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Interviewer: Madeline Park

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MP: Okay, so can you briefly introduce yourself to me?

AG: So I'm Ashley Gonzalez. I'm 18 years old. I was born in Mesa Heights, which is a low-income community nearby downtown San Diego. I have a younger little sister who is [laughs], who is also in the process of receiving a higher education. She's in a private middle school and is gonna attend another private high school, hopefully. As for me, I attended a private middle school called Nativity Prep Academy, which gave me a scholarship to attend a private high school, which is Cathedral Catholic High School. And I'm going to be the first one in my family to go to college at University of San Diego to major in environmental science with a minor in communications."

MP: Oh, okay. Why did you choose the major and minor that you did?

AG: Originally it was sociology just because growing up in Logan Heights it was really...it was all...I was exposed to gang violence and drugs and I kinda normalized that. I always thought it was the way of living and every single person had the same childhood, or experiences, the same things I faced when I was younger. As I grew up I attended Cathedral Catholic High School, took an environmental science class. And I began to see how, compared to like Del Mar Heights and all those rich areas and in Logan Heights there was such a drastic difference. It was really green in Del Mar and there's like very healthy grocery stores. And it's very like focused on like health. As in Logan Heights, every corner there's like liquor stores. And then there's Wal-Mart,

which is basically like our form of groceries. And then, not only that, but we have this...the Bay Area where there's a lot of industrialization. And so that costs a lot of like health issues for low-income families. So it's just like asthma, or a risk of having like obesity or cholesterol. And so that just really like made me furious because we're like the children of the future, you know? And so, in order for us to like give our best and like do our best in school, all these little things such as like where you live, your zip code, your food really has a huge impact on determining if you're going to college or not. And so most of my cousins, they, they went to public schools--which isn't bad. But the food that they give you--since they're like low-income they can't afford to like buy food every single day so they have like...they're like able to get free food from the government. And sometimes that food isn't the greatest so they like don't eat it. And that really causes a little impact on their form of performance. As for me, I'm lucky to have food that I can eat and enjoy, and it's very healthy, so my chances of getting good grades is higher. So just like keeping all these little like experiences I encounter, and having time to reflect on them made me like become aware that this is like environmental injustice and no child should have to face these barriers to achieve a higher education or perform well. Because people in Del Mar, they don't have to worry about that. And it's easier for them to like have time to study compared to like my family members who have to like--or future generations--who have to face this. And it's something I really want to break.

MP: How do you feel like you, you yourself, want to like contribute to breaking that cycle, I guess? Or do you have an idea of what you want to do?

AG: Yeah...well I have little ideas that I've been trying to like work on. So the first time I really started being very into social in--social justice and like advocating for like low-income

communities is...I actually started sophomore year just because I entered all these like different little programs like Cinco Lo Mujeres which is a committee where I had to work with other girls who like discuss about social justice that women face and how we can break that cycle of like gender roles. And then I entered this leadership council with Barrio Logan College Institute where I had the time to like get the tools and see how I can communicate with other members and how to use those tools...and like all these little things like ACLU Summer Institute I like learn about all these social justice issues such as like incarceration, or police brutality, and like intersexuality, as well as Bank of America--working with like homelessness. And so that gave me like little insights of like how I can contribute in a way that--for some it may be small but in the bigger picture it's big. So for those ideas I worked with a lot of like high schoolers around the San Diego area to make a Community Converse Conference, and my focus was mostly on implementing a healthy way of coping with all these issues. Because it's very difficult to know what are healthy methods, and most of the time people go to drugs because they don't, they're not exposed to it. And for me, I had to see my cousins really go to like hardcore drugs like cocaine or meth because they didn't know how to handle that stress. So I learned through like art. And so I thought like art was a great way to be implemented into the conference because it was the second year. And I got all these different artists and allowed them to express their story in a healthy way. And I wanna create something similar to that like in college, create Community Converse Conference focusing on themes that sometimes people don't really like discussing about like mental health--which is a big issue here in Barrio Logan because people don't really know about it and often just say like "oh, you're just like sad, like it's gonna pass away." And sometimes if we're not aware about these like issues--and climate change [laughs], which is a big

issue. They know it's something that's happening or they don't really know much about it, just think like oh it's gonna rain more. And I feel like through ways of communicating through different arts, it's a way for people to have a better understanding of it. As well as like people here, most of parents didn't have a higher education. My parents, they dropped out in elementary school. Both of them. So it's kind of hard for them to understand like reading and writing and so through art it's a way for them to kind of like communicate and it's like the symbolism. And so that's what I'm planning to do with like hopefully communicate my ideas through something artistic and also through embracing yourself. As other than that, I like haven't thought much of it [laughs]. But that's a little idea that I've been thinking.

