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Sino Ako? (Who am I?): Exploring Filipino American identity In Philippine Studies courses

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University of San Francisco

***Sino ako? (Who am I?): Exploring Filipino American identity
In Philippine Studies courses***

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by
Omega Loren Letana
December 2016

***Sino ako? (Who am I?): Exploring Filipino American identity
In Philippine Studies courses***

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by

Omega Loren Letana

December 2016

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Rosa M. Jiménez
Instructor/Chairperson

December 2016
Date

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ABSTRACT

Filipinos make up the third largest immigrant population in the United States and are the largest Asian immigrant group in California (U.S. Census, 2010). Despite this and an American colonial past, the American education system has failed to depict Filipino and Filipino American history accurately in its textbooks and courses. In addition to this, studies have indicated that young Filipino Americans often have difficulties in defining their identities. It is imperative that we recognize how this issue of identity formation is being addressed in postsecondary institutions through Philippine Studies courses, which employ decolonizing pedagogies.

This thesis paper analyzes the role that Philippine Studies courses in the San Francisco/Bay Area play in exploring identities among Filipino American students. It aims to highlight the importance of supporting these classes as students find it as one, and sometimes the only, avenue to discover their roots. Data supporting this study came from three types of sources: two class observations, two interviews, and 16 surveys. The qualitative data provided by the sources were analyzed and organized into themes. The students' responses indicated that most often have to negotiate being American with their Filipino identity. They also show that students struggle with fulfilling personal, family, and societal expectations especially regarding their educational and career paths. Most importantly, the participants voiced a strong desire to learn about their Filipino heritage and culture, which was the reason why most of them are in their respective Philippine Studies courses.

Defining Filipino American identity is an arduous task, made more difficult by a lack of opportunities in K-12 for students to learn about Ethnic Studies, and Philippine Studies in particular. While many of the students interviewed are still in the beginning phase of their self-discovery, it is clear that courses in community colleges and universities and other programs that are designed to support Filipino American students in their journey to decolonization and exploring their identity are critical and valuable.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to Lott (as cited in Revilla, 1997), the reason why Filipinos have maintained a nondominant status in the United States is because of colonial mentality and the practice of values, such as *hiya* (shame) and *bayanihan* (togetherness in common effort). However, the latter are in fact, superficial Filipino cultural values fabricated by Westerners to perpetuate their status as colonizers (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). While colonial mentality exists and is one reason offered for the struggles that Filipinos experience (David & Nadal, 2013), this belief does not paint a complete and objective picture. Filipinos have not been recognized to be of importance in history books and by American society; therefore, there are some Filipino Americans who would rather deny their heritage than risk being seen in a negative light (Revilla, 1997). How then are young Filipino Americans conceptualizing their identity if being Filipino is associated with being inferior? How has internalized oppression manifested in their lives and how has it affected their sense of identity?

As a Filipino American student, these are important questions to ask and attempt to answer. I consider myself a 1.5-generation Filipino American. I was born in the Philippines and moved to the United States at the age of 12. My family lived in a small Northern California town where farming was the main industry and the population was predominantly White and Latino. I did not meet another person who identified as Filipino until I was in high school and my contact with fellow Filipinos was limited to my home and at church. I had gotten used to being surrounded by people who did not look like me, speak like me, or know anything about the Philippines. Since then, my family moved to

San Francisco and I attended a university in Southern California with a large and diverse student body. Through those years, I questioned and struggled with the idea of what it means to be Filipino American when despite looking Filipino and holding an American passport, I felt that I did not quite belong in the Philippines or in the United States. It was at church and home, where I learned about and was surrounded by 1.5 and second-generation Filipino Americans, where I felt a sense of community. Kiang and Fuligni (2008) claim that for young people, their definition of ethnic identity is changing and dependent on the people who surround them; it is relational. They find that the strongest sense of ethnic exploration and belonging occur when young people are with their parents, who primarily serve as their sources of information regarding their culture and history. With this and my experiences in mind, I sought to investigate how my experiences resonated or differed from that of other Filipino youth. I am curious whether their schooling experiences, particularly in Philippine Studies courses, have affected their sense of identity.

Education can serve as both tools to either oppress or liberate. For students from nondominant groups, their education has largely been oppressive and has perpetuated the powerlessness of their people and an approach rooted in social justice through a decolonizing pedagogy is needed (Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003). The lack of knowledge about their own history and limited opportunities to challenge dominant narratives have led to students to feel that they have a “damaged culture” (Halagao, 2004, p. 463). Pedagogies that aim to empower the oppressed (Freire, 1989) are greatly needed in order for students of color to feel a sense of belonging. This involves educators using culturally relevant content “to develop activities that both validate those undergraduates’

cultural backgrounds and achieve important educational outcomes” (Museus & Maramba, 2010, p. 253). Ethnic Studies programs that make use of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1989) and decolonizing pedagogy (Tejeda et al., 2003) are imperative in exploring identities for students of color.

Filipinos and Filipino Americans have been largely invisible in American schools, whether in the curriculum, particularly in K-12, or representation in postsecondary educational institutions (Halagao, 2004; Maramba & Bonus, 2013). Not only do they feel unrecognized, but they are also subjected to expectations stemming from the model minority myth (Empleo, 2006). Having a space in which to explore the Philippines’ history and languages are important in defining the Filipino American identity and beginning transformative experiences. In order to discover and construct their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities, young Filipinos, such as those living and studying in the San Francisco/Bay Area, need opportunities, especially in institutions of higher education to dialogue and give voice to their experiences.

Background and Need for the Study

For many Filipinos, it is difficult to define their culture as it is a product of many years of colonization, annexations, and immigrations from both neighboring countries and imperialist nations (San Juan, 2009; Martin, 2012; Nadal, 2011; Ocampo, 2016). It is a combination of Eastern and Western values and beliefs (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). How much more difficult can this task of defining cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities be for those who are straddling the American and Filipino identities? According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), Filipinos make up the third largest immigrant population in the United States and are the largest Asian immigrant group in California.

With such a large number of Filipinos in the United States, it is curious that many Filipino immigrants choose to assimilate instead of to acculturate. These assimilation practices, which often begin even before Filipinos step foot in America have resulted in many young Filipino Americans not being able to speak their family's heritage language or knowing much about the Philippines (David, 2013; Ocampo, 2013). Some of this can be attributed to the Filipinos' lack of propensity to live exclusively in Filipino communities unlike other immigrant groups and also their proficiency in English has given them opportunities for occupational mobility. These have often resulted in their children being monolingual English speakers (Ocampo, 2013).

When the Spanish colonized the Philippines, the natives were stripped of their indigenous identity and were made to think of themselves as inferior. This was further exacerbated when the Americans took over the Philippines from Spain and justified their presence by portraying the Filipinos as wild, uneducated savages – a picture not that different from how Native Americans and Africans were depicted (David, 2013). During American colonialism, there was an increased migration from the Philippines to the United States; however, they were not all voluntary. Filipinos were sponsored to receive education in the United States but were also brought to the United States for labor (Hernandez, 2016; David, 2013). The Philippines' colonial past has certainly contributed to feelings of inferiority among its people. And these feelings are perpetuated after immigration to the United States due to the country's racialized context (Ocampo, 2013) as well as its education system.

Heras and Revilla (1994) claim that second-generation Filipinos are finding it more difficult to reconcile their identities than their first-generation counterparts.

Furthermore, Tuason, Taylor, Rollings, Harris, and Martin (2007) cite various studies that suggest that second-generation Filipino Americans have lower college attendance rates as well as lower self-esteem and increased mental health concerns, including a pattern of suicide, compared to first-generation Filipino Americans. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that 45.6% of young Filipina Americans have thought about committing suicide. In addition, only 20% of Filipino Americans in California stated that they are satisfied with their lives (as cited in David, 2013). Another concern is like other immigrant groups, there seems to be a three-generation language shift where by the third generation, Filipino Americans are unable to speak any Philippine language (Okamura, 1997). Much of these concerns can be linked to contemporary oppression and colonial mentality, which is defined as when “the oppressed perceives oneself as inferior to the oppressor” (David, 2013, p. 19). Hence, the process of decolonization, where Filipino Americans explore indigenous values and what it means to be Filipino, is essential in undoing colonial mentality (Strobel, 1997).

