

Faces of No Sabo

by

Jazmine Medina

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Sponsor: David Wilson

Second Reader: Nicholas Garmendiz

In the constantly-evolving landscape of Hispanic-American identity, the phrase “No Sabo” has become a shorthand for cultural disconnection. The phrase “No Sabo,” which is the incorrect way of saying “I don’t know” in Spanish has become a pejorative for Hispanic children who grew up in the US and know little to no Spanish. While it may seem like a harmless joke, the phrase carries deeper implications—it marks a divide within the Hispanic community itself, where language fluency is often used as a measure of authenticity. This term ranges from being used to lightly tease a non-Spanish speaking hispanic, to shaming and exclusion of these individuals.

For many young Hispanic-Americans, especially those raised in the United States, being labeled “No Sabo” can feel like a rejection from their own culture. Spanish is often seen as a cornerstone of *Latinidad*—an essential link to heritage, family, and identity. Yet for many, language loss is not a choice but a byproduct of assimilation, generational shifts, and systemic pressure to prioritize English. In many households, parents or grandparents may have deliberately avoided teaching Spanish in hopes of protecting their children from discrimination or helping them “fit in” more easily. As a result, many young Latinos find themselves navigating a complicated cultural landscape—deeply connected to their roots, yet sometimes made to feel not “Latino enough” because of language barriers beyond their control.

I first encountered the term when I was probably in elementary school, when one of my cousins laughed after I stumbled through a Spanish sentence. “You’re becoming a No Sabo kid, huh?” he said. Though at the time I didn’t entirely understand what he meant, a pit filled my stomach and tears formed in my eyes. The rest of my cousins laughed and continued repeating it. I felt a strong sense of shame whenever I spoke Spanish and still do, to this day. That moment made me question whether I was “Latina enough,” and it sparked years of quiet insecurity about my ability to speak my native tongue and my cultural identity.

My senior project explores the meaning and impact of the “No Sabo” identity in contemporary Hispanic-American life and shedding light on the cultural divide that can be seen today. Through a campaign built on real student stories and a collaboration with Lizz from the MultiCultural Center, I aim to challenge the shame associated with cultural disconnection and instead foster understanding, pride, and belonging. By reclaiming the term “No Sabo” as part of our story, we can begin to heal the disconnect and redefine what it means to belong. By shedding light on the emotional and cultural impacts of growing up “No Sabo,” my senior project seeks to reframe the narrative—from one of loss and inadequacy to one of resilience, belonging, and empowerment within the Latino community.

The inspiration behind this project came from a desire not only to explore my own relationship with the “No Sabo” label but also to create space for others to share theirs. What began as a personal reflection evolved into a community-centered campaign, one built around storytelling, representation, and reclaiming identity. I began doing a bit of research on Hispanic representation here on Campus. After having conversations with Lizz from the multicultural center, Latinos Unidos, Nikko Garmendiz and a few others; I ultimately decided to collaborate with Lizz after hearing her story. She is a Puerto Rican woman who grew up in the US and away from her culture. Her parents never spoke to her in Spanish; fearing that she may have been discriminated against if she spoke Spanish. My next step was outreach. I reached out to peers across campus who identified with the “No Sabo” experience, sending an open invitation to participate in my senior project. I asked them to share a short bio, a photo, and any thoughts or stories they felt comfortable contributing. The response was overwhelmingly positive and I had eighteen stories to share, including my story.

Participants opened up about the quiet shame of not speaking Spanish “well enough,” the embarrassment of being corrected by family members, and the confusion of feeling too Hispanic in white spaces, but not “Hispanic enough” in their own culture. Many had never

spoken about these experiences before, but in seeing others share, they felt less alone. Their stories revealed recurring themes—cultural guilt, humor in miscommunication, pride in heritage, and a deep yearning to reconnect.

Using the submitted photos and bios, I designed a series of campaign flyers that were posted around campus. Each flyer featured a different student's face and a quote from their bio. At the bottom left of each flyer; there is a QR code that leads you to the instagram account made to share their stories to the world. The aim was to highlight the individual within the collective; to show that the “No Sabo” identity is not a singular experience, but a shared and valid one. This campaign, while sharing every individual's unique story, also advertised my campus event, held in collaboration with Lizz from the MultiCultural Center. My aim was to bring these conversations into a shared space. The event included a display of the flyers, an open mic, and facilitated dialogue about cultural identity and belonging. The goal was to move beyond the shame tied to being a “No Sabo kid” and toward a space of empowerment—where we reclaim the term not as an insult, but as a symbol of resilience and adaptability within the Hispanic community.