MP: Oh yeah that's really cool! [AG laughs]. How did people respond to that conference you set up?

AG: So I was in charge of the first day. The second day was mostly like talks. But for the first day I really tried to make it like a way of [background distractions]. For the first day I, I really wanted a way of creating a safe space. I feel like in order to be achieved in something [background distractions] [redacted]. So I think in order to be successful in the project you have to create a safe space just because if you don't have like establish a safe space people are not willing to be vulnerable and speak their own experiences. So that was my goal at first--to like create a safe space before we...before we start anything. So...to create a--like one step I learn is to be vulnerable to the people and not be afraid to voice your opinions. So I had to give a speech on my experiences, which was really scary because I never really tell my story to people. Just because...I was afraid of being vulnerable to people and I had this mindset of like if you're vulnerable, then you're weak--which is wrong [laughs]. But I told them about growing up in

low-income communities and all these barriers of like having to not feel guilt of going to a private school compared to a public school, or this like culture shock, or all these little things I had to face. And it really set the mood and people began to...feel more comfortable of like voicing their opinions and just not being afraid to tell their stories. And as we ran out we all got to decorate the room to have like artwork, because when they came in it was just like plain. So when they came out the artwork was there and we invited like a dance Azteca--which is like a Aztec dance--seeing like a traditional Mexican dance. And we had that...they, they performed. And it was just a way to really like...really create a bond with each other and like speak with each other, and just tell their stories in their own form of way. And just like little interactions, we got a lot of responses. The TV news came, people were telling me they were so proud of me and that they just really enjoyed it 'cause it was like...youth-led and that's something that really people were empowered. People were like, "wow, if these youths are empowered so can we." And just like having all these artists talking and just learning about what it meant to be an artist for them and just like their stories, it was just like amazing [laughs], loved it [laughs].

MP: That's crazy. Wow, can you tell me a little bit more about--you touched a little bit about your school and how you go to a Catholic...

AG: High school?

MP: Catholic high school, and it's a private school, right?

AG: Yes.

MP: Okay, so how...how do you feel about going to like a Catholic school versus like a public school and stuff?

AG: Well, at first I wasn't really fond with the idea just because, as I mentioned before, growing up in Logan Heights I had my friends, I had my little clique, which is like the people I grew up with. And...just having...me sharing the same experiences of being low-income and being in like a low-income community, having parents that worked day and night and just really struggling or wondering, "oh are we gonna pay the rent? Are we gonna be able to afford this? Or I have to cancel that because money's tight." And so I always was like fascinated going to like San Diego High because that's where all my cousins went, that's where all my friends went, and I was pumped, like this is going to be great. But my parents always wanted a private education ever since in Mexico, but they couldn't because they were extremely poor so they had hopes of their children having going to like private schools. So I went to a private middle school and it's their...they help low-income communities and it was a really long time; it was from 8 to 5. That was insane. But you got used to it, you know. You had to put a lot of hard work and dedication and sometimes you had to sacrifice the little things at the moment to have a better result and...in the future. So through that I got a scholarship to attend Cathedral Catholic High School. I was a little bit upset that I got accepted because I didn't really think I was gonna get in, but the face that my mom made when she was...when I got in, I wouldn't trade it for the world. She was so proud of me. So I, I had to go, I had no choice. But I wanted to go for my parents. So when I entered I was a little bit in shock [laughs]. It was...everything was like...I would describe it like heaven. Everything was clean, it was like white, like the buildings and the the people [laughs]. But I kind of felt like an outcast. Being--I'm very indigenous looking, very brown, and I was...I was at the moment very ashamed of it because I knew that these people were from upper-class and that they had this like...this like having this opportunity of like mentors and tutors and all

