MODERN BABAYLAN EMBODIED: PORTRAITS OF PINAY ACTIVIST–PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

MODERN BABAYLAN EMBODIED: PORTRAITS OF PINAY ACTIVIST–PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MARYANNE J. RIODIQUE

Filipino/a Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States, yet remain invisible in academic research related, as such the demographic imperative to disaggregate data on Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in higher education persists to continue investigating the varied experiences of the diverse ethnic groups within the AAPI category. This study interrogates the impacts of coloniality, race, transnationalism has, and how 2nd generation Filipino/a Americans reconcile that with their ethnic identity and ……

By applying this intersectional lens to examine the lived experiences of Filipino American women (Pinays) working in higher education, this study applies a social justice and activist-oriented lens, hence the reference to the participants as activist-practitioners. This study builds upon a growing body of research on the Filipino/a American experience from a position of liberation and decolonization and turns towards the Pinay's role as change agent, activist, and culture bearer. For this purpose, the idea of the babaylan, as traditional shaman/healers in Filipino indigenous culture, is claimed a both metaphor and inspiration in this study from which to interrogate the Pinay's role as she "intercedes for the community" and becomes a "transmitter of knowledge" (Strobel, 2010, pg. 2).

As a transnational people living in liminality, Filipino/a Americans suffer from cultural amnesia, often lacking an awareness of Filipino history, language, and indigenous knowledge systems, resulting in persistent feelings of otherness and unrootedness. Referencing a conceptual

framework by Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales', this study considers how participants embody Pinayism (2005), and Filipino indigenous knowledge systems, such as kapwa (interconnectedness) and bayanihan (sense of community) in their work. Portraiture is used to draw detailed narrative images of each participant, following each Pinay through the process of "good remembering" through formative educational experiences and leadership lessons (Strobel, 2010, pg. 18) as a part praxis and catharsis. Lessons gleaned from semi-structured interviews and field observations reveal ways the family unit serves as a cultural portal from which to reinforce forgotten cultural knowledge, history, and language to second generation Pinays (Ferrera, 2017). The interviews reflect how lack of representation from minoritized staff and faculty during their educational experiences left an indelible impression on their career paths, inspiring them to lead from the liminal place, to serve Filipino/a American students and other minoritzed students. What surfaces is the participants' ability to live lives of resistant socialities, enacting change by working from within the apparatus of higher education (Nievera-Lozano, 2016). What may appear to be a conventional, mundane type of activism, reveals a persistence and conviction of service to students, grounded in social justice and decolonizing motivations.
Keywords: Filipino-American studies, Pinay, Pinayism, cultural portals, activist–practitioner, student affairs, diversity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I didn't grow up knowing anyone with a doctoral degree, let alone have any Filipino/a faculty or student support staff while I was in in school and college. The language of the academy, the process of researching and publishing continues to be a puzzle to me, so in many ways I feel that I have stumbled haphazardly through this experience. Nonetheless, I felt that embarking on this journey was a necessary catharsis as I have reconciled my identity as a Pinay, raised between cultures, raised between borders, often fighting imposter syndrome, and navigating spaces where I see no one who looks remotely like me.

To my parents, Carlito and Daisie Riodique, thank you for providing me with the unconditional love and support as I fumbled my way through the first half of adulthood. I think I may have finally gotten my act together. Thank you for surrounding me with unconditional support and love, for teaching me about the importance of family, and how to be intentional about how I care for the people in my life.

To Nanay, I wish you were here to see me walk across the stage. I miss your laughter, and your hugs—although I may not be *that type of doctor*, I know you would be so proud to see me accomplish this milestone.

To my sister, Desiree Ngo, and my brother, Casie Riodique: I love you both so much. I hope this work inspires you, your children, and your grandchildren, that it's important to keep connected to our roots, our heritage. I began this work to make sense of my place in this world, and I discovered that there were words and a whole vocabulary to describe how to make sense of our identity, our culture, and heritage as Filipino/a Americans.

To my cohort-mates, Martha Moore-Monroy, Elizabeth Rosenkrantz, and Mel Dean: Thank you for the late-night emails, texts, Zoom calls, and hugs; for reviewing countless drafts,

sharing career advice, general mothering, and most of all, all the laughs and commiserating. I could not have finished this program without your love, support, and friendship.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Frances Riemer, for providing the guidance to get myself, and others in my cohort, through to the finish line. Your mentorship and guidance were nuanced, never overbearing, just nurturing enough to get us to where we needed to be. Most of all, I appreciate and respect the way you guided us, you never made us feel less than, or small. I always sensed that you trusted my abilities more than I did, and that little boost was often what I needed to get me over the next hill.

To various colleagues and leaders who have cheered me on in the most beautiful and heroic ways: Rebecca Henriksen, a gem of a human being, and a model for leadership that I will always emulate. Your belief in me has gotten me through some difficult leadership challenges and I thank God for your presence in my leadership journey. Laurie Wittbrodt, my sounding board, a loyal friend, APA expert, and expert proof-reader—thank you for being there as my voice of reason and cheerleader. Evelyn Casuga, my mentor and friend, another angel along my journey in leadership. Your generosity of spirit knows no bounds, and I'm thankful for your friendship and guidance, always.

To my research participants, thank you for entrusting me with the honor of telling your stories. They are testaments to Pinay empowerment, perseverance, hope, and light—beacons that will have reverberating impacts in the lives of students and their communities.

To my husband, Thomas, who spent countless hours managing meals, our son's extracurricular activities, my often-crazy work schedule, and my late-night reading and/or writing frenzies. Your support and confidence in me have kept me going, even when I felt like I

was failing at being a mother, student, and leader; you've propped me up when I felt like I had nothing else to give. I'm grateful to have had you by my side through this journey.

And lastly, to my son Calvin. One day, I hope this work will spark your curiosity to go deep into knowing your Filipino self, our history, and the resilience of our people. I love you and I'm so proud of the young man you are becoming.