Moreover, Filipino Americans are often placed under the larger umbrella term “Asian Americans,” which poses a great concern. As previously mentioned, the Philippines’ history and relationship with the United States are unique compared to that of other Asian nation-states. Because of this, the Filipino, and in particular, the Filipino-American experience is quite different from that of other Asian American groups. It is best to study each group separately instead of using this umbrella term to define their experiences. Thus, the idea of the “model minority,” which claims that Asians excel in a number of fields despite being a minority, whether professionally or personally, is quite damaging (Empleo, 2006; Maramba, 2008; Nadal, Pituc, Johnston, & Esparrago, 2010;

Ocampo, 2013). Not only does it fail to reflect the challenges that Filipino American youth face in the United States, like underrepresentation in universities (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997) particularly in highly selective institutions (Teranishi, et al. as cited in Museus & Maramba, 2010), it also neglects to tell the story of these young people in academic literature.

In this study, I aim to focus on 1.5 and second-generation Filipino Americans because I believe that both the Philippine and American educational systems have failed to provide these students with a critical view of their histories that have led to the difficulties they currently face. I am defining 1.5-generation as people who are foreign-born and immigrated to the United States at a young age and have spent most of their lives living in America (Tuason et al., 2007). Second-generation is defined as those who are born in the United States to foreign-born parents (Rumbaut, 2006). As a product of both the Philippine and American education systems, I understand the yearning for learning about my people's history because from experience, both educational systems teach history from a Western and White perspective. As a Filipino American, I did not learn much about the contributions Filipino Americans have made in shaping the history of the United States until I was in college. Lapses, such as these, in education have contributed to challenges in defining and feeling confident about my Filipino American identity. I have seen some of my friends also question and grapple with this idea of identity. Understanding the experiences of not only our ancestors and fellow Filipinos, but also of other students and having the opportunities in institutions of higher education that provide them with the space and tools to investigate and define the Filipino American identity is important.

Purpose of the Study

This study will focus on the experiences of Filipino American students in the San Francisco/Bay Area. The main purpose of the paper is to explore the role that Philippine Studies courses in higher education play in the definition of Filipino American identity for the students that take these classes, including how aspects of decolonizing pedagogy perform in this process. This thesis paper will also examine how expectations from themselves, their families, and society influence their attitudes about and definitions of their identity. It will investigate what motivations and factors affect the Filipino American youth's desire to take these courses and how the students' sense of identity and definition of being a Filipino has changed throughout their classes.

Additionally, it is imperative to recognize the importance that Ethnic Studies courses, and in particular Philippine Studies classes, play in liberating students from internal colonization. This paper will discuss the value that Philippine Studies courses hold for them and the classes' significant role in the decolonization process of the students and their empowerment.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

The following are research questions to be discussed and answered in the course of this paper:

- 1) How do Filipino American youth define their identities?
- 2) What does the idea of the model minority myth mean to young Filipino Americans?
- 3) Have the students' definitions of their identities changed from when they began their courses to now?

- 4) What does having the opportunity to take Philippine Studies courses mean to the students?

Theoretical Framework/Rationale

Drawing from parts of Enriquez's (1977) seminal work on Filipino psychology, *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, I will use *kapwa* or shared identity, which is the "heart of the structure Filipino values" (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), as a framework for understanding the need for Filipino American students to learn Philippine history and explore their identities. According to Enriquez (1977), a salient aspect of *sikolohiyang Pilipino* is its assertion that while the Filipino may differ from each other, it is their consciousness that makes them all Filipino. Though others may think that they do not fit a Filipino stereotype, a Filipino is a Filipino as long as he believes that he is and acts accordingly. He also adds that the Filipino experience is shaped by experiences and contact with outsiders and understanding of the colonizing role of the West. Importantly, Filipinos, despite their different regional identities, have an equal national identity of being Filipino. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* aims to "Filipinize" Western ideas and the recognition of the value of *kapwa* is "[linked] with the struggle for justice, freedom and dignity" (San Juan, 2006, p. 58).

Sikolohiyang Pilipino is a decolonizing tool that challenges Western ideas and focuses on indigenous values and beliefs. This thesis will address the need to incorporate a decolonization process in exploring Filipino American identity. Decolonization, which is "a process of reconnecting with the past to understand the present and be able to envision the future," is perhaps the most important component of defining a Filipino American identity, (Strobel, 1997, p. 63). Knowing about indigenous concepts such as

tao (the ego, human being; indigenous Filipino) and *kapwa* (fellow being) will provide a sense of identity as Filipino Americans understand their history and know that their experiences are shared with and by others. In addition to this, the paper will look at how decolonization is practiced in classrooms through programs and Philippine Studies courses that make use of decolonizing pedagogical tools. A decolonizing pedagogy involves recognizing that colonial ideals are perpetuated in educational spaces and continue to oppress people of color, thus there is a fervent need “to transform these dimensions of schooling so that schools become sites for the development of a critical decolonizing consciousness” that will challenge and work so that people of color may no longer be subjected to their colonial and neocolonial conditions (Tejeda et al., 2003, p.12). And it is through working together and practicing solidarity, even beyond our Filipino American community, as people who have been colonized and oppressed, that we can begin to become decolonized. Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) suggests including a pedagogy of solidarity along with decolonization, which “is premised on a profound faith in the imaginative capacities of human beings to transform the conditions—and thus the definitions—of their existence” (p. 59). Recognizing ourselves in others, despite our differences, and working together to dismantle colonial and neocolonial forces through education will lead to liberation and empowerment.

Furthermore, following the idea of a need to look at the Filipino American experience separate from the Asian American experience, this thesis paper will also examine the concept of the “model minority myth” and how it has affected the representation of Filipino Americans in education and literature and how it has shaped the concept of Filipino American identity. The belief that Filipino Americans, like other

Asian American groups, are able to succeed and overcome challenges that minorities face have led to Filipino Americans being invisible in literature and unsupported in education and other aspects of life (Nadal et al., 2010). In reality, many young Filipino Americans do not experience a smooth educational path, despite having college-educated parents (Buenavista, 2009). This damaging myth of having a model minority must be challenged using the voices of Filipino American students.

Methodology

As the first step to conducting my study, I observed two Philippine Studies classes at a community college in the San Francisco/Bay Area. One is “History of the Philippines,” and the other, “Filipino Family.” During class observations, I took field notes, which I then studied and analyzed alongside survey responses. From these classes, I asked for volunteers and interviewed two Filipino American students. The next step was conducting individual interviews, which I recorded and transcribed. The interviews were held either on the school campus or locations near campus. Each interview lasted from one hour to two hours. The transcriptions were then analyzed and coded in order to identify emergent themes, which are discussed in Chapter III. In order to obtain more data to answer my research questions, I distributed surveys to the Filipino Family class and subsequently made it available online so that students from other Philippine Studies courses may be able to respond. Through this, I was able to obtain 16 responses – 15 from students at the community college and 1 from a private university, also located in the San Francisco/Bay Area. These responses were then analyzed, coded, and organized into the themes earlier identified from the interviews. Any other themes identified from the surveys are also addressed in Chapter III.

A mixture of qualitative, ethnographic research methods, including observation and interviews, were used throughout the process of writing this thesis paper to interpret and analyze the data gathered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In my interviews, I referred to indigenous research practices (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) including making sure that there is *pakikipagpalagayang-loob*, which is ensuring that there is a level of trust and rapport established between people who may identify similarly, but have just met. In addition, the interviews were based on the method of *pagtatanong-tanong*, a practice of asking questions in a casual manner, but with a strong intention of hearing meaningful answers from the interviewee. Conversely, the participants were also welcome and encouraged to ask me any questions they may have had. Employing these methods enabled me to dialogue with the interview participants which gave them the space to become co-creators of knowledge along with me. While they initially saw me in a researcher position, throughout the interviews, we were able to take turns in speaking and listening, both contributing knowledge (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014).