these like resources that can help them achieve. And for me it was a struggle just because...English is not my first language. I took language therapy when I was in a little girl till like second grade. So I kinda had like a little struggle speaking English. And during the process my Spanish got a little mixed up. So my Spanish and English are like not the greatest [laughs]. And so I had that to like worry about that barrier, 'cause I was very self-conscious about speaking English, and in Spanish class I was like...I look, I'm Mexican but it's not like oh it's proper Spanish. So that really made me like be quiet for the whole year. And then I was always behind math because my parents couldn't help me with math, and having tutors was not an option because it was very difficult to like pay for it. So I had...I was one year behind math. And that caused a lot of insecurity and I would just stay really quiet. And I always had this culture shock. Like people would talk about like going to yachts, and I would have like nice tea parties, and I knew about it and I thought it was from like the movies or something. But like, I was like, oh it's reality, people actually have tea parties [laughs]. And so, those little things I like really felt like left--felt like an outcast. It wasn't until sophomore year when I met my Spanish teacher, I really talked to her about these emotions of being like first-generation, and not having the same resources, and feeling like I'm one year behind everyone, and not like growing up having the same childhood to like relate to them. And she told me how that she faced that as well. And so I just went to her classroom a lot and spoke to her, and we just really bonded. And she gave me this idea of creating a club. And she really like empowered me. She was like, you know, being...being from a low-income community and being raised by like two like hardworking parents that want the best for you, there's no shame in that. And the fact that you've come so far and you like sacrifice all this, like is very empowering and you shouldn't...you should not be

afraid of like hiding yourself and shaping yourself to become this perfect...like person in this like society. And so I made a club called La Vida Loca, which is focused on like embracing your culture. And through that, a lot of like low-income communities or students from low-income communities came, and we just had a time discussing about like art, Salang's poems. And then the next year, when I started getting involved like advocating for social justice, I started talking about themes that most people don't wanna face like anti-blackness and like addict communities, which like happen and no one wants to talk about it. Or the contributions of Afro-Mejicanos and indigenous people, and issues that they faced back then and how they are still facing it now. And I really wanted my school to be aware about these issues just because they haven't really grown up with it, and they haven't been exposed to it. And it was a great way to bring discussion about these themes. And through that I created my own community. I started talking to people that I wouldn't like talk to here in Logan Heights, people who are upper-class but like are really into social justice. Which I met a good friend of mine who works with ACOU, and just like having little friends here and connecting. And even if they didn't agree with what I agreed or like...had a strong opinions on, it really opened up my eyes to why they have that mindset and why they...why they like believe in this and it really shaped my like mindset and thoughts of who I am, and it gave me a better of not to be too judgemental. Because sometimes people who have this idea are not well-informed about it or they're not exposed to it.

MP: That's true. That's true. Okay, so would you say this past senior year it was different from when you first entered into your school?

AG: For sure [laughs]. I feel more proud of being Mexican-American. I'm not afraid to speak my mind as much, just because like freshman year I was very intimidated that they were very like

this side, and I was very like oh like I don't wanna speak up 'cause there's more supporters in that. And what I learned is that--I took sociology and psychology class--and that's...a really gave me the sight of why people grew up like this or like some...how your atmosphere really influences as view as a person. So I would tell them like my own experiences about like oh yeah, growing up in low-income community, I didn't really been like, or like I didn't really have food nearby. I couldn't like have food in my table so we would go to a homeless shelter. And things like that, people would talk to me and be interested and I would be interested about their life to like compare myself to like...or like compare like the different like experiences and how that like shaped us. And I think it just really like opened my eyes to the circumstances that low-income and like upper-class like face, as well as just like not being afraid to discuss. I feel like that's a big issue now that people are just jumping to like attacking each other, when they could just sit down and have a very like civil discussion of like, "okay, you don't agree with this. Okay, can you tell me more?" Ask questions. And so that's what I learned: to not jump, just to ask questions.

MP: Do you feel like you've been able to have a lot of those discussions with different people?

AG: I do. Actually my friend and I were having a discussion this lunch about SAT and ACTs, and I had the opportunity to have like some SAT tutors to like help me out. But it was kinda difficult because it was like once a week, so it wasn't like constantly. And she would have an SAT tutor since like middle school, which is like insane to me. And I was like, wow. And I looked at her and I was like, "Do you think SAT is just about your intelligence or is it just you like practicing your mindset to have like...to follow these patterns?" And she said, "I think it's important because like--she gave her mindset--like I think it contributes to this and like

colleges.” I was like, “Interesting.” And so we had a discussion about that, like I think it was kind of like a way...it was just a business for me, like, you know, like companies trying to get money out of it. But she thought about it like really contributing to the...education system. So we just debated about that. And I came out like, oh, I see not everyone has that mindset. ‘Cause like here in Logan Heights they’re like oh, it’s like a way of business, and they’re just tryna like screw you over. But I was like, hm, I can see why she agrees with that. But I didn’t...we didn’t fight about it, we just kinda talked about it.”