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Daisie and Carlito. For the times when you felt you might have been over-looked, when you were not heard, when you felt too embarrassed to speak because you did not have the words, for the times when you felt you could not afford to complain because you had too much to lose . . . for all the sacrifices you've made . . . this is for you.

For you, Tom and Cal… a piece of me, out of love, in search of meaning. You both make it all worth it.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> To return home is to the ancient, to our anitos and our ancestors, to folklore and oral traditions which contain the indigenous wisdom of my people.
>
> —Leny Strobel, *Coming Full Circle*

This study evolved as part of my praxis and process of making sense of my own version of Filipino/a American identity and how liminality and feelings of otherness have informed and guided my career path in higher education. Embarking on my own praxis, I began what Strobel (2005) described as "suturing the split self" (p. 28), reconciling what has been missing in my own identity formation , and "finding equilibrium in my identity" (Calimlim, 2023, p. 74). Through this process, I explored the effects of coloniality, liberation psychology and education, and a reclamation of my own indigeneity toward further enlightenment and empowerment using the intersectional movement of Pinayism. As a 1.5 generation Filipino American woman (i.e., Pinay), I remain curious about the journey of praxis for other Filipino/a Americans as they reconcile and suture their Filipino/a American identities and apply that knowing towards activism and impact in their work and communities of practice.

Background of the Study

According to the latest U.S. Census report, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) individuals are among the fastest growing ethnic groups, and Filipino/a Americans are the third largest subgroup at 19% of the total population, or an estimated 4 million people and growing (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Despite the increasing numbers of the Filipino/a American community, a marked paucity of educational research focused on the Filipino/a American community persists. In a recent survey of published educational research related to Filipino/a Americans, Maramba et al. (2021) found only 74 articles published during the period of 1980–

2021. Filipino/a Americans are often lumped together under the AAPI umbrella and researchers often fail to articulate nuanced historical and cultural contexts, including racialization and unique migrations stories (Maramba et al., 2021), which shape the lived experiences of Filipino/a American students, faculty, and higher education practitioners (Maramba, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010).

Existing educational research about Filipino/a American populations has focused on student populations and has remain geographically focused on the west coast of the United States, lagging behind current trends of Filipino/a American population growth in the Southwest, Midwest, and the South (Maramba et al., 2021). My goal for this study is to highlight the experiences of critically engaged Filipina American (i.e., Pinay) student affairs professionals in Arizona, a region with a growing population of Filipino/a Americans outside of historically significant population hubs and cultural portals for the Filipino/a diaspora in the United States. These stories are important to highlight the continued narratives of Filipino/a Americans in the United States, which unfortunately remain untold and largely invisible despite Filipino/a Americans being one of the oldest and largest ethnic minority groups in the country. The study's findings are significant because they highlight wider implications, such as the need for increased disaggregated study and research of AAPI groups in higher education, recognition of the varied migration and racialized stories, and understanding the strategies student affairs professionals must take to serve AAPI student populations. Additionally, these findings illuminate the need to improve diverse representation from minoritized groups, such as AAPIs, in student affairs and student-facing support positions, where their presence can have positive implications for improved student success and retention outcomes.

Significance of the Study

Pinays live in varied types of liminality—as transnational daughters of the Filipino/a diaspora who stand in the in-between cultural space among the Philippines and the historical colonial legacies of both Spain and the United States. Our voices are often muffled—or, at best, consolidated—in the Asian American collective experience. With this study, I sought to illuminate the experiences of Pinay activist–practitioners as leaders and role models by developing a conceptual framework referencing indigenous Filipino/a knowledge systems. The framework features core Filipino values such as *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness); *Pinayism*; social capital; and—weaving it all together—our contemporary leadership archetype of *babaylan*, who are truth-sayers, healers, warriors, and transmitters of knowledge.

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the experiences of critically engaged Pinay higher education practitioners as *activist–practitioners* in a region with a growing population of Filipino/a Americans but lies outside of historically significant population hubs and cultural portals for the Filipino/a diaspora in the United States. Activist–practitioners were generally defined as staff, faculty, or administrators in student-facing roles with a social justice orientation toward their work and who fundamentally demonstrated a vested interest in human rights, social change, and collective social well-being (Lorenzetti, 2013; Strietzel & Sriram, 2022). This study adds additional context to the importance of the work, however subtle, that Pinay activist-practitioners do to engage with similarly located minoritized student populations and their communities, informed by their previous educational experiences navigating predominantly white institutions.

My Personal and Professional Context to the Research

As a 1.5 generation Pinay, my own experience in the Filipino American community, and my alienation from it at times, has been shaped by my upbringing as a military child. Both my parents were born and raised in the Philippines in the city of Olongapo, situated just outside of Subic Bay Naval Base, a strategic port used by the Spanish and then the United States during colonial periods. My father and four of his brothers were able to enlist in the U.S. Navy as part of the Military Bases Agreement, a program established in 1947 that allowed Filipino citizens to enlist in the U.S. Navy in exchange for extended 100-year leases for up to 22 strategic military bases on Philippine soil (Le Espiritu, 2003). My father served 20 years in the U.S. Navy as an E-6 air mechanic who helped maintain F-16 fighter jets on U.S. naval air installations and, periodically, on short deployments on aircraft carriers at sea. His military assignments caused us to move every 4–5 years and we lived on bases throughout Japan and in Southern California.

The life of a military family meant we were uprooted every 3–5 years and forced to acclimate to new neighborhoods, which contributed to my feelings of otherness. Growing up, I felt bereft of this notion of a hometown and never felt bound to a specific place or land. I ached for that type of homecoming and nostalgia, and even today remain unrooted—a sentiment shared by many Filipinos in diaspora, which marks our realities as a transnational people (Le Espiritu, 2003).