Additionally, the survey was designed to generate more qualitative data than quantitative data. Most of the questions pertaining to identity, attitudes, and opinions of the students' classes were open-ended to provide them with the opportunity to fully express themselves and elaborate on their answers as they deem necessary (Julien, 2008). As much as possible, the questions were written with language that can be easily understood by the respondents. They were also given the chance to ask for clarifications when surveys were provided in class and contact information was given for the online survey. For consistency, I also asked some demographic questions such as age and major as these were asked of the interviewees as well.

Limitations of the Study

The two greatest hurdles in conducting this study were the number of participants and time. While I had initially planned on conducting a handful of interviews to obtain more in-depth data for the study, recruitment was a challenge and as a result, I modified the study to include a survey. The survey enabled me to gather more data; however, it did not allow me to probe and ask follow-up questions. The online survey also did not give me a chance to elaborate and clarify some of the questions, causing some irregularities in responses. Time, both the participants' and mine, was something to consider in scheduling observations and interviews. The surveys did address a part of this problem, enabling students to answer the questionnaire on their own time and for as much time as they needed. However, the return rate for the online survey was much lower than expected.

Aside from the logistics of conducting the study, the number of participants may be a limitation as they obviously do not represent the entire population of Filipino American youth. Focusing on students who are currently studying in San Francisco also limits the scope of this study and is not reflective of the experiences of all Filipino American youth in the United States. While a larger group of participants may more accurately tell the story of 1.5 and second-generation Filipino Americans, time constraints and the scope of the project did not allow for this to be possible. The participants' immigration history should also be considered in understanding their views. In addition, throughout the study, as the researcher, I had to recognize that my experiences are different from that of the participants and use that knowledge as a strength in co-creating knowledge with the participants.

Significance of the Study

Through this study, I aim to contribute to studies about Filipino American students in the San Francisco/Bay Area, particularly students in postsecondary education. For a population this large, it is important to conduct studies that honor the unique experiences and challenges of this population. While studies about Asian Americans are useful, it does not accurately depict the difficulties young Filipinos experience in defining their identities and their struggles in understanding where they belong. As an old proverb states, “No history. No self. Know history. Know self.” Going through the decolonization process and studying Philippine history is a challenging feat, but it is the only way to begin understanding who a Filipino truly is, void of the definitions imposed by colonialism and the West. Through this thesis, I hope that studies specific to the Filipino American community will inspire the next generations to know their roots beyond how the American society has depicted them whether it be by themselves, through their families, or seeking our educational institutions that provide them with spaces where they can explore this topic. I also hope that the future generations will be encouraged to write and publish more works about the Filipino American experience, to honor and preserve the stories of those who came before them, and challenge the notion of a “model minority.” In addition, I fervently wish that this study will exhibit how important Philippine Studies and other Ethnic Studies courses are to students of color. They are valuable tools in exploring identity and in empowering students.

Definition of Terms

1.5-generation Filipino American: A person who was born in the Philippines and migrated to the United States as a child (Tuason et al., 2007). The 1.5 refers to the child

immigrating at a young age, usually age 12 or younger, with the parents, who are considered first-generation, to the United States (Min, 2002).

Colonial mentality: The condition in which the oppressed perceives oneself as inferior to the oppressor. The colonized reject anything that is associated with their culture, in this case, the Filipino culture, and put anything Western in a pedestal seeing them as superior (David & Nadal, 2013). They accept their inferior status as normal and yearn to be like their oppressors (Halagao, 2010).

Decolonization: The process of undoing and challenging feelings of inferiority as a result of colonization. It is a necessary component in developing a Filipino American identity that involves looking at history in order to understand present realities and challenges and look to the future (Strobel, 1997). Decolonization in education requires using pedagogical practices that challenge the current purpose of schooling, which is to maintain the status quo of oppressing people of color through content and institutional violence, and empower students of color to reject these notions and move towards liberation through action (Tejeda et al., 2003). An additional approach to this is by making use of pedagogy of solidarity that recognizes the contributions that everyone can make and identifies the skills they have in creating movements towards social change (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). A decolonizing framework in education aims to free students from the shackles of ignorance and lack of knowledge of their own culture and emboldens them to fight for social justice and change (Halagao, 2010). In the Filipino context, rejecting Western values by adopting *sikolohiyang Pilipino* to understand Filipino identity and cultural values is a form of decolonization. It involves confronting and unlearning Western ideas to interpret our surroundings through a Filipino lens (San Juan, 2006).

Kapwa: It literally means ‘fellow being’ in Tagalog. In Filipino psychology, it is the core value of the Filipino (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Enriquez (1986) defines this as “the unity of ‘self’ and ‘others’” (p. 11). This is the most important concept in Filipino interpersonal relationships and requires a person to see that the ‘self’ and ‘others’ are equal and are the same. It creates empathy in recognizing and validating others’ experiences and connecting them to your own (Strobel, 1997).

Second-generation Filipino American: A person who identifies as ethnically Filipino, was born and raised in the United States, and whose parents migrated from the Philippines (Rumbaut, 2006; Tuason et al., 2007).

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan.

- Dr. Jose Rizal

This quote from Dr. Jose Rizal, the proclaimed national hero of the Philippines, is literally translated as “The person who does not know how to look back where he came from, will not be able to reach his destination.” It alludes to the importance of knowing where you came from, your past, and in the process being critical of your history in order to move forward and arrive at a future for which you hope. This is the essential meaning of decolonization (Strobel, 1997). This quote describes the basis for this study: the need to know your past through education in order to find yourself.

The years of colonialism in the Philippines has had a great impact on the way Filipinos view themselves. For many Filipino Americans, defining what it means to be Filipino is a challenge that requires unpacking the Philippines’ colonial history and its remnants, like colonial mentality, and exploring their identity by navigating the racialized society here in the United States. These are what many Filipino American students face in their schooling experiences and what they may struggle with as they seek to define who they are as Filipinos. It is imperative that the varied experiences of Filipino American students are reviewed in this paper because there are recurring themes regarding their struggles that need to be addressed and included in dialogues. While these challenges are very much present, there is resistance through decolonizing pedagogies and Ethnic Studies courses that offer support to students as they seek to find out more about themselves.

Colonial History and Filipino American Identity

What it means to be Filipino American is difficult to define because there is a plethora of ways to attempt to explain what makes someone Filipino American. In the racialized context of the United States, Filipino Americans may either belong to Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders or have their own racial category in demographic surveys depending on where and for which governmental department these forms are filled out (Nadal, 2004). In addition, beyond the census' categorization of the group there is the constant question of under which racial group Filipinos belong that confounds many people when geographically-speaking, Filipinos are from Asia, but their history and experiences with colonialism are similar to those of Latinos (Ocampo, 2016) and Pacific Islanders (Chutuape, 2016).

There is no simple way to define what a Filipino American is. However, an important consideration in beginning to define a Filipino American identity is the Philippines' long history as a colony of Spain and later, the United States. Over three centuries of Spanish colonization has influenced Filipinos in substantial ways that differentiate Filipinos from other Asian ethnic groups (Chutuape, 2016). Some scholars have approached this conundrum from different perspectives. In the United States, Filipinos may identify to be a part of a number of groups: Asian American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or simply Filipino (Tuason et al., 2007). Even though Filipino Americans have worked and fought alongside with other Asian Americans and are one of the largest Asian immigrant populations in the United States (San Juan, 2009), they are sometimes rejected as being part of this panethnic group (Ocampo, 2016). It is also possible that Filipinos may distance themselves from other Asian Americans and identify

with their Black and Latino peers (Chutuape, 2016) possibly because of similar experiences shared with Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans (Nadal, 2011). Tuason et al. (2007) claim that Filipino Americans identify themselves as belonging with Pacific Islanders and that Filipino Americans are different from Asian Americans because of “their relative ease with English...and because the predominant religion is Catholicism rather than Confucianism or Buddhism” (p. 362). In particular, for Latinos, Filipinos find that their colonial history, language, and religion are closely related (Agbayani-Siewert, 2004; Nadal et al., 2010). On the other hand, Revilla (1997) offers and analyzes a list of qualities that some may use to define the “real Filipino”: heterosexuality, having the ability to speak a Filipino language, and physical attributes. Alternatively, Hernandez (2016) sees the task of identifying a Filipino, specifically a Filipino American identity as much more multidimensional, stating,

Across their various and often conflicting identities as children of immigrants, people of color, Asian Americans, Filipino Americans, and/or college students, Filipino American students’ hybrid identities cannot be summed up through one category of social difference or one check box on institutional data collections. (p. 340)

Despite strong Filipino resistance to American rule, the Americans believed that it was their duty to teach their “little brown brothers” how to be civilized (Nadal, 2011; Ocampo, 2016). Like the Spanish, the Americans also permeated Filipino culture and brought more Western influences, such as an educational system patterned after the United States that sought to keep Philippine languages out of the classroom, thus, barring Filipinos from practicing and learning their own culture (Martin, 2012). And as an American colony, a select few Filipino elites were sent to study at prestigious universities in the United States with the purpose of “[utilizing] their positions of influence to establish a self-sufficient, American modeled system of government” upon their return to

their homeland (Hernandez, 2016). These are further colonizing actions to demonstrate the power that Westerners had over Filipinos. They had used religion, and by extension, education, to colonize the minds and spirits of Filipinos.