MP: Oh, okay.

AG: Yeah [laughs].

MP: Okay, this is kinda like a little more off-topic--

AG: --Yeah go ahead.

MP--from what we talked about. But can you tell more about like your closet friends?

AG: Oh, yeah! [laughs]

MP: What are they like? Like what...hobbies do you guys have? What do you guys like to do together and stuff?

AG: For sure. So...I had a close childhood friends of mine. Some of them I stopped talking to just because, as much as I wanted to support them and be like a form of like...like there to be with them, they like joined gangs and drugs. And sometimes I can love them afar, but like for my mental health and not trying to be like easily pursued to do like drugs and all that, I love them from afar. And, I lost a lot of them. I see them and I follow them on social medias, but the closet one that I really have, I met him in third grade [laughs]. And his...his name is Jimmy. And we really bonded together just because like low-income as I mentioned before, but he had a more

like harder childhood just because he had like a single mother and like he has to support his sisters. So we always, everytime he have no food, I would like give him stuff. Like everytime he was like working, I was like Imma show up [laughs]. And we just like, little incidents like that really brought us closer. We would would always like talk about what would happen in our day, talk about achievements, what went wrong. And it was just a way of like having a strong support system. And then, when he got a job, which was like freshman year, he invited me to like the movie theaters [laughs]. For free. So we would always love going to the movie theaters and just watch whatever movie. He doesn't like horror movies but I do [laughs]. So I would just drag him in and we would watch horror movies together. Or we would like just walk around like Swami, because he sells like...objects. And we would just like, when he has a break, we would walk around and be like, oh that's cute or see like this shirt and just like pretend we were wearing it [laughs]. So he's one of the closest friends of mine which I adore, and I love him as a brother. And like every time I got the resources--like SAT books--I would get a lot of them, I would just give it to him. Or like if I got like a packet of like colleges to apply to or like scholarships to apply to, I send it to him. We weren't always sharing stuff. And that's, I think that's why we're close. As for my other friends, it's a girl [laughs]. Her name is Mercy. I met her in middle school. At first we didn't get along. We were kinda like those people like oh, like...you don't like the same hobbies as me so like I'm not gonna hang out with you [laughs]. But then we grew...we were like...there was like an incident where we just let that go. We just started talking, we became close friends. And we went to the same high school. So I adore her as well. She's always...she's always there for me. And she always tells me things I can improve on. She's like, "Okay, okay you, you were a little bit selfish here." She's like, you know, she would always tell

me stuff like that like, “Maybe you can improve here.” And I would tell her that like, “Oh, you were kinda mean here.” You know? So we were always working to improve ourselves and I think, in the process, we really flourished into these empowered, young Mexicans. And we’re always like working besides each other. And...I adore her. We would always like go to museums together. We would go to Chicano Park Day together, because we were like okay, we wanna learn more. And since I was very much about like my culture and being proud of being brown, so she grew up in a very like...kind of a bit...she’s middle-class so she had more opportunities than me so she didn’t really experience the same encounters. But she always felt like a little bit ashamed of herself, of like being Mexican. So I brought her into being proud of it, and I showed her all these like different role models and idols. And together we just grew, and through the process we started enjoying going to art museums, like finding new music--hearing Beyonce [laughs].

MP: Oh yeah.

AG: Beyonce for sure, she’s a big fan. And...we’re always...we’re always together. We’re like chiclets, we’re like gups [laughs]. Yeah...

MP: So you mentioned like...you talked a lot about being proud that you’re like Mexican, right? So was there like...you didn’t always feel that way, right? So what was like the moment that you...that your perspective switched? That you suddenly became proud of your culture? Or was there a moment? Or did it happen more gradually?