As a Pinay, I am unrooted in other ways as well. *Cultural amnesia* (Strobel, 2015) is a condition affecting many Filipino/a Americans who lack the understanding of Filipino history and have lost language, indigenous knowledge systems. Filipino/a Americans are transnational subjects crafting their identities in a liminal space, “living between the old and the new, between homes, and between languages” (Le Espiritu, 2003, p. 10). As such, Filipino/a American

identity, and the concept of home as a place of origin, are fluid and transgress borders. My interest in Filipino/a American communities as they grow in prominence and population density beyond the U.S. West inspired me to focus this study on participants in Arizona and explore how Pinays activate their identities and sense of community, despite being physically distanced from more established Filipino/a American cultural portals or access points.

My work in higher education over the 12 years prior to the time of this study has focused on nontraditional student enrollment and retention and international student recruitment. My research interests center around minoritized student groups and the unique strategies to both recruit and retain these student populations. I am also interested in faculty and staff administrators of color, their unique experiences on college campuses, and the roles they play supporting the growing students of color population in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

I used a few different theories to analyze the data collected through this study. One conceptual framework referenced indigenous Filipino knowledge systems, such as the indigenous virtue ethic theme of *kapwa* (Reyes, 2015), which is an indigenous Filipino term loosely translated as shared self or shared identity. *Kapwa* was born out of Southeast Asian tribal and animist culture and embodies the Filipino indigenous virtue, which "emphasizes our interrelatedness with one another" (Desai, 2016, p. 34).

I also applied an intersectional, decolonial, feminist lens to interrogate the lived experiences of study participants. By understanding how Pinays ground themselves as activist–practitioners when working with minoritized student populations, I hoped to illuminate how they draw power and agency from their Filipino/a American ethnic identity in their professional roles.

I reference the intersectional model of *Pinayism*, developed by scholar–activist Tintiangco-Cubales (2005), which combines feminist theory and Filipino/a American liberation psychology in search of a "radical Pinay sisterhood" (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2021, para. 1) toward the goal of decolonization and empowerment. Derived from the term *Pinay*, a shortened Tagalog word for Filipina, the model more specifically defines a Pinay as a woman of Filipino descent living in diaspora in the United States. Tintiangco-Cubales developed the concept of Pinayism to illuminate stories of Pinay struggle and survival to uplift and inspire continued activism and service throughout the Filipino/a American community. She ensured Pinayism was not simply known as Pinay plus feminism; rather, it was a complex intersectional space where issues of "race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational status, age, place of birth, diasporic migration, citizenship, and love" (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005, p. 147) intermingle to embody the varied postcolonial and transnational condition of Pinays.

Nievera-Lozano (2013) used her scholarship to speak from the "subalternized voice" (p. 8), often silenced as a woman of color in the academy, her lived experiences were often questioned. Nievera-Lozano's dissertation examined how the existing epistemological assumptions of renowned Pinay scholar–activists informed their pedagogical practice. Building upon Nievera-Lozano's (2013) description of the classroom as a "powerful place of becoming" (p. 10), my own research has continued to assert that becoming takes place throughout the campus environment, and Pinays serving in student-facing roles have a profound impact on minoritized student populations—not as scholar–activists, but as critically engaged *activist–practitioners*.

Using indigenous knowledge systems, I applied contemporary leadership archetypes modeled after the role of *babaylan* in traditional Filipino tribal communities. *Babaylan* were

influential members of tribal communities, and the role was often held by women; they were part shaman, part healer, and transmitters of knowledge for their extended communities. I apply these archetypes of contemporary babaylan to investigate the role Pinay activist–practitioners played in their higher education communities of practice (Strobel, 2010).

The babaylan leadership model was first used as a conference theme at the 2005 Filipino American Women's Network (FAWN) conference in New York City, entitled *Coming Into Our Own: Spirit, Leadership and Success* (FAWN, 2005). Panel discussions and breakout sessions were woven around themes of babaylanism, and presenters invoked the spirit of female leaders in ancient, precolonial villages in the Visayan Islands of the Philippines. Influenced by cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien (1993) and her renowned work, *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Healer, Teacher, and Visionary*, FAWN conference organizer Perla Daly applied Arrien's leadership archetypes with Filipino indigenous knowledge systems to inspire Pinay activists, professors, and community leaders toward action from a place of universal *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness). Examining the "indio-genius" (Strobel, 2010, p. 19) allowed me to examine why Pinay activist–practitioners were drawn to their vocation and how their practice was rooted in social justice and a need to propagate *kapwa* in caring for others.

Research Questions

Employing portraiture methodology, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: How do Filipina American higher education activist–practitioners interpret their life histories and educational experiences from a decolonial lens as they practice as change agents in the campus environment?

- Research Question 2: In what ways do Filipina American higher education practitioners draw upon social capital and Filipino/a ethnic identity to shape their work with minoritized student populations?

Methodology

As a means of storytelling, portraiture blends phenomenological and ethnographic techniques in a method that combines inquiry in artistic and scientific forms. As the pioneering scholar on portraiture, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) sought to "capture the complexity and aesthetic of the human experience" (p. 3) written in narrative prose that would inspire and appeal to wider audiences and move the dialogue "beyond the academy's inner circle" (p. 10).

Portraiture, a form of narrative inquiry, disrupts the normalized paradigm of other research methods, which inherently prioritize the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the data. Portraiture constitutes a decolonial research method by providing the necessary space for participant's stories and honoring the truth-telling by minoritized and historically marginalized groups. By elevating the power of voice, portraiture is an effective means to rebalance the power dynamics "where power has been disproportionately unbalanced and where voices have been silenced" (Rodriguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020, p. 613).