Of all the remnants of the Philippines' colonial history, there is one whose effects are still strongly felt among Filipinos in the Philippines as well as in the diaspora. Many Filipinos and Filipino Americans suffer from colonial mentality (CM), which is also referred to as internalized oppression – when a person or group of people view themselves as inferior to those in power, they reject anything associated with their ethnic group, and accept this imbalance in power as normal (David & Nadal, 2013). Not only do they accept this as normal, but they yearn to be like the colonizers (Halagao, 2010). This internalized oppression has developed and been reinforced through many years of colonialism. A number of scholars claim that it is because of colonial mentality that Filipino Americans have a difficulty in defining Filipino culture and identity, with some going to the extent of thinking that an authentic Filipino culture and identity may be nonexistent. Discontent among Filipino Americans may possibly be attributed to colonial mentality (Strobel, 1997; Nadal, 2004). However, it is important to bear in mind that while many Filipinos and Filipino Americans experience colonial mentality as a result of internalized oppression, it is possible for Filipinos and Filipino Americans to not possess colonial mentality (David & Okazaki, 2010). Contradictory to what many Filipino scholars claim, some (Tuason et al., 2007) argue that it is actually “very rare” for Filipino Americans to express being “confused, conflicted, or in crisis” over their identity (p. 370). Thus, we must be critical and recognize that Filipino Americans may also have different experiences and varied thoughts about their identity.

Ultimately, San Juan (2009) claims that the only way for Filipinos to discover their “authentic identity” is if the Philippines is truly “free, prosperous, [and] genuinely sovereign” (p. 21). Knowing the history of the Philippines and its relationship with the United States is important in unfolding the complexities of the Filipino American experience and how their lived experiences, as well as their internalized oppression, have shaped their Filipino American identity. Colonial mentality and a complicated racialized system in the United States have made the task of defining a Filipino American identity incredibly arduous.

Education, Filipino American Students, and the Model Minority Myth

There are a number of issues that concern Filipino American students. Other than knowing about the complex colonial past of the Philippines, which still affects the lives of Filipinos and Filipino Americans, we should also investigate the model minority myth. This myth assumes Asian Americans to be law-abiding, academically and financially successful, hence the term “model minority” (Empleo, 2006; Maramba, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010; Ocampo, 2013). There are two problematic implications caused by this idea. One is ‘Asian Americans’ is a broad term that ignores and devalues the varied experiences of the different groups within the Asian American category (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Maramba, 2008). It dismisses the fact that there may be needs and difficulties that exist within this group. Second, this myth creates an image of what a “good” member of a minority group should be and expects all members of all nondominant groups to be able to succeed and to be “good” Americans (Lee, 1996; Nadal, 2011). Classifying several ethnic groups under one label, Asian Americans, is dangerous. Agbayani-Siewert (2004) says this of the limiting racial classifications in the

United States: “Racial categories are not synonymous with cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes and therefore do little to expand our knowledge” (p. 49).

Furthermore, being categorized under the vast umbrella of Asian Americans, the links to American colonial education in the Philippines and their experiences “within the American racial landscape” are overlooked (Hernandez, 2016, p. 333) and attempts to disregard the racist colonial American period in the Philippines (Buena Vista et al., 2009). Scholars have pointed out that Filipino American students, who are purportedly part of this model minority group, actually have lower rates of attendance in highly selective post secondary education institutions compared to other Asian Americans (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Museus, 2013). Second-generation Filipino American students share similar educational experiences with underrepresented students of color (Buena Vista et al., 2009), which challenges the idea of a model minority. For some students, they find that they are more similar to their Black and Latino peers in their values and resist notions of a racial binary, and even further challenge the model minority myth as applying to them, while at the same time imposing it on others (Ocampo, 2013; Chutuape, 2016). Some scholars have a slightly different view on Filipino American students, suggesting that Filipino Americans are quite different from other Asian Americans as they possess values that are more similar to White Americans (Agbayani-Siewert (2004) and when compared to Chinese Americans, their faster rate of acculturation is also reflected in lower rates of school achievement (Eng, Kanitkar, Cleveland, Herbert, Fischer, & Wiersma, 2008). The latter study is an example of literature that does not discuss the colonial past of the Philippines and how that part of history has contributed to the assimilation and acculturation processes of Filipino

Americans.

Filipinos may initially appear to validate the model minority myth with high rates of college degrees; however, this statistic fails to acknowledge where these degrees were obtained and that for most, these were attained abroad prior to migrating to the United States (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). This is one of the struggles that second-generation Filipino American students face. They are expected to be able to adapt effortlessly in post secondary institutions given that they have parents who are college-educated. But their experiences are in fact comparable to those of 1.5-generation college students because their parents' college experiences are much different than their own here in the United States. They are often not able to receive the support that other children of college-educated parents do (Buenavista, 2009). Additionally, Filipino American students experience 'cultural dissonance' (Museus, as cited in Museus & Maramba, 2010) as they struggle with bridging their Filipino identities at home with other identities at school (Maramba, 2008) that may affect their sense of belonging on campus (Museus & Maramba, 2010). Their sense of identity shifts depending on their social contexts (Ocampo, 2016). And as part of the "model minority," Filipino Americans and other Asian American students are not provided with much-needed resources because of the assumption that they do not need any assistance in college for they are supposed to be inherently educationally successful (Buenavista et al., 2009; Maramba, 2008). These are critical contextual considerations when discussing the experiences of Filipino American students.

Moreover, Filipino American history is invisible in K-12 curricula in the United States (Halagao, Tintiango-Cubales, & Cordova, 2009). Despite the decades of being an

American colony, the participation of Filipinos in various social movements in the United States – including their integral part in the creation of the first Ethnic Studies program in the country (Hernandez, 2016) – and fighting alongside Americans in World War II, American textbooks and classes do not discuss any of these in depth, if at all.

Grouping all Asian Americans together diminishes the different experiences and contributions each ethnic group has committed and impedes in providing students with resources that are tailored to them to address their unique challenges. Because the story of Filipino Americans has been largely dismissed in American schools, particularly in K-12, it is essential to investigate what opportunities in higher education are offered to Filipino American students to explore their heritage and help them define their identities and feel proud of their Filipino heritage. This is important as Filipino American college students have reported experiencing a “lack of belonging” in their schools and have looked to student organizations to have a sense of belonging, “feeling voiceless on campus” as a result of low representation, and “hostile classroom classmates” (Maramba & Museus, 2010).

Decolonization and Ethnic Studies Courses

An essential element in exploring Filipino American identity is engaging in decolonization. The decolonizing process for Filipino Americans involves getting in touch with indigenous values stemming from *sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) (Strobel, 1997; Enriquez, 1977). *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* is a tool for combatting the psychology of colonialism. Enriquez (1986) discusses salient values in the Filipino culture that influence the way in which Filipinos understand the world around them. One of those is the cultural value of *kapwa*. *Kapwa*, or shared identity, involves not only

having empathy for others but also seeing yourself in their experiences and the connectedness that exists between yourself and others, which includes all living things (Strobel, 1997; David, 2013). With the indigenous value of *kapwa*, Filipino Americans may see themselves in the lives of those who lived the immigrant experience before them as well as their ancestors in the Philippines and their struggles in the face of colonialism.