AG: More gradually. I’m tryna...there’s, my dad works a lot so I don’t see him as much. But when he doesn’t work--usually Thursdays [laughs]--he, he would come into my room and we would just talk. And my dad, even though there’s like this mindset that if you don’t have a higher

education you're like uneducated, but my dad learns a lot. Little things, he catches. He's very observant. He has a good memory too [laughs]. He would tell me how...he would tell me stories of like being just like hard-working, and how at a young age he would always work hard. And all these little stories like when you're younger you just think of it. You don't really process it. But in freshman year when I was really down I would have time of reflecting and I would be like wow, my dad sacrificed all this. And he worked at a young age--I think he worked when he was six. And so I kinda felt guilty just because I was like wow, I'm having this mindset of like oh I want to go to San Diego High instead of like attending this good private school and paying a lot--not a lot of money, it was like \$100 per month. Which is not much for many but it was kind of like...kind of like a burden for my parents because they had to always like make sure they had enough money to pay for my high school tuition. And so I would just think about that, and I would look at photos of my grandparents in Mexico and then...just like moments like that, time of reflecting, I was like you know what, I worked really hard to be here. I shouldn't be ashamed of it. I have my parents' support and I wanna give them a future. And little by little, I changed my negative mindset to like something very positive. Like okay, sure I'm not with my friends...I can make new friends, no worries. Okay, this is hard for me, I'll talk to teacher. And I'll talk to the teacher and through that mindset, I became really close to my teachers. They're always out there to help me. Or like have you heard about this? And like, through like a strong support system here at Logan Heights, and so as my school, and here at Barrio Logan College Institute, I began to feel like more proud of myself and not being afraid to like voice my opinions because I knew that...I have a story to tell and I'm lucky to communicate with both English and Spanish like audience. And...and not only that, like, even when I feel empowered sometimes I get kinda

like insecure of like my appearance because I don't really see like a strong, independent, Mexican woman who's not like have a love interest [laughs]. And I don't see them in the billboards, I don't see them in magazines, and if they do they have this typical stereotypical idea of having like a nice body or having very like light skin. But then...there's this really incident that sometimes I think about...when I'm kind of insecure, where my mom's friend looked at me and she says, "You have a very indigenous beautiful face. You look like an Azteca princess"--like you know those paintings where they have like women with noses like mine and big eyes. And she said, "You should really look into your indigenous background," which is like Azteca, I asked my dad [laughs]. I just think about that and sometimes when I'm sad or like oh, why can't I be more like blue eyes and white skin, I think of that incident and just knowing that there's one person out there who thinks I'm beautiful with my indigenous features, I'm like okay. That one person, ooh, I'mma make you proud [laughs]. Yeah...

MP: Wait that's so cool. That's so inspiring!

AG: [laughs]

MP: I guess like going off of like your dad and everything, how has your family like influenced you as a person and the way that you see the world around you?

AG: Yeah, I'm lucky to grow up in the household that's very...I guess you can say liberal.

Typically they have this mindset that, my family has this mindset that if you're the male, you're in authority. He works day and night; that's his job. Moms, housewife. They have to cook, clean, feed the children. But my parents aren't like that. My parents, my dad always says like okay, I'll work, but your mom is the boss. I'll cook for you and I'll clean for you; when I'm not working, I'm doing that. My mom says okay, I'm a...she, she cleans houses when we're in school. But

when she isn't she's always taking my little sister and I to programs. So she's always busy. And they always bounce back and forth; if they need something they would be like okay, you do this and I do this. And it was never this like, they never followed the social gender roles of like house husband, like it wasn't like that. And I'm lucky that they're madly in love. I have lot of cousins who have parents that are like always fighting back and forth and they have this negative mindset of what's a relationship. And often they're idea of a relationship is toxic. And that's currently happening a lot with all my cousins with like divorces, and that's currently happening. And I'm very lucky to have that strong support system that isn't toxic, but what really influenced me when I was writing my college essay is just that like, back then before my little sister was born, my parents came to the United States and they were really young. My mom had me when she was nineteen. My dad was a little bit older. And I think he was like twenty two...I don't know [laughs]. And my mom was...she sacrificed her, everything. She had her family in Mexico so she was here in the United States with no one. Maybe my cousin, but they weren't really like related, they were like second cousins. And my dad had a bit of support system; he had his cousins. But there was like this whole like...weird thing between them. And there's tension between my mom's family and my dad's family. I don't really know much about it. But my mom was pregnant in the United States with no support system. And my dad was always working day and night; he had four jobs back then. And so...so like my dad wasn't, he was always working. I wouldn't see him as much so it was just my mom and I growing up. And I must admit I was a little bit troublemaker [laughs]. Since I was surrounded by a lot of like gang members, I would always see their like, them fighting, so I would fight [laughs]. And so I grew a little toxic behaviors here and there, and I would try hard to change. Sometimes just like come out, I just, I