While the term “No Sabo” has often been used to shame, mock, or exclude, a shift is taking place among younger generations. More and more, Hispanic-Americans are reclaiming the label—not as an insult, but as a point of connection. Online communities, influencers, student organizations, and artists have begun to embrace the phrase with humor, pride, and vulnerability. This movement acknowledges that while language is important, it is not the sole measure of cultural identity.

My campaign is a small but intentional part of this larger movement. By asking participants to share their “No Sabo” stories, I wanted to create a platform where people could speak honestly about the feelings of insecurity, confusion, and resilience tied to their

experiences. Many participants said it was the first time they had been asked to reflect on this part of their identity—and even more of them said that it felt empowering to be seen and heard for these experiences. The campaign aimed not to erase the pain tied to cultural disconnection, but to show that identity is still valid, even when it's imperfect.

The event held in collaboration with the MultiCultural Center was designed to bring that reclamation into a shared space. By displaying the flyers, hosting open dialogue, and allowing for creative expression, we aimed to transform a word that once caused embarrassment into a symbol of unity. Reclaiming “No Sabo” doesn’t mean ignoring our losses—it means acknowledging them while embracing the complexity of what it means to be Hispanic-American. Through this project, I have come to believe that reclaiming identity is a powerful form of healing. “No Sabo” may once have been used to draw lines between who belongs and who doesn’t—but we are rewriting that narrative. We belong, whether we speak Spanish fluently or not.

Unfortunately, throughout this project, I often found myself questioning whether what I was doing “counted” as design. While many of my peers were creating polished branding packages, prototypes, or visual systems, I found myself knee-deep in conversations, outreach messages, and bios from participants. I was creating flyers, yes—but they felt secondary to the emotional labor of holding space for others. I worried that I wasn’t designing enough, or worse, that I was doing my senior project the wrong way. It took me time to understand that what I was doing *was* design—just not in the way I had originally imagined. I wasn’t simply making graphics. I was designing a campaign rooted in empathy, storytelling, and connection. The layout of a flyer may seem simple, but behind each image and sentence was a decision about how to represent someone’s story with care. I was designing a platform—one that gave people a voice, and that visualized belonging in a community where many had felt invisible.

Slowly, I began to see that this project wasn't lacking in design; it was redefining it. Design doesn't always have to live in sleek mockups or interface systems—it can also live in how we bring people together, how we create emotional resonance, how we make someone feel seen. That realization changed everything for me. It reminded me that design is not just about aesthetics—it's about intention. By the end of the project, I was no longer comparing my work to others. I was proud. I had created something meaningful—something that sparked conversations, connection, and healing. Maybe this is what design has been about the whole time: not just what we make, but what we make possible.

When I first set out to explore “No Sabo” culture, I thought I was simply highlighting a common experience within the Hispanic-American community. I didn't realize I was also healing a part of myself. This project became more than just a senior project—it became a journey of reconnection, community-building, and redefinition. The students who shared their stories with me didn't just participate in a campaign; they helped reshape the narrative around what it means to be Hispanic-American. They showed that being part of this community doesn't require fluency—it requires heart, memory, and the willingness to embrace all the contradictions that come with it. As I reflect on what I've learned, I realize that reclaiming “No Sabo” isn't about pretending we haven't lost something—it's about owning that loss and still choosing to belong. It's about creating space for those who are still finding their way back to their roots, and saying: *you're still one of us*. In the end, this thesis is not just a project—it's a reminder. That identity is not fixed. That healing is possible. And that design, at its most powerful, can bring people home to themselves.

Faces of **NO SABO**

Senior Project by Jazmine Medina
in collaboration with Liz Elvira

April 28th 6:30PM
Multicultural Center





no.sabo_project

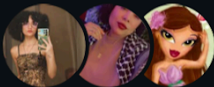


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Message



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