Filipino Americans, particularly second-generation Filipino Americans, are often curious about their identity (Tuason et al., 2007). While young Filipino Americans may not experience the exact same struggles their ancestors did, through *kapwa*, they are able to share in these struggles. They may recognize similar experiences as they face challenges in their schooling experiences. Using cultural practices like *kuwento* (stories) as a counternarrative, students do not only honor Philippine oral traditions of storytelling, but they are able to challenge and build upon what very little is known of Filipino American history in the American education system (Jocson, 2008). Through this pedagogical practice, the students find that their experiences are valid and these stories allow them to build empathy and build a community based on *kapwa*.

Education can both oppress and liberate. The American education system is designed to be racist and to perpetuate the status quo, encouraging students of color to reject their own ethnic cultures through misinformation or whitewashing of history (Dickeman, 1973). As education had been a tool to colonize people of color, including Filipinos, it can also be a path to decolonizing the minds of Filipinos in the Philippines and in the diaspora, particularly in the United States. Scholar educators have been exploring pedagogies that will help Filipino Americans students combat feelings of inferiority. Some look to “curriculums and pedagogy with decolonization framework

with the aim to emancipate students from ignorance and ignite a commitment to social change” (Halagao, 2010, p. 496). Others have responded to the need for decolonizing and critical pedagogies by developing Ethnic Studies programs to address cultural identity, academic preparation, and empowerment with Filipino American students. A decolonizing pedagogy, according to Tejeda et al. (2003) is:

an anticolonial and decolonizing theory and praxis that insists that colonial domination and its ideological frameworks operate and are reproduced in and through the curricular content and design, the instructional practices, the social organization of learning, and the forms of evaluation that inexorably sort and label students into enduring categories of success and failure of schooling. Thus, an anticolonial and decolonizing pedagogical praxis explicitly works to transform these dimensions of schooling so that schools become sites for the development of a critical decolonizing consciousness and activity that work to ameliorate and ultimately end the mutually constitutive forms of violence that characterize our internal neocolonial condition. (p. 6)

Programs designed to work with education students to teach Ethnic Studies and culturally relevant content, such as Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) in the Bay Area (Daus-Magbual & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016) and Pinoy Teach in the Pacific Northwest (Halagao, 2004; Halagao, 2010) are examples of decolonizing practices. These are programs that connect Filipino undergraduates and public school students to teach them about Philippine history and culture, topics that are of relevance to young Filipino Americans. PEP is a program that uses a critical leadership praxis to “[produce] critical leaders in classrooms, schools, and the community” dedicated to social justice and equity (Daus-Magbual & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016, p. 181). It not only helps develop skills for future teachers, it also encourages young Filipino Americans to become great educators. Pinoy Teach focuses on curricular concepts, followed by content, with a strong preference to advocating for critical pedagogy. Students were provided with concepts, which serve as frameworks, in order for them to understand not only the Filipino

American experience, but the experience of other cultural groups as well (Halagao, 2010). Upon completion of the program, past undergraduate students who participated in the program expressed a “positive outlook in life and active community engagement” (p. 507). Both programs involve undergraduate students in Education learning about Philippine history and culture in an Ethnic Studies framework and working with and teaching Filipino American high school students in Philippine Studies classes (Halagao et al., 2009). The programs also use skits, poetry and storytelling in their classes and along with practices like *kuwento*, Filipino American high school students are able to engage in critical performance pedagogy (Halagao et al., 2009). Additionally, the Filipina-developed practice of Pinayism, as praxis, strives to “connect the global and local to the personal issues and stories of Pinay struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength. It is an individual and communal process of decolonization, humanization, self-determination, and relationship building, ultimately moving toward liberation” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 179-180). These are excellent examples of decolonizing practices that allow students to move from merely being receptacles of knowledge as transferred by their teachers, but they are given the opportunity to become empowered and move into action – a process of “emancipation” (Freire, 1989).

There is a need for students to feel that their stories are valid and that their voices are important. Where their K-12 education has failed Filipino American students and also other students of color, scholar educators are trying to fill in these gaps in higher education through Ethnic Studies courses, which are now being to K-12 classrooms (Tintiangco-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2014). Through the work of these educators, students are able to explore their identities,

challenge dominant narratives about their histories, and feel empowered to work towards social justice and change and share their own experiences.

Summary

Filipino American youth have a number of challenges that they have to face as students: lack of knowledge of their own history, being stereotyped along with all Asian American students, being invisible in their K-12 education and sometimes in higher education as well, and discovering a complex identity as Filipino American. While there is a small number research on the experiences of Filipino American students, most of the ones that exist address these challenges and recognize the need to understand the socio-historical contexts of the Filipino experience. Unfortunately, some studies have neglected to acknowledge the colonial past of the Philippines, which may help explain why some Filipinos exhibit insecurity or a rate of assimilation higher than other minority groups in the United States. Many of them have carried Western values even before setting foot in the United States.

The deep scars of colonialism, in the form of colonial mentality, are important to consider in exploring Filipino American identity. Identity is difficult to define and it often changes depending on experiences and contexts. Philippine Studies courses, similar to Ethnic Studies courses, are there to combat the oppressive nature of education and are designed to aid students in exploring their identities and in encouraging them to challenge dominant narratives and become champions for their own communities. These courses demonstrate *kapwa* by exposing the students to not only their history but to stories of other nondominant groups and their struggles so that they may find commonalities and feel empathy and work towards a more equitable society. It is through courses like these,

rooted in decolonization, that students may be able to have transformative experiences and learn more about their cultures and in the process, be free, be critical of and spread the knowledge that has been shared with them.

CHAPTER III RESULTS

This thesis paper aims to examine the importance of Philippine Studies courses in how students explore and define their identities as Filipino Americans. Furthermore, this study analyzes how expectations can take in different forms and how students deal with pressures from their families and society, who may expect the students to meet stereotypes and deem them as part of the “model minority.” It seeks to answer whether the students find value in these courses and if they see the benefit in taking classes that are decolonizing spaces and are intended to aid them in their journey to discovering their roots and culture.

Introduction

The study began with an observation of a “History of the Philippines” class at a local community college. A second visit was an observation of a Philippine Studies Class entitled “The Filipino Family” where I distributed a survey to the students. I interviewed two students from these classes at locations most convenient for them near their school campus. Finally, I made the survey available online and opened it to students of other Philippine Studies courses from the community college as well as a private university, both located in the San Francisco/Bay Area. In total, there were 18 students who participated in this study; 2 interviewees and 16 survey respondents. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30. Of the 18 participants, 17 attend the community college. Their majors and careers goals varied from Undecided, Nursing to Sociology. A majority of the participants identified as either first-generation or second-generation Filipino Americans although the definitions for generational status are not consistent among all respondents. Note that the names of the participants used in this paper are pseudonyms.

When I visited the History of the Philippines, where 11 students were present, the instructor was discussing the *Katipunan*, a group of revolutionaries who fought against the Spanish. After a brief lecture about historical events that were significant to the revolution, the instructor provided the students and me with copies of the “*Mga Aral nang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (Katipunan Code of Conduct),” which had a copy the Tagalog text and an English translation. The students read it silently and the instructor facilitated a class discussion about the text asking students to reflect on which of codes of conduct listed resonated most with them. Some of the students shared their thoughts about the discrimination Filipinos faced during Spanish colonization.

In my class visit to the Filipino Family class, 10 students had attended the class that day. The class session revolved around the concept of “colonial mentality.” The students watched a video about a Filipino family that had immigrated to the Philippines and were asked by the teacher to think of this question as the video played: “What is your perception/understanding of this family’s assimilation/acculturation into American society and their expressions of colonial mentality?” During the discussion, some students expressed being uncomfortable watching the family in the video talk about being proud of their Filipino heritage, yet stressing several times how important it is to adapt to American culture. Some students expressed that they have had similar experiences as this with their own families and other Filipino families they know. The class ended with a sentiment from one student expressing that though “they tried so hard to fit in, they’re still Filipino.”