grew up with that. But I handle them in a more healthier way. But it was just my mom and I in this really small apartment. It was like the size of...I would say like...a public bathroom. It was really small, I had one room. And there was, next here was like gasoline, like a gasoline station. So, and the windows were very like, you couldn't shut them so you could always smell gas. And, since they didn't have that much money, my dad will...my dad will always work day and night but sometimes it wouldn't pay the bills. So my mom would always take me to the homeless shelter St. Vincent de Paul. And we would eat there sometimes. Sometimes I would stuff my food in my mom's purse just so I didn't...so that she didn't have to worry about feeding me the next day. And they also had back then English and Spanish like therapists, so I learned a bit English there. But I was very attached to my mom; she's like my best friend and my role model. But when, sometimes when money became really tight, she had to work. So I would be in different houses. So my mom--I would have different babysitters [laughs]. So I kind of know the whole neighborhood by now 'cause they're like, "Oh, I babysat you before," and I'm like, "I don't remember" [laughs]. But I, I jumped to different houses and grew really strong relationships. In fact I...in fact one of the lady was my madrina for my quinceanera, so she did my cake. Another one paid for the dress. So I grew my own little family here in Logan Heights; I'm really close to them. As well as my mom, she didn't have her actual family here in United States. And those little experiences, just being the only child till I was five really made me...kind of like independent, just 'cause I had to be alone by myself a lot. But like I also had that strong like...I never feel like I was missing anything. I had the love of my parents and the support of them. Some of my friends didn't have parents, and so like I really felt lucky that I had that. And so most of the things that I do for them is to make them proud. And like just seeing their face of

graduating, I can't wait 'cause I had this little practice graduation and my mom was so happy. She was just like cheering me on. And just like seeing her...like...that's the reason why I'm doing it [laughs].

MP: Your parents must be really proud that you're going to USD.

AG: Yes, it was my mom's dream college for me.

MP: Oh really?

AG: Yeah, so my mom has a lot of friends who like had the opportunity to have their children go to college. And my madrina Norma--love her to death, such a sweetheart--she always was there to support my mom. She...she had a son who went to USD. And she invited us one day to the campus and she fell in love with it. It was the first college I think that my mom went to. She was like, "My daughter's going there! My daughter's going there!" And [laughs], and then since it was Catholic and she's very Catholic and it was a private school--which was a bonus for her too--she was like, "I want my daughter to go here so bad." And my dad came to the campus once and he was in love with it. He was like, "Oh my God. This is a school? This is like heaven!" And so I...at first I really wanted to go to UCLA, I feel like it's everyone's dream school [laughs]. I wanted to go to UCLA or USC but when I got into USD, they gave me a good financial package and I knew my parents wouldn't have to worry about like debt or pay that much. And so like I started investigating it more and more, and I just like...loved it. The campus really was like amazing, great support system for like first generation. And the fact that my mom loves it and it was her dream, I was like I have to go. And it's close by. And like my mom's always telling her friends like, "My daughter's going to USD!" It's just like uh, like just seeing her face and she has the little sweater, uh, love it.

MP: Oh that's so cute! Oh man...wait so you mentioned you have a sibling?

AG: Yes.

MP: What's like the relationship with your sibling?

AG: It's really really close [laughs]. I like...I like teasing her a lot [laughs]. I'm like, okay I had to clean my room for like five years before you came, so it's your turn [laughs]. But I love her to death. I think...I do it for my parents but--I won't admit it to her--but I do it for her too. Just because, since I was the first child I feel like I was like the little hamster. I was like tested to see what's wrong, like what's the correct way, what we should avoid, all these little things. And so, so I have a better understand of like what to do--don't wait like deadlines [laughs], stuff like that. And so I help her out a lot. I want her to really like achieve and not be afraid to ask questions. And honestly I'm so proud of her. Like I tell her a lot and I think she thinks like I'm joking around [laughs] but I'm so proud of her. She...she became like...so confident, very empowered, and she loves learning about cultures. And she always comes to my room in the night and we just always talk about our day. And she would always tell me about all these little things that she learned. She went to like a conference about like, like how to like save water, like environmental justice. And then she would talk about how she like fascinated and how she learned how to like build these like little like projects. Or she's very interested in like the Japanese culture. So she's learning like Japanese by herself. And she's learning like...like different languages like Swedish and like all that just for fun, which is so insane. And so she would always come to my room and she would like tell me all these little phrase in a different language, and she'll teach me it. I forget about it but like [laughs] she teaches me it. And so my relationship with her is really close. Like I...I would honestly do anything for her. I would like...if someone does anything to her, I