The sample size of participants for this study was fairly small, four participants. Because my view of the population of Filipina Americans working in higher education was limited, my rationale for using portraiture as a method was to conduct deeper and more meaningful inquiry into the lived experiences of study participants. I sought to understand what formative influences shaped their work and how they see themselves as advocates for students of color and other minoritized student groups in their communities of practice, especially coming from

backgrounds where they may have also felt othered or marginalized. To that end, I applied portraiture as a research method to allow participants to narrate formative educational experiences and provide thick descriptions of their varied migration and transnational experiences as immigrants or the children of immigrants, the role of their families, and what part their Filipino ethnic identities play in their roles as student advocates and change agents on college and university campuses. By making space for storytelling and expanded personal narrative, I gleaned how they made meaning of their professional roles, the challenges and frustrations of their roles, what they found joy or gratification doing when working with students, or in their communities and their future career aspirations and professional goals. My hope was to add to the body of educational research on Filipino/a Americans in higher education and emphasize the continued need to explore how they experience the higher education apparatus (i.e., as a mechanism to repress and control the working class by reinforcing rules of established order; Althusser, 2006) in the United States, which can provide additional context for other minoritized and immigrant populations.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

- An *activist–practitioner* is a student-facing higher education professional with a social justice orientation in their work, bound with a vested interest in human rights, social change, and collective societal well-being (Strietzel & Sriram, 2022).
- The *babaylan* were Filipino tribal shamans, a role traditionally held by women in precolonial times; babaylan were truth-sayers, healers, and leaders (Strobel, 2010).
- *Bayanihan* is the spirit of community, an altruistic tendency to help others (David, 2013).

- *Cultural portals* are access points to the unique cultural and social capital linked to (Filipino) ethnic identity (Ferrera, 2013).
- *Counter-storytelling* is the use of counter-stories, parables, and revisionist histories by minoritized populations; used in part towards the theme of "naming one's own reality" in critical race theory scholarship, where the "experience and realities of the oppressed" are centered (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pg. 58).
- *Decolonial* refers to an approach acknowledging and naming of the impact of colonization on identity, with eventual realization of the oppressed towards liberation and humanization (Freire, 1970).
- *Kapwa* is an indigenous Filipino value ethic based on the concept of interconnectedness, or inter-relatedness (Desai, 2016; Enriquez, 1992).
- *Intersectional* refers to the ways in which women inhabit multiple, intersecting identities, and as such, multiple layers of oppression. In this context, Pinays uniquely inhabit several social identity structures of overlapping identities, involving complexities of race, nationality, class, and gender; as such, an intersectional inquiry considering the dynamics and implications of multi-layered identities. (Carastathis, 2014).
- A *Pinay* is a woman or girl of Filipino descent living in the United States (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009).
- *Pinayism* is a decolonial and feminist framework to process the Filipina American (i.e., Pinay) condition, and to highlight Pinay stories of struggle and survival (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009).

- *Portraiture* is a narrative, qualitative research method blending techniques from both ethnography and phenomenology research methods, with an emphasis on the researcher as an instrument of inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Summary

There is a demographic imperative to disaggregate data on AAPI students in higher education and investigate the varied experiences of the diverse ethnic groups within the AAPI category. As I demonstrate in the review of the literature, the Filipino/a American experience was shaped by a legacy of colonialism and racialization. As a transnational people living in liminality, Filipino/a Americans suffer from cultural amnesia, often lacking an awareness of Filipino history, language, and indigenous knowledge systems, which results in persistent feelings of otherness and unrootedness. These legacies continue to impact Filipino/a Americans through psychological manifestations such as colonial mentality, internalized racism, and diminished ethnic identity (David & Okazaki, 2006). Through a review of Filipino/a American literature excerpts and scholarly writing, I build on a growing body of research about the Filipino/a American experience framed by liberation and decolonization and turn toward the Pinay's role as both activist and culture bearer. In this study, I move toward an evolution of Filipino/a American praxis, driven by the need to understand the Pinay's role working with minoritized student groups from a social justice lens as activist–practitioners.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, education has been used as a tool of empire to distort histories and cultural legacies for Filipinos to pacify them in the wake of American colonial policies (Constantino, 2000). As a colonized people, the loss of identity, language, and culture had adverse effects related to Filipino/a American ethnic identity formation and Filipino/a American psychology, particularly as it relates to the health and mental well-being of second generation Filipino/a Americans (Ferrera, 2013). Through a review of the literature, I examine historical precedents that led to colonial mentality and how this condition affects Filipino/a Americans as they are funneled toward higher education. I explore seminal works from Filipino/a American scholar–activists who have constructed an architecture of postcolonial paradigms undergirded by feminist and indigenous worldviews. Using a conceptual framework of Filipina American feminist theory (i.e., Pinayism), indigenous Filipino concepts of *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness), and *babaylan* archetypes of women's leadership, I apply a culturally sensitive framework to document and interrogate the impact of Filipino American women (i.e., Pinays) as activist–practitioners in student-facing roles in higher education. Through a reclamation of Filipino/a American identity, Pinays act as catalysts to shift the paradigm from education as a tool of empire to altering the educational experience for minoritized student groups from *within* the institution of higher education.

Pinay narratives provide a form of counter-storytelling illustrating the evolution of Filipino/a American identity as part of the postcolonial and transnational journey many immigrants or colonized peoples face in diasporic realities, which require a reclamation of indigeneity and ethnic identity to finding agency and power. By articulating the complex histories of Filipino/a Americans, this study of Pinay higher education activist–practitioners adds

to the portfolio of work highlighting Filipino/a American stories, specifically Pinays as they ground their work in a social justice orientation with minoritized student groups.