Some of these class discussions were reflected in the way the participants answered the interview and survey questions. Visiting their classes also provided me with

an idea of what it is they are learning about in Philippine Studies courses and see first-hand how the topics examined are relevant to Filipino American youth. The results of the survey and interviews are discussed in the following sections, which address the research questions listed in Chapter I. In my conversations with Kristine and Oscar, the two students I interviewed and in reading the responses to the surveys, I identified three themes: negotiating being American and Filipino identity, meeting personal and family expectations, and yearning for opportunities to know yourself. The theme of negotiating being American and Filipino identity was raised throughout the interviews and survey responses. It involves defining what it means to be Filipino in an American context where some of the respondents feel they live in two different worlds. Meeting personal and family expectations appeared is an extension of the first theme in the way that family expectations are oftentimes associated with being part of the Filipino culture, while personal goals are usually seen as part of their American identity and how these are connected to societal expectations as part of the model minority myth. The last theme is yearning for opportunities to know yourself, apparent in all interviews and survey responses as students identified their Philippine Studies courses as spaces where they have learned about themselves and their identities as Filipinos.

Negotiating Being American and their Filipino Identity

All, but one of the participants, self-identify as a Filipino in some way (see Fig. 1). Answers varied from Filipino, Filipino American, to Pinay and Americanized-Filipino. In their responses most attributed their Filipino identity to family. Carla, a 19-year old Graphic Design student at the community college wrote in her survey response that she considers herself to be Filipino because her family is Filipino and to be Filipino

means to be “born from a Filipino family and having a strong sense of family with your [own] family and [with] others” (survey, 11/3/2016). Much of the responses about Filipino identity that reflected the participants’ positive view of being Filipino were about the welcoming and community-oriented aspect of Filipino culture. However, it is in this definition of being Filipino as being part of a Filipino family, whether nuclear, extended or chosen, where some students, particularly the two I had interviewed, have had to grapple with American norms and Filipino culture, which is most associated with their families.

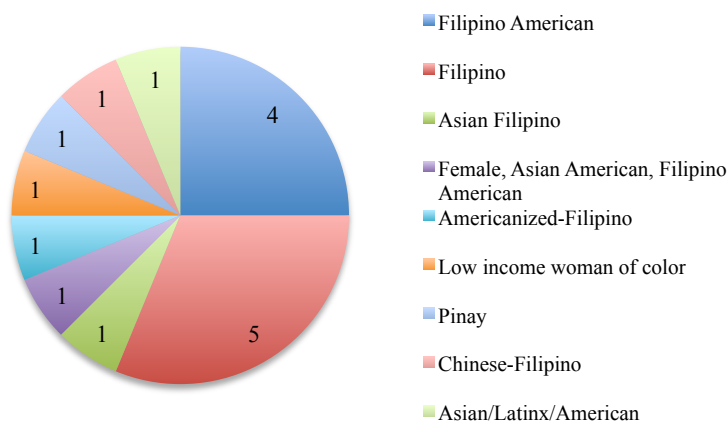


Figure 1. Survey responses to the question “How do you identify yourself?”

The first person I interviewed was Kristine, an 18-year old freshman at the community college, who is interested in the arts and helping others but is still exploring what her career goals are. She was born and raised in San Francisco and has spent some years living and attending school in the East Bay. She was the first student to approach me to say she would like to participate in an interview with me. What I noticed first about Kristine is her bubbly and friendly personality. During the interview, she expressed several times how much she loves being Filipino. As someone who identifies as Filipino American and has struggled with navigating being American “outside” and being Filipino

inside the home, she offers her take on being Filipino American:

We have the best of both worlds. A big part of our heritage like our heritage from our family who may be foreign and what we have here in America. It's very liberating. It feels like kinda having two different cultures really makes us open-minded. (interview, 10/15/16)

She expressed at various points of the interview that she values the Filipino culture, but expresses frustration with a lack of understanding between herself and “older relatives,” who she sees as more “traditional” Filipinos when it comes to lifestyle choices and “way of thinking.” She also sees them as “foreign” as mentioned in the quote above, clearly compartmentalizing where the Filipino and American spaces are in her life. What Kristine associates with the Philippines and Filipino culture includes a negative view about safety in the Philippines and “dramatic” relationships within families. In contrast, she sees Filipino culture as festive, discussing food being central to Filipino relationships and being very welcoming. She also comments that Filipinos in the Philippines “are a little more judgmental” when it comes to “looks like lightening their skin”, while Filipino Americans “are a little more open-minded.” These are observations she has made from personal experience with family members as well as relatives relaying stories about the dangers and hardships faced when living in the Philippines. She does not name these examples as manifestations of colonial mentality and does not offer possible reasons for these other than ascribing them to cultural and generational differences. Because there is a lack of access to Philippine Studies in K-12, Kristine along with some other students, are still in the beginning processes of learning how to fully understand colonial mentality.

Approaching the topic of identity from a different perspective, Oscar, a 25-year old Political Science major at the community college, who I interviewed after his class and was open about his life experiences, first commented on the “filipino” label as a

Western concept and strongly identifies with the *katutubo* (indigenous people) of the Philippines. He also adds that in discussing Filipino identity, we must make mention of “Pacific Islanders and all the different people who were there” because they are an integral part of the history of the Philippine Archipelago and for a multicultural country like the Philippines, “one face of the Philippines does not do the whole country justice” (interview, 11/5/16). His search for trying to understand how he came to be where he is now, a Filipino American, is centered on his family’s immigration story. He says this of his interest in political aspects of culture since he was young:

Through interacting with older relatives...I’ve just had a keen ear to the way that the American culture enforces identity and specifically being Filipino, I’ve always been paying attention to, you know, how this immigrant experience, chain immigration experience, like how does that set us apart and what does that fully entail when you say, yes, I am Filipino American? (interview, 11/5/16)

From the time I spent with him during the interview, his passion for understanding his Filipino identity while resisting Western influences and his desire to “apply a cultural lens to [his] studies of politics and to view [his] family as a case study to understand relations of power” was palpable.

While the participants had different ways of defining what it means to be a Filipino, one participant’s answer summarizes this well: “There is no one way to define what being Filipino is, because every person's lived experience as a FilAm/Filipino person is different and very situational” (Trina, survey, 11/21/16). However, because most of the participants saw their families as the ties that bind them to their being Filipino, their families’ experiences and attitudes have shaped the way they understand what it means to be Filipino so that Filipino is often associated with the home, while American is outside of the home. It appears that the students continuously strive to reconcile these two spaces and identities.

Meeting Personal, Family, and Societal Expectations

As family appears to be a major point of discussion in the interviews and survey responses, it not only represents the students' Filipino heritage and identity, but for some, it also represented expectations and "pressure." In her survey response, Alicia, a Biology student, writes:

Being Filipino, as in any Asian culture, you have to be what your parents want you to be – a doctor or nurse – and that you have to be going to school. Education first. You have so much responsibility and you are stressed out. (survey, 11/3/2016)

Kristine echoes Alicia's statement and shares her own experience with having to meet "parents' expectations and their criteria," but adds how this conflicts with her personal goals saying:

My mom's always like, 'Oh you gotta do what you gotta do for money.' Money's the goal, but for me and like my Filipino friends, that's not even like the thing of the matter to us. Like of course money is important; we need it to survive, but we care about like what makes us happy. And that's a big thing for me. (interview, 10/15/16)

Both Alicia and Kristine mention that these expectations from family – to succeed in school and have lucrative careers – are part of Filipino culture. Adam, a self-identified second-generation "Americanized-Filipino" agrees, saying, "[My] parents expect the best from me, just like any other Filipino parent" (survey, 11/22/16). In Kristine's narrative, this is an example of where her being Filipino conflicts with the American aspect of her identity. The pressure from parents to do well in school and to pursue financially stable careers stem from the parents' desire for their children to succeed and achieve or maintain a middle or upper middle class lifestyle (Wolf, 1997).

A couple of other students also answered along these lines in the survey when asked about expectations they feel others have of them, particularly their families: do

well and live better lives than your parents did. What I find striking about Alicia's response, in particular, is that she was in the Filipino Family class which had reviewed the video clip about a Filipino immigrant family who discusses these same ideas of success: the expectation for their children to become doctors and succeed. She completed the survey prior to the class discussion about colonial mentality and I am curious whether her answers would have been different had she filled out the survey after class. The idea of the American Dream, which most immigrants aspire to live, drives parents to want their children to achieve economic success often through educational success. This demonstrates how discussions in courses like this mirror the lives of a number of Filipino-American students. These comments on academic and economic success are not only reflective of colonial mentality, which was discussed at length in the Filipino Family class, which I observed, but it also plays into the model minority myth.