would like confront them because she means the world for me. And just like knowing that we go through these experiences together like...it creates a more deeper bond. And if, if we ever feel like sad, we're always there just because...we know how it can be emotionally draining. And when my grandma passed away last month, it was kinda hard because my mom couldn't go to Mexico 'cause of money stuff. We would, we would really like be like supporting us. We would like cry it out. I feel like, like we were always ashamed to cry in front of my mom because we were like, oh my mom she's going through a lot because it's her mother. But we would cry it out and then be like okay we're strong, we can do this, and we'll be a support system for our mom just like how she supported us all these years. And so I think like those experiences really, really brought us more closer. And now she's like, we're five years difference, so we're always...I feel like we can talk about mature topics. So like if she's scared of like asking questions to my mom she knows she can always go to me and I will never judge her. Ever. Because I know sometimes it takes a lot of courage to talk about issues like that. So...

MP: That's really cool.

AG: [laughs]

MP: It sounds like your family is really like, like a really close family who like supports each other a lot.

AG: Yeah [laughs]

MP: Okay, I think we're nearing the last few questions.

AG: Oh for sure.

MP: But, I guess in terms of like culture, where do you think you stand on that? Because, you're Mexican-American right?

AG: Yeah.

MP: So then how do you like...how do you...I guess like combine the two?

AG: Yeah.

MP: Like do you feel like you relate to one over the other? Or...

AG: With culture it's very like complex. Because I feel like the United States everyone's like one other culture. And sometime, it really depends for me is the atmosphere. Lately I've been, for the past years, I've been very like exploring my Mexican side just because my parents are like pure Mexicans. They're not like mixed or anything. And so I grew up with this atmosphere--especially like in Logan Heights or Barrio Logan's very like murals of like Mexican history or like the people around there are all Mexicans. And you can communicate with them with only Spanish because they didn't have the opportunity to learn English. And so [laughs] I...since I don't have my parents or my family members nearby, I always felt like with my culture I could connect to them in a way. I only have like...twenty cousins here, which is like...it's only three family members, like three families, both of them have like little cousins there. But most of them are all in Mexico. And when I miss them I just look at my...I decorated my room with like papel picado, I did like a little Dia De Los Muertos altar for my grandma, and then I had like pictures of like artists that I admired who were like, like Frida Carlo. And it was for me...it was like not only embracing like my heritage but it also was just like a way of connecting myself with my loved ones just because they're far away. And then, as for my American side, I feel like I'm more American by the way I dress. I feel like fashion really influences that just because sometimes my mom's like, "Oh you're gonna wear your indigenous dress out? Isn't that like a little bit weird?" Because they're not used to it. And, as for my music

taste, like that aspect it's like pure Spanish music [laughs]. Some English music like oldies, but they're like...like that. But it's kind of hard. You really, for me I have to take a break in my class. I'm like okay, I don't feel like I'm home, I can't relate to any of the people. I put in my earphones and just listen to some Spanish music just to like calm myself down, it's like a way for me to calm down and just be like okay, breathe in [breathes in], breathe out [breathes out]. You can do this. And it really brings me a sense of peace and hope. But [laughs] I don't know if that answer your question...

MP: No yeah, no that's definitely like...so you definitely relate more to your Mexican side?

AG: Yeah

MP: Okay. This is kind of a random question--

AG: --Yeah go ahead.

MP: But what do you think are some of the biggest struggles that you've faced so far?

AG: So I think I mentioned this a little bit before but the language barrier. I did take English therapy when I was very young...I think like around three. I first learned Spanish because my parents only communicate with me in Spanish. But sometimes the world can be a nasty place, and so there was an incident that occurred when I was younger, and it really caused a lot of trauma in me. So I stay quiet. And my mom knew something was wrong so she took me to the doctor. And they said, okay like she has this trauma. She has to learn the language again--whichever language, Spanish or English. That's like...take her time to relearn the language just so she could be more able to communicate with people. So the first...I know some Spanish obviously but...I learned the first word that I spoke after the trauma was English. So I took English therapy. But...and I always tell like, in the process people practice these words with

