal guide that's around you that can be able to help point you to the right direction. So it's up to you to self-assess and to advocate for yourself and figure out

what you need for yourself, whether that's academic, whether that's emotional need, whether that's financial need and et cetera. So, I mean, I would say that that's something that I've had to adjust to.

Speaker 7:

Yeah. I think there was a huge difference because in high school, I just like, I, my parents moved to Maryland when I was a sophomore, like right before my sophomore year. And so there was a lot of adjusting in like the cultural, like different country getting used to the accent. Like there were a lot of fly students service. Most of us were poor. It was a minority majority. So like, there was like literally in every class there's POC, but within the public school system, I could see that like most students who were in like honors classes or like in the specified program for like, like really smart gifted students, um, had a lot of white students. So it's like, I was mostly just surrounded by like a mix of people. Right. And there was no need for me to actually talk about being poor. I would say it was just like, the resources was just out there.

Speaker 7:

Like, for example, like getting free breakfast and lunch, you just have to apply. They would tell you, like, my counselor will tell me right off the bat, like, here's the paperwork, just go fill it out. And like, I would take it home. I would like give to my mom you'd fill out together. And a whole bunch of my teachers also helped us get, like, get resources. There was a food bank sort of thing called mana food, um, in our area. And like, they helped me with the process of getting registered, my family registered. So like, things like that, it's like out in the open and it was like, teachers knew the resources and it was easily accessible. Like I didn't even have to go ask necessarily, like when I was registering for act or the sat, they would be like, yeah, so you need this.

Speaker 7:

Right. And you need the fee waiver. Like it's all ready. Whereas that Barnard, it just feels like, yeah, they got me here. They're like, Oh yeah, you were poor. And you like deserve to be here. You work so hard and everything. But once you get here, it's like hush, hush, almost. I feel like I only got to talk about my fly identity within my friend group who are POC and fly. Whereas like talking about it to like other people, like inter class, like upper class, not yeah. Higher income folks and middle class folks. It's just like, the conversation is super hard. And they, they immediately, the reaction immediately sets to being like petty or like, it's, it's not, I'm not looking for pity. I'm just telling you, this is my situation. This is my background. I don't want you to feel sad for me. Cause I got a lot out of it.

Speaker 7:

And you're not considering like, like the positive acts aspect of it. Right? Like I'm, there are cultural capital that I gained that you didn't gain that sort of thing. You know, it's like, it's really hard to kind of navigate elite spaces and see how like, just be fine with the differences off the bat. It always feels like people would just, not just white privilege, but also like, like money. They're trying to find a way to like, hide it, hide their privilege or claim sort of like this. Um, it's STEM saying that like, no, I have worked hard for it. So I deserve it. Right. I felt like so many of my friends that we always give our success, like claim our success to luck and not hard to work when Ashley, we put in more work than all these other like people. Right. So I think in terms of figuring out like the community on campus, it took me a while also like talking to professionals, I guess, like professors and stuff like that. It took me a while. It wasn't like in high school where I could, I, I felt comfortable going and talking to anyone, you know? Not like not anyone I was shy back then, but even then, like their resources are out there. It's just in Barnard.

Like we were talking about, you need to advocate for yourself, you need to go talk to financial aid. You need to be like, Hey, like this is something I need help with. So yeah.

Speaker 1:

All right. And I think I can't add anything more to that statement. And with that, we're going to close up part one. Thank you so much for tuning in and listening to the first part of this five part mini series. Part two is coming out really soon. So be on the lookout. If you have any questions, comments, concerns definitely hit me up or email me@eightsuitechatsatgmail.com and follow along because the audio portion is not the only portion we have. We have other things like art pieces and visuals that are coming out on the Instagram at H suite chat. So definitely check that out. Check the page out. Thank you so much for listening. And I will talk to you all later base.