As one of the largest subgroups of Asian Americans in the United States, Filipino/a Americans are still largely invisible in educational research and there remains a paucity of research on the Filipino/a American experience in higher education. Further, there is a need to disaggregate the data on Asian Americans in higher education because each subgroup in the category has different histories of migration that have shaped their acculturation to the dominant society in the United States. For example, Filipino/a American identity is inextricably linked to the history of the Philippines as a colony twice over, first to Spain and then the United States. Filipino/a Americans as an ethnic group suffer from colonial mentality, cultural amnesia, and loss of ethnic and cultural identity and language. Coupled with transnational identities and complicated migration patterns, these histories cause Filipino/a Americans to struggle more with acculturation to the dominant society in different ways than East Asian immigrants or recent refugee populations, such as Southeast Asian groups.

In the literature, existing educational research on Filipino/a Americans was focused on undergraduate students and, regionally, on students in the western half of the United States where Filipino/a American immigrant populations settled because of immigration patterns (Nadal et al., 2010; Maramba, 2008; Maramba et al., 2021; Museus & Maramba, 2011). According to a recent report compiled from U.S. Census Bureau data, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) represent one of the fastest growing ethnic groups; Filipino/a Americans are represented as the third largest subgroup at 19% of the population, which is over 4 million people (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Despite the growing Filipino/a American community, a distinct paucity of educational research about these Filipino/a Americans persists. In a recent survey of

published educational research related to Filipino/a Americans, Maramba et al. (2021) found only 74 articles published in the period from 1980–2021. Additionally, Filipino/a Americans are often lumped together under the AAPI demographic umbrella despite the drastic differences in racial and colonial legacies in each racial subgroup. Further, data on AAPI groups has failed to articulate nuanced historical and cultural contexts, including racialization and unique migrations stories that have shaped the lived experiences of Filipino/a American students, faculty, and higher education practitioners (Maramba, 2008; Maramba et al., 2021; Nadal et al., 2010). Given the gap in research on Filipino/a Americans in higher education, and particularly as Filipino/a Americans continue to come to terms with an embattled identity crisis associated with histories of colonization and =colonial mentality, continued archiving of Filipino/a American stories as an acculturation tactic in the dominant American- and white-centered culture is necessary. These stories can offer insight about how similar minoritized groups with indigenous and colonial histories experience the U.S. higher education apparatus (Althusser, 2006) and support diverse representation of minoritized groups in faculty ranks and student-facing support roles.

Historicizing the Filipino/a American Experience

I begin historicizing the Filipino/a American experience with an overview of the colonial legacy of the Philippines, first as a colony of Spain and later as a neocolonial project of the United States. Education was used as a tool of imperialism and oppression, indoctrinating Filipinos with American culture, images, and values. The cultural and political invasion during the American colonial period would have lasting impacts on the Filipino people, specifically the ways coloniality continues to impact Filipino/a American ethnic identity in a phenomenon of colonial mentality.

Despite Filipino/a Americans comprising one of the largest ethnic subgroups among Asian Americans in the United States, the long-standing colonial history between the Philippines and the United States has all but been forgotten (Le Espiritu, 2003). As a perennial "colonial project" (Maramba et al., 2021, p. 5) under Spain (1565–1898) and the United States (1898–1946), this colonial legacy of Hispanization and American imperialism resulted in widespread cultural amnesia, systematic erasure of lost identities and traditions, and fragmentation of Filipino/a American identity (de Jesús, 2005; Strobel, 2015). Continued interrogation of Filipino/a American history is a necessary reckoning for the United States to reconcile its imperialist past and achieve a greater understanding of postcolonial implications for Filipino/a Americans, specifically how they engage with the U.S. educational apparatus (Althusser, 2006) as students, higher education practitioners, and members of the academy.

Colonial Education as a Tool of Empire

Filipino historian Renato Constantino (1970), in his seminal work, *The (Mis) education of the Filipino*, described the use of education as a colonial weapon used as a damaging force towards Filipino identity and national consciousness during the American colonial period. Constantino (1970) further stated:

> The education of the Filipino under American sovereignty was an instrument of colonial policy. The Filipino had to be educated as a good colonial. Young minds had to be shaped to conform to American ideas. Indigenous Filipino ideals were slowly eroded in order to remove the last vestiges of resistance. Education served to attract the people to the new masters and at the same time to dilute their nationalism which had just succeeded in overthrowing a foreign power. The introduction of the American educational system was a subtle means of defeating a triumphant nationalism. (p. 22)

During the U.S. colonial period (i.e., 1898–1946), the U.S. military was deployed throughout the Philippine archipelago to help educate the masses under the guise of spreading civility and modernity; from 1901–1950, the United States had imported over a thousand U.S. teachers to far-flung cities and provinces (Strobel, 2015, p. 31). The colonial education campaign resulted in a near duplication of the U.S. education system and widespread use of English for instruction and commerce, essentially constituting a measure of assurance through the influence of education that Filipino interests could always be steered toward alignment with U.S. interests (Constantino, 1970). The Filipino/a American psychological condition today reflects the repercussions of prolonged denigration of precolonial Filipino indigenous knowledge systems, which were Filipino/a Americans swapped in exchange for Western ideals, as part survival and assimilation strategy.

Le Espiritu's (2003) ethnographic research on diasporic Filipino/a American realities highlighted the effect of U.S. colonialism on the Philippine economy as a case of arrested development that steered the Philippine economy toward an agricultural export economic future. This arrangement provided a free trade of resources to the United States, but left the Philippine economy dependent on expensive imports for basic necessities and hindered the country's economic development (Le Espiritu, 2003). The impending economic crisis was exacerbated under Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos's regime, lasting from 1965 to 1986; his harsh martial law policies; corruption; and ill-fated economic strategies that relied almost solely on trade with the United States propelled a mass migration of educated professionals to the United States and elsewhere.