Of the 18 participants in this study, only five expressed knowledge of the model minority myth and of them, four said they had experienced someone having these expectations of them. Despite the fact that most of the participants were not aware of the term, they relayed sentiments that echo these expectations of the "model minority."

Kristine, who said that she had not heard of the term, understood that there are often expectations that come with being identified as an Asian American student. She says that "it's terrible because [she's] the complete opposite" (interview, 10/15/16) of Asian stereotypes like being good in Mathematics, because she is more drawn to creative subjects. Trina, a Sociology student at the private university, who does know of the myth, says this of her experience: "People have expected me to be academically competent or even surpass my peers in terms of education and civil obedience" (survey, 11/21/16).

Oscar defines the myth as having been fabricated “in order to affirm white superiority through the upholding of the notion of Asian success” (interview, 11/5/16). He states that he’s “experienced being mistaken for Chinese and was stereotyped about academic abilities from other friends in school.”

There are both pressures coming from their families and outside, a point in which both Filipino and American have agreed in their expectations of Filipino American youth. Although, considering colonial mentality and the myth of a model minority, familial expectations largely stem from these concepts. What further complicate this are the goals and expectations the students have for themselves.

Kristine expresses her desire to have a career where she “doesn’t feel like I’m going to work” (10/15/16) as opposed to what she believes her mother wants for her. She adds that for her, she would like to avoid “making the same mistakes as [her] older relatives” who she has seen work so hard that they barely have any time for themselves and their families and they “go to work stressed...and come back from work stressed.” As for Oscar, he hopes to have a business opportunity that will be able to support him and his family financially, but that will also help others discover their own passions. He says that he does not desire to be incredibly rich, but have just enough to provide for his family. In his interview, he makes comments that imply that in making his decisions, he considers how it will impact his family and future family financially. He narrates about his living situation and the dilemma of moving out from the family home versus being practical and saving the money to help the family and for his education. He also wants to pursue a graduate degree but worries about the financial burden it will have on him.

These examples are only from a few participants and are not to say that their goals

and their families are not necessarily the same, but they do feel that the pressure to meet their families' expectations are very real and present. These reflect just how important family is in the lives of the students.

Yearning for Opportunities to Learn about Yourself

An overwhelming number of participants express the desire to learn more about their heritage, hence, learn about themselves (see Fig. 2). There were nine respondents who, in various ways, express that the reason why they decided to take their respective Philippine Studies classes was to know about “my roots,” “my own history,” and to further “my knowledge of the Filipino culture.” While some students had said that their ideas about what it means to be a Filipino had not really changed throughout their courses, their responses when asked what these classes mean to them reflect a different narrative. For many of the students, these classes have helped them make sense of who they are and their experiences.

REASON	# of students
To know about my history/culture/roots	10
To apply a cultural lens to my studies	1
Prerequisites	3
Because of the instructor	1
Referred by family/friend	2
To support the Philippine Studies Department	1

Figure 2. A summary of survey respondents' answer to "Why are you taking this course?" Note that some students' answers belong to more than one category.

Alicia says, “It has made me realize the things that relate to me and my families” (survey, 11/3/16). The space has allowed her to investigate why she may be feeling that pressure from her parents that she mentions in her survey response. Further, Lisa, who identifies herself as “Asian/Latinx/American,” says that her Philippine Studies course has led her to “see that there’s no way of being a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Filipino” (survey, 11/27/16).

Language is culture and thus, a part of knowing your culture is to know your language. Many of the participants admit that they do not speak a Philippine language and of them, most expressed shame and disappointment in not being able to speak the language of their parents. Trina writes, “I am disappointed that I cannot speak the language.” Cathy, a second-generation Filipino American, echoes this declaring, “I feel ashamed whenever I can't speak Tagalog but my parents didn't teach me when I was younger and always spoke to us in English” (survey, 11/3/16). Some express that they want to learn a Philippine language, however, some cited time or discouragement from family as setbacks. The last statement by Cathy can be expounded to investigate the intricacies of colonial mentality and language and power, some aspects of which are discussed in Chapter II, and the roles they play in heritage language learning.

In contrast to the feelings of deep regret over being unable to speak a Philippine language, largely because their families only spoke to them in English, a smaller number of students who can speak a Philippine language feel pride and enjoyment in their ability. Cris has this to say: “I feel blessed because I get to speak my language” (survey, 11/3/16). Andres concurs, stating, “I do speak Visayan and Tagalog. It's an advantage to know my ancestors' language” (survey, 11/23/16). For these students, they are pleased to connect to their heritage through speaking their parents’ native languages.

The students expressed that their longing to learn more about their cultural roots, whether it be language or Philippine history, is the reason for deciding to take their respective classes. And for many of them, they have accomplished this goal and in the process have also learned about themselves and their identity.

Since taking the class about Philippine history, Kristine has felt that on a personal

level, her sense of identity has changed, saying about the course:

It has helped me get in touch with my identity. Before, I just felt that ‘Oh this is how it is at home,’ but I realized that this is who I am and something I am proud to be. Honestly, I felt so like oblivious about Philippine culture before this class...but after a while learning so much more about where we all came from, it’s very eye opening... (interview, 10/15/16)

All of the participants expressed positive experiences with their classes, stressing how important having the space has been for them to learn about their history and understand their own families and experiences in the American context.

For some students, their Philippine Studies course has provided them with pieces of information about their heritage that are absent from their K-12 education to other higher education courses. These courses have given them the opportunity to consider “other aspects of [their] ethnic identity” (Trina, survey, 11/21/16). And because of their transformational experiences, they believe that other young Filipino Americans can benefit from having opportunities to take classes about the Philippines and Filipinos.

Lisa says this about her class: “It’s made me see that there’s a lot more to the history of the [Philippines] than what textbooks choose to show us.” In the same vein, commenting on the lack of visibility of Filipinos in the American curriculum, Kristine asserts:

It is important for Filipino American students to be learning about our culture because like Philippine history isn’t something we learn about like within the American education...Sometimes we tend to lose ourselves and I feel like bringing us back to our roots just really grounds us...Like that’s just our ethnicity, but that’s who we are. We should take up and uphold everything that our roots are. (interview, 10/15/16)

And for some like, Oscar, having this opportunity is a privilege that he believes Filipino American students should take advantage of even if questioned by some family members. He exclaims:

Having Aunties ask you why you're taking... 'Why?' 'Why?' Well, it should be obvious! They're offering it [History of the Philippines/Filipino Family]... Is that so wrong? I mean, well, you haven't really filled in blanks for us so can you blame us? And shame on you [referring to the Aunties], you know. So, I'm gonna get it in college. (interview, 11/5/16)

As threats over the future of Ethnic Studies courses loom, some of the participants recognize how important it is to take these courses to keep Ethnic Studies, particularly Philippine Studies, alive. Oscar, Kristine, and Adam all indicated that aside from wanting to learn more about Philippine culture, self and community awareness, they are taking their classes to show their advocacy for the Philippine Studies department. Because for them and many students in these classes, they have finally been given the opportunity to know their story and they would like others who have been deprived of this knowledge in school and in their homes, to have the chance to have a critical view of and know of their own people's stories.

Summary

In the interviews and survey responses, the students directly addressed and sometimes implied the difficulties and the positive way in which they see their bicultural realities. For some of them, understanding why things are different at home and what the dominant culture dictates is difficult to navigate and reconcile. But they have been given a space to do so through their Philippine Studies courses. They may indicate that the way they understand being Filipino has changed, but all of them acknowledge the impact their courses have had in their lives, particularly in knowing themselves and from where they and their ancestors came. Some took a Philippine Studies class because it fulfilled requirements, while others took it because of the instructor, or was recommended by a friend, and others signed up for the course to advocate for and support the Philippine Studies Department because they recognize that other students stand the chance of

benefitting from these classes, just as they had. These classes have filled in holes that the American education system has failed to fulfill and that some of their families have, for a variety of reasons, have decided not to address.

CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The interviews and survey responses indicated some significant aspects of Filipino American students' experiences. The constant act of negotiating being American and maintaining a Filipino identity causes stress and confusion, yet encourages students to look at what it means to be a Filipino in an American context. There were some negative sentiments about living a bicultural life, often with regards to a home and outside culture that may sometimes be in conflict with each other. This may be due to internalized oppression, or colonial mentality, and the lack of access to Ethnic Studies or Philippine Studies in K-12 may also promote this tension. However, there are also positive attitudes exhibited as students realize that they are able to live with and enjoy two cultures that provide them with a broader perspective in life.

One of the conflicts that some students have expressed between their Filipino and American identities is having to meet their families' expectations of doing well in school and having profitable careers and satisfying their personal goals of having careers that satisfying, though may not necessarily be financially rewarding. Of course, their families mean well and want their children to do better than they did. The students are looking for opportunities to discover their identities. Some feel a disconnect because of a loss of heritage language and some students want to know more about their culture beyond what they see at home. For the students, knowing about their heritage culture and history equate to knowing about themselves. They appreciate that classes like History of the Philippines and Filipino Family give them spaces to learn what their ancestors have gone through and explore aspects of their identity that they otherwise would not necessarily have to face.

Discussion

The study indicates that Filipino American students' identity is associated with family and having strong relationships with others, being hospitable and sharing their culture. This affirms what Wolf (1997) says: that family is central to young Filipino Americans definition of identity. It also supports Tuason et al. (2007)'s study, which indicates that both U.S.-born Filipino and first-generation Filipino Americans see elements of their Filipino American identity by their strong relationships with their families and others and having qualities such as "hospitable, polite, and respectful" (p.368). Additionally, some Filipino American students, particularly female students, struggle with assuming their identities in their homes and outside, as in schools (Maramba, 2008). Many of the students who participated in the study echo this sentiment in their responses. There is a pressure they feel to be a certain way at home to please their parents and act in what they interpret to be a "traditional" Filipino way, while other pressures from society exist outside the home. It is quite interesting that in both spaces, they are expected to succeed, yet for different reasons. In the home, there is pressure to achieve the "American Dream" and be able to surpass their parents' accomplishments. This may be due in part to colonial mentality, but may also be due to the fact that while many Filipinos migrate to the United States with college degrees that have helped in their immigration process, they often experience "occupational downgrading" and would like their children to receive an American education that may result in a better career (Buenavista, 2009). As far as societal expectations are concerned, Filipino American students are frequently presumed to succeed in schools as is expected of 'model minorities;' however, as discussed previously this myth is dangerous and does not depict

an accurate picture of all Asian American students' experiences. Nevertheless, the myth persists and some Filipino American students feel that they are expected to be excellent students although the literature indicates that students experience challenges and difficulties (Maramba, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Buenavista, 2009; Empleo, 2006).

Through their classes, where they investigate historical events and issues concern Filipino Americans currently, the students are able to make connections with their own experiences. They realize that they are not alone in what they go through as part of a nondominant group. This is an example of *kapwa*, seeing yourself in others and sharing of their experiences (Strobel, 1997; David, 2013). While experiences may not be the exact same for everyone, there are similarities and parallels that exist that students can relate with and from which they can learn. This is also an essential part of the decolonization process, for which Strobel (1997) lists three steps: naming, reflection, and action. A number of the students who participated in this study have realized some parts of this process, especially “[acquiring] cognitive knowledge about Filipino culture and history,” “[understanding] how the loss of language affects Filipino identity,” and “[understanding] the need for connection with the parent culture” (p. 66). Some students are further ahead in the decolonization process, beginning to question, wanting to tell their story, and wanting to give back to the Filipino American community. It is a process, and as such, it takes time. It appears that for some, their Philippine Studies courses have helped shepherd them in recognizing their oppression and beginning to reject colonialism and its products.

Discovering their individual identities hinge on their discovery of their ethnic

identity. For most of the students, their ethnic identity is associated with their families. In exploring identities beyond the home and in order to understand how their home life relates to their being American, Filipino American students look to education to educate them about their heritage. Unfortunately, for some students, their K-12 education has not met their needs and they now look to their postsecondary courses to give them the information they crave to know. Some of the participants are still early in their exploration of their identities. Some are even unaware of the presence of colonial mentality in their lives. However, all attest to the value that their Philippine Studies courses hold as salient guides in their journey of discovering their humanity.

Recommendations

Even though students may be silent in class and appear to be non-participatory in discussions, it does not mean that their class holds no value for them. Students may be taking the time to process emotions and ideas in new ways relating to culture, family, history, and identity for the first time. It is imperative that we show support to keep and grow Philippine Studies, and Ethnic Studies in general, to provide spaces for students to learn about their heritage and explore their identities. We must also ensure that the American education system, particularly in K-12, uses curricula that reflect the stories of all the people who are part of the American tapestry. We must not be satisfied with the downplaying of historical events that often portray a White savior. It is especially salient these days to acknowledge the contributions people of color have achieved in creating America.

As for suggestions for further research, studies that investigate how the students' families have reacted to their desire to take Philippine Studies courses may yield thought-

provoking results and encourage dialogue among students and their families. Family was at the core of much of the data gathered in this study. It is a critical factor in defining what it means to be Filipino. The family members attitudes and opinions regarding Philippine Studies courses may have an effect on the future of Philippine Studies. A few students noted that they had learned about their respective courses from a relative, while for other students, their families had questioned their decision to take Philippines Studies classes.

Perhaps a follow-up study with the same students who participated in this research might reveal more about how Philippine Studies courses guide students in their exploration of identities. Some of the participants had said that their sense of being Filipino had not yet changed since beginning their courses and so I would like to know whether their answers will be different after having spent more time learning about different aspects of the Philippines, including its history and colonial mentality. I am curious whether they will have a stronger sense of what they believe it means to be Filipino and how far along in the decolonization process they are after their courses.

Another possible area to explore is how the students define generational statuses as Filipino Americans. One of the initial goals of the study was to compare students who are either 1.5 or second-generation in their understanding and definitions of their identities as Filipino Americans. Yet, this quickly proved to be difficult; without providing my own definitions for these terms, students had filled out the survey forms defining these generational terms a bit differently than what was intended.

An extension of this study that examines identity in Philippine Studies courses, would be to investigate informal education spaces, such as churches, and consider how

they may contribute to identity formation in the lives of young Filipino Americans. This may be a complex task particularly since religion was an important tool in colonizing the Philippines. It will be intriguing to explore ways in which churches, through programs like Sunday school or Bible studies, can promote decolonization to Filipino American youth to guide them in their identity formation.

Conclusions

The results of the study reveal a need for Philippine Studies courses for a number of reasons. For many Filipino American students, a large part of exploring their identities lies in learning about their heritage. The students who participated in this study expressed a number of feelings and thoughts about their identities and how having the opportunity to take Philippine Studies courses have made an impact in most of them. They have learned more about the Filipino culture, Philippine history, indigenous cultural values, and colonial mentality and in the process, they have begun to learn more about themselves as Filipino Americans.

Courses that offer students an opportunity to learn about their stories serve as decolonizing spaces where they can challenge dominant narratives about Filipinos and Filipino Americans and fill in the gaps in history that have gone unfulfilled because of their American education. The decolonizing and critical pedagogical practices in these courses offer students crucial support as they grapple with questions about their identities. Keeping these spaces available and expanding them give Filipino American students the chance to get to know themselves and their stories.

As someone who considers herself 1.5-generation Filipino American, this study had not only given me the opportunity to learn about and from the experiences of fellow

Filipino American students, it has also compelled me to look at my own experiences and the ways in which colonial mentality have been manifested around me. I continue to question why I sometimes believe and view things the way I do and have to continuously unlearn and shed the remnants of colonialism that continue to be present in my life. In the process, I have also engaged in dialogue with family members about what it means to be Filipino – authentically Filipino – and how we can challenge notions of what it means to be Filipino from a Western perspective. This experience has also encouraged me to continue engaging with and learning from Filipino Americans in the hopes that in the future, we will no longer need to ask the same questions regarding student experiences and the American education system has met the needs of all students, representing their stories without whitewashing history. And as for Filipino American students, may they be able to confidently answer the question about their identity, the question of who they are.

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