your child like “cat”, “dog”, and but my parents don’t know English so it’s hard practicing the words. So I have a little bit of their accent [laughs] when I speak. Which I felt shame before, but I’m now proud of it because I kinda feel like my parents are there talking to me [laughs]. And so...so I took English therapy till I was second grade and then but I also in the process like my Spanish started getting really....really like I didn’t have much practice so I was kind of like could be better. So I always had that like, people like teasing me for my English. And then my mom’s friend like oh she’s Mexican but she doesn’t know how to speak proper Spanish? So that’s always a barrier I still face. Even today they’re like oh, she takes Spanish classes and she can’t even speak like, say that word? So it kinda hurts but I...I’m practicing. And then another barrier would be...let’s see. There’s another one I had in my mind [laughs]. It’s just sometimes it’s kind of hard with the culture shock, especially with the like political environment. There’s a lot of like tension that wasn’t there before in my school. I know how to handle it but sometimes it’s kind of hard just ‘cause there’s people who really strongly believe in this like opinion, and the second you say like, “Okay, I don’t agree with this and here’s why.” Sometimes they attack you, and you, if you don’t know how to handle it or respond in the correct way, it could cause a lot of tension and lead you to like a bigger conflict. And at times I wanna speak so badly about like my strong opinions and tell them like hey, give me a chance to speak. But sometimes I have to calm myself down because I have to be aware that I’m in a scholarship. And I can’t say something that may offend someone who has more...more resources and power, in a sense. That like I can’t like get like go to like court or something. Or maybe like they’ll make a huge issue about it and they’ll have to count that. It’s my...my parents could be at harm. It could cost my scholarship. And sometimes your reputation can be damaged and my mom always says that your reputation

will always be there with you. And even if you like it or not, it has an impact. So sometimes when I wanna speak up or protest something about like, protesting about my support for like the Black Lives Matter, I have to take account that sometimes there's a place I can do it and sometimes I just have to be quiet, handle it, and talk about it in another form of way that I can instead of like risking everything that I've been working on.

MP: That's crazy. That's a tough lesson to learn.

AG: Yeah...really hard [laughs]

MP: Yeah, that's true. Isn't it like very frustrating for you? When you want to speak out in those moments?

AG: Yeah, very frustrating. Sometimes in those moments it causes like emotional drain 'cause I'm like wow, I could have spoken up and gave them a better insight. But I work really hard for my future and as much as I want to, the little stuff can really damage you in the long run. And sometimes like they could be my bosses. They could be like oh, I remember when you had this opinion, and I disagree with it. So there's like little things that you have to take account.

MP: Yeah. Going off of that, I guess this will be the last question. But, what do you hope to see in your future?

AG: [laughs] So [laughs], this is kind of random but I want to buy a house for my parents and I. And I wanted--I always thought about it really hard, a little bit too much [laughs]. But I want a red house, and inside the house I want it to be filled with art--like murals. And I want it to be kind of like, I always thought like if I die, I want it to be kind of like Frida Carlo's house like la casa. So when people visit it, but I want it be filled with like the history...of like myself and the struggles because I know the story that I have is not unique; a lot of people have the same story.

But it's not often documented, and if it is, we're often not talked about. And I wanted it as a way for people to like walk and just be like okay, I feel comfy. Like it's a safe space and I see this story, and I can relate to it and have change. And aside from that I also want to just...can I say this...I want to have little programs implemented around like countries--somewhere like Barrio Logan College Institute. But I want it to be based on just finding like a way to like use your voice without feeling shame, and telling your story. 'Cause some...like academic-wise, like there are programs that are out there to help you with your grades and tutors, which is good, especially for low-income communities that don't have the resources. But I feel like I missed a lot in my childhood is just finding my voice and using it in a healthy way, in a way that can really bring awareness of like social issues. And at times, since there's the cycle of poverty and sometimes within the cycle of poverty there's some like ways, coping mechanisms that are very toxic, that are passed down like generations and generations. And it's very hard to break that cycle, especially when you don't have someone to tell you that this isn't healthy and this can cause a lot of damage during your childhood as well as...like when you're an adult. And so I want something like that implemented where it shows that like okay, you have some like coping mechanisms that are unhealthy. And sometimes the way you behave can be like toxic for other people. We can break this together. And there's ways that you can handle this in a manner that will be both emotionally healthy for you as well as physically. So I want something like that implemented.

MP: That's really cool. Wow.

AG: [laughs]

MP: Well thank you so much for taking the time to talk.

AG: You're welcome. Anytime.