Strobel's (2015) pioneering decolonizing treatise, *Coming Full Circle*: *The Process of Decolonization Amongst Post-1965 Filipino/a Americans*, provided a thorough historiography of

the post-1965 wave of Filipino migration and the ensuing Filipino/a American experience. He explicitly described ways Filipino/as in the United States were bound to U.S. history and its evolution into a modern nation. Establishing a U.S. education system in the Philippines did not serve the domestic national economic and political interests of Filipinos, but instead helped to propel a "brain drain" (Strobel, 2015, p. 32) or a wave of immigration of highly skilled professionals from the Philippines to the United States after 1965. Strobel built on Constantino's (1970) observations about the persistent and sustained U.S. influence in Philippine national economic and political affairs and Le Espiritu's (2003) analysis of continued U.S. colonial influence on the psyche, mental health, and identity development of Filipino/a Americans.

Postcolonial Impacts on Filipino/a-American Psychology

The Filipino/a American postcolonial condition, which was an effect of their experiences with coloniality, reflected persistent generational impact on Filipino/a American psychology and ethnic identity formation. Empirical studies of Filipino/a Americans have demonstrated cultural amnesia, loss of *kapwa*, and not understanding an individual's own cultural heritage and history have adverse effects on sense of agency, mental well-being, and confidence (David, 2013; David et al., 2006, 2017; Nadal, 2010; Nadal et al., 2021; Reyes, 2015; Strobel, 1996). Through the reclamation of indigenous knowledge, practices, and Filipino/a cultural value ethics, Filipino/a Americans reclaim a lost sense of self and find renewed purpose. The effects of colonialism continued to manifest in Filipino/a American psychology through internalized racism, the centering of whiteness, and other "social toxins" (Desai, 2016, pg. 34) more endemic to colonized communities, such as depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Scholars of Filipino/a American psychology have documented the long-standing impacts of colonialism and identified colonial mentality and internalized racism as lasting conditions with long-term

psychological impacts, such as diminished ethnic pride among Filipino/a Americans, which has culminated in a cultural inferiority complex and an inability to articulate a strong sense of self or ethnic identity (David & Okazaki, 2006; Strobel, 2015).

I explored conceptual frameworks centered around ethnic identity and social capital, specifically Zhou and Bankston's (1994) application of social capital among immigrant groups as a buffer against racialization and alienation from dominant culture, namely social capital and its application with cultural identity and enculturation with minoritized and immigrant groups (Ogbu, 1998; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Diminished social capital and cultural knowledge was of particular concern for Filipino/a Americans whose ethnic identity formation was impacted, centering European/American or white culture and resulting in a form of self-hate and a disregard for the indigenous elements of native Filipino/a cultural characteristics. This cultural brainwashing left Filipino/a Americans with cultural amnesia and lacking an awareness of the Filipino culture, heritage, and value ethics core to their ethnic identity, which often resulted in psychological and mental health issues related to postcolonial trauma. The importance of *kapwa*, a core concept of *Sikolohiyang Filipino*, or Filipino liberation psychology, centers the use of Filipino/a indigenous knowledge and cultural resources to cultivate increased agency and enforce ethnic identity (David et al., 2006, 2017; Enriquez, 1992).

Colonial Mentality

Filipino/a American scholar–activists, such as Strobel (2015), brought forward the phenomenon of cultural amnesia among Filipino/a Americans, a condition in which Filipino/a indigenous cultural identity became buried in exchange for Western cultural ideals. Research about Filipino/a American psychology has centered on a process of decolonization and researchers have called for a harnessing of indigenous methods toward the development of a

Filipino liberation psychology. Developing a liberation psychology requires confronting the influences of empire, naming colonial actors, and recognizing the generational trauma resulting from colonialism. Strobel (2015) emphasized the importance of decolonization for Filipino/a Americans to reimagine a community in which Filipino/a Americans can make increasingly visible and meaningful contributions to society resulting from enhanced self-agency and sense of self. In other words, decolonization lights a pathway toward liberation that can only be realized through the strengthening of ethnic identity. To harness the power in history and cultural legacies, Strobel (2015) asserted:

> [Filipino/a Americans] must be able to identify their source of agency, which lies in their recovery of indigenous knowledge and finding therein symbolic meaning that will be useful for decolonization. These indigenous knowledge and cultural values, which were repressed and submerged under colonization, need to be reclaimed, re-imagined, or re-created in order to recover a sense of Filipino/a identity. (p. 25)

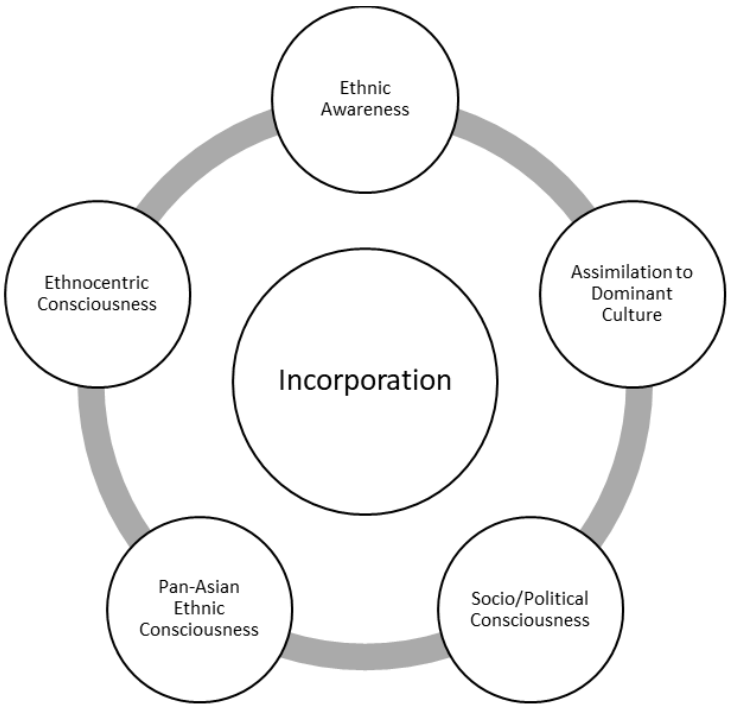
To ground the Filipino/a American counternarrative against coloniality, it becomes necessary to center indigenous cultural knowledge, such as *kapwa*. Enriquez (1992), one of the early practitioners to name and acknowledge Filipino/a liberation psychology (i.e., Sikolohiyang Pilipino), defined the concept of *kapwa* as a "recognition of a shared identity, an inner self shared with others" (p. 52). As a core tenet of Filipino values, *kapwa* valorizes interrelatedness with others, social belonging, and collectivist tendencies, which directly conflict with dominant Western/American ideals grounded in individualism and independence (David et al., 2017; Desai, 2016).

