

**Keyword:** Major

**Interviewee information:**

- Name/nickname: Dr. Santana
- School year: Visiting Assistant Professor
- Major: PhD in Sociology with a specialization in Population Studies
- Hometown: Bronx, New York
- Family's country of origin: Dominican Republic

**Transcript (copy segment transcript here):**

**[00:00:35- 00:08:05]**

[00:00:35] What made you decide to go to college and after that pursue PhD?

[00:00:40] Well, you know, for me, I didn't really have an option. I didn't... growing up it was just assumed that I would go to college. It was me, my older sister at the time. It was just so ingrained in us. I realized several years later how much of a luxury that was, because a lot of people probably not. I don't know. I shouldn't say a lot. But I have met others who have similar backgrounds, particularly socio economic backgrounds, who did not have that luxury, didn't think college would be a given. For me

[00:01:17] I just took it as a given just what you do. And so that's what you're set out to do. As for why I ended up doing the PhD. Oh, I have to pull back to where to where I was as a freshman. I originally. This makes me laugh to think about it.

[00:01:37] I originally wanted to be a psychologist and then I make the joke that I am mentally too warped to help someone else with their own issues, cause I could barely deal with mine. But more seriously. I remember I was interested in majoring in psych. And as a freshman, I took Intro to Soc [Sociology] just to fulfill a requirement and I didn't really know what sociology was. You don't really get taught that in high school.

[00:02:11] I mean there might be a couple a handful of course, of sociology courses, but it's rare. You mostly see psych among the social sciences. I remember taking it with this with a sociologist named Annette Laro. She's really well known for a sociology of the family and intersections of race and class. And I loved the class. It was an insane amount of reading. Now that I look back at it. Like two chapters every time we were supposed to meet. Easily, at times I had a hard time keeping up. But I love it. For me, it was so exciting to go to class. So, so exciting.

[00:02:57] I remember feeling like it was a language. It felt like it was a language that I understood but never realized I understood it. That's the best way I could describe it. At the same time, I was taking I did take some psych courses at Penn and I did not like it. It was just, I liked the social cultural aspects of it. But a lot of it was very biological base and it just it did not click with me at all. It didn't agree with me.

[00:03:26] So.

[00:03:29] But I remember being in the soc [sociology] course, an Intro to Soc class, and it triggered some questions within me, as to, oh, well. How was I so lucky to be in this situation, in this school, and others of my background weren't. And I just found that question to be so fascinating.

[00:03:53] So sophomore year, I remember I was still the same routine in Intro and I was in between psych and soc [sociology], and I ended up doing with soc [sociology]. ]

[00:04:02] But I wanted to get into research to answer some of the questions that I had. Was it junior year or Sophomore year? I remember it was either sophomore year or junior year. I started knocking on people's doors so I can be their RA, even if it was for free. I was willing to do it. Just to get some sort of experience... to get my foot in the door. And thankfully someone said yes.

[00:04:30] My undergrad, my first undergrad advisors was this woman named Chenoa Flippen and her husband Emilio Parrado. And from there I started RAing. And then from there I got into the McNair Scholars Program. I don't know if they have it out here, but McNair Scholars program, it's, um, it's a nationwide initiative that encourages research amongst certain populations. I believe it's for underrepresented minorities. But I have the check. I got into that. And that helped me to conduct a summer research project. And I also got a grant too. The summer between my junior and senior year.

[00:05:17] So, yeah, junior and senior year. I think so. Yeah, it says it all all these years jumbled together. Yeah. And then no, I'm lying. It was the sophomore its was sophomore to junior year. That's when I did McNair. And then the summer between my junior and senior year, I did another research program at Princeton.

[00:05:42] And that's when I switched over to the dark side and started in quantity.

[00:05:48] And my mentor there was this man named Angel Harris. And I remember that's the summer between the junior and senior year. I had like a crisis of faith. We want to do academia. I you know, doing grad school, especially straight out of undergrad, is never an easy... grad school period is not an easy endeavor, but it should not be taken lightly, especially straight out undergrad. If anything. I don't think I made the wrong choice for me. But I don't recommend it for most people. I don't. It's a lot, but eventually I chose to pursue grad school. I remember just having to do a ton of applications my senior year on top of that, writing a thesis. I got in to... I applied to nine places and I got into seven. Ultimately, I chose between Princeton and Stanford and I went with Princeton. What made you choose Princeton? Oh, well, several factors. In terms of intellectual fit. Princeton was a better choice. It was. The funding was better. It is very hard to beat Princeton in terms of funding. Very, very hard. Very hard. Most schools, a lot of schools tried, but it's hard. And also from a personal standpoint. Am I really gonna give up all that I know to live on a grad students type out in California? Especially Stanford, Palo Alto is known for being very expensive. So is Princeton the town. But I mean, I remember being a grad student hopping on the bus the day of or hopping on a train and being home in three hours and I had to think about it. And after I got a car even cheaper. So, yeah, no it was a mixture of intellectual and personal reasons and I don't regret my choice. Princeton was not a fun... I mean, it's not a fun town to be in.

[00:07:56] Especially if you're an underrepresented minority and if you're in your 20s, but no you make do.