Filipino/a American Ethnic Identity Development

Nadal (2004) developed a unique ethnic identity development model, referencing prior pioneering works from Atkinson et al. (1998) on minority ethnic identity development, adjusted to the nuanced experiences of Filipino/a Americans from their racialized and colonial past. Nadal developed the Pilipino American identity development (PAID) model to understand the enculturation levels of Filipino/a Americans. Nadal's (2004) model divides Filipino/a American ethnic identity development into six stages (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

PAID Model



The earliest stage of the PAID model is *ethnic awareness*, generally established between the ages of 2 and 5 years old (Nadal, 2004). At this stage, most identity formation is associated with an individual's family, with a positive to neutral orientation, and an impartial view of

Filipino culture. The second stage, *assimilation to dominant culture*, marks the beginning of an individual's ability to perceive the differences between the dominant culture and Filipino culture. During this stage, an individual may form the opinion that White/Western culture appears more highly valued and develop a self-deprecating orientation toward their Filipino identity. Realizing White/Western culture is the dominant culture will naturally propel the individual toward centering Whiteness, and assimilation to the dominant culture. Increasing levels of awareness of Filipino ethnic identity are formed in Stage 3, *socio-political awakening*, and Stage 4, *Pan-ethnic Asian American consciousness.* By Stage 5, *ethnocentric consciousness*, the individual acknowledges the differences of Filipino/a Americans against the Asian American paradigm and seeks to identify with the unique culture, language, and history of the Philippines and Filipino/a Americans. The last stage, *incorporation*, represents a level of enlightened self-awareness and appreciation of an individual's own ethnic identity as a Filipino/a, and individuals in this stage channel action and energy toward positive activism and grassroots community building. Although Nadal (2004) acknowledged not all Filipino/a Americans will experience this process of decolonizing praxis, when working with Filipino/a Americans, as with any minoritized group, it is important to understand the various levels of enculturation and how they might inform engagement, teaching, and advising practices in education.

Accessing Filipino/a American Identity Through Cultural Portals

Ferrera's (2013) work on the importance of *cultural portals*, which anchor ethnic and cultural identity, demonstrated how second-generation Filipino/a Americans (SGFAs) attempted to reclaim ethnic identity by accessing cultural capital. In their journey toward a forgotten cultural, linguistic, and spiritual homeland, SGFAs leveraged cultural portals toward stages of

ethnocentric consciousness, and ultimately, incorporation in Nadal's PAID model. Ferrera (2013) described the function of cultural portals, saying:

> Cultural portals provide glimpses into our indigenous inheritance that can incite legitimate longing for a much longer, older history than that often acknowledged in the adopted country. As a community, we continue to be in diaspora, as scattered seeds that experience "Otherness," shame, uprootedness, and disconnection in constant and variant ways. It is this experience of dissonance around clashing values and culture, identity, shame, and the sense of not "fitting in," that compels us to find ways to constructively wrestle with the ongoing dis-ease. By questioning, challenging and resisting, we form our own unique sources of resilience. (p. 178)

Defined in this way, cultural portals act as access points to the unique cultural and social capital, leading to exploration of their Filipino/a ethnic identity (Ferrera, 2017). Cultural portals represent access to Filipino culture and history through various experiences, which might include travel to the Philippines, active participation in language or cultural learning, and community engagement with Filipino/a organizations (Ferrera, 2013). Ferrera hypothesized access to cultural portals allowed SGFAs to tap into ethnic identity and cultural heritage, thus equipping Filipino/a Americans with skills to counter and reject effects of colonial mentality, such as internalized inferiority compared to the dominant culture, liminality, and negative association with indigenous Filipino culture. Equipped with a bicultural/multicultural competency, Ferrera believed access to cultural portals would lead to increased agency and self-awareness.

Leveraging Social Capital From the Filipino/a American Community

More contemporary interpretations of social capital theory, from scholars such as Lin (2000), explored social capital theory among historically minoritized groups, including women,

ethnic minorities, and immigrant populations. Lin proposed inequality in all types of capital, including social capital and access to different types of human capital, reproduced and perpetuated continued inequality in socioeconomic achievement and quality of life. Lin's work promoted an assimilation strategy and posited creating more linkages with dominant groups, or even reducing one's identity from one's core group, might be necessary to bridge any social capital deficits. Lin's theory of dissociation from one's ethnic identity constitutes a strategy of compartmentalization needed to not only survive, but thrive.

Tinto (1987) applied similar assertions in the higher education context to theorize student retention strategies for minoritized student groups, particularly students raised in communities with low levels of higher education attainment. Tinto claimed minoritized students would face significant hurdles in bridging the cultural divide and might need to reject membership, at least partially, from their communities to center their collegiate experience. In a critique of Tinto's analysis of college student attrition, Tierney (1999) countered Tinto's original premise that minoritized students/students of color have to commit a form of "cultural suicide" (p. 82); in other words, they must practice some measure of disassociation from their communities and culture to assimilate to the dominant culture of the college campus and succeed academically. Tierney (1999) argued historically minoritized students—who are (a) engaged with their racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner, (b) have a high level of cultural integrity, and (c) have increased agency—were more apt to succeed academically versus their "culturally insecure" (p. 84) peers. Tierney further asserted minoritized students with stronger ties to their cultural and ethnic/racial identities did not have to accept diminished returns or outcomes simply due to less social or cultural capital, redefining habitus (i.e., perception of their environment) with renewed agency and self-determination. Tierney's argument reinforced the imperative for

racial and ethnic diversity among student affairs staff and faculty in higher education, because their support and presence are key for creating a welcoming campus environment for minoritized students and they can encourage students to integrate themselves, as whole selves, into the campus environment as engaged and culturally secure beings.

Social Capital Among Immigrant Groups

Zhou and Bankston's (1994) empirical study of Vietnamese immigrant communities in Louisiana highlighted the cohesiveness among ethnic and immigrant enclaves as a unique form of social capital, essentially creating a community-based scaffold of support that immigrant youth can leverage as a competitive advantage when they access the benefits and resources of the ethnic community (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). I use Zhou and Bankston's interpretation of social capital, as a continuous process in immigrant communities, alongside indigenous Filipino/a value ethics of *kapwa* as a conceptual framework to conduct a study of the lived experiences of SGFA women who work in student-facing roles in institutions of higher education in Arizona. From this lens, I seek to interrogate how SGFA women draw on the spirit of *kapwa* and their ethnic and cultural identities as sources of power and agency to ground their practice when working with minoritized student groups in their communities of practice. This line of inquiry is particular interesting in Arizona, described as a tertiary region because it is distanced from more established Filipino/a American enclaves such as California, Hawaii, or the Pacific Northwest (Le Espiritu, 2003). Because the Filipino/a American community is less concentrated in Arizona, SGFAs have less direct access to cultural portals (Ferrera, 2017).

In Search of Radical Pinay Sisterhood

To further contextualize the research, I bring the reader's attention to a growing body of intersectional works grounded in *Pinayism.* Defined as a conceptual framework combining

decolonization techniques and feminist perspectives, Pinayism was originally coined by Pinay scholar–activist Tintiangco-Cubales (2009) in her search for radical Pinay sisterhood, as part of her own process of liberation and decolonization. This concept is scaffolded by contemporary works from Pinay scholar–activists created space to interrogate the intersectionality of feminist theory, coloniality, and empowered Filipino/a American liberation psychology (de Jesús, 2005; Le Espiritu, 2003; Nievera-Lozano, 2019; Strobel, 1996, 2010; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009). A multi-disciplinary lens of inquiry is activated to highlight stories of struggle and survival, with the goal to uplift and inspire continued service to the Filipino/a community (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005).

Counter-Storytelling With Feminist and Indigenous Frameworks

The growing body of work grounded by a Pinayist perspective centers the stories of Filipino American women, their histories, and counternarratives, and particularly emphasizes the humanization and liberation of Filipino women (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009). Historically, indigenous Filipino culture has elevated the matriarch's role in traditional precolonial, pre-Hispanic, Filipino/a tribal and animist culture. These images of matriarchal tribal leadership served as a counter-narrative to themes of *marianismo* or the stereotypical model of *Maria Clara,* both ideals rooted in Spanish and Catholic origins, where women are idealized as pure, chaste, and self-sacrificing, modeled after the image of the Virgin Mary from the Catholic canon (David, 2013; Ferrera, 2013; Strobel, 2015).

Studies highlighting the experiences of college-age or post-graduate Filipino American women have demonstrated the impact of intersectional pressures on identity formation, agency, and overall psychological health (Maramba, 2008, 2011; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Nadal et al., 2010). Researchers have also demonstrated the extent of intersectional pressures and

postcolonial/racial trauma on Filipino/a American youth and adolescents. A 1994 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey of at-risk teens in U.S. cities found Filipino female teenagers in the San Diego metropolitan area reported higher rates of suicide ideation, at over 45%, versus other ethnic groups in the same age category, such as 33.4% among Latinas, 26.2% among white, and 25.3% among African-Americans (Lau, 1995). Maramba's (2008, 2011) studies about Filipino American female college students consistently found stress was associated with biculturalism and navigating norms of traditional Filipino culture versus American/Western ideals, which promote greater independence and individualism. Filipino American women viewed their family as intrinsic to their sense of Filipino/a American identity, and experienced conflict when negotiating the intersections of restrictive gender-biased parenting strategies, loss of ethnic identity, and familial expectations (Maramba, 2008).

As immigrant families acclimated to the dominant culture, women became "keepers of culture" (Le Espiritu, 2013, p. 167). Le Espiritu (2013) articulated how the emphasis on "Filipina chastity" (p. 158) reinforced traditional masculinist norms and themes of patriarchy in the name of ethnic Filipino/a pride and dignity. Young Filipino American women face myriad controls on their bodies, autonomy, mobility, and personal life choices, a strategy long used by immigrant families to assert their moral superiority over the dominant society (Le Espiritu, 2003). As Filipino American women struggle to find their place between *marianismo* (i.e., women idealized as pure, chaste, and self-sacrificing) and U.S./Western ideals of independence and individualism, Filipino American women and girls experience liminality as they develop their identities in this in-between space, which can result in an identity crisis and lead to increased loss of identity and self (David et al., 2017; Le Espiritu, 2003). Recent works, including de Jesús's (2005) *Pinay Power: Peminist Critical Theory, Theorizing the Filipina American Experience* and

Nievera-Lozano's (2016) *Pain+Love=Growth: The Labor of Pinayist Pedagogical Praxis*, documented "resistant socialites" (Nievera-Lozano, 2016, p.283) where Filipino women tell their stories and lived realities. Nievera-Lozano (2019) described this praxis, saying, "These practices of using their anger to fuel a digging up of stories gone silent for too long, these practices of reconciliation and learning to live in great contradictions, I refer to a Pinayist pedagogical praxis" (p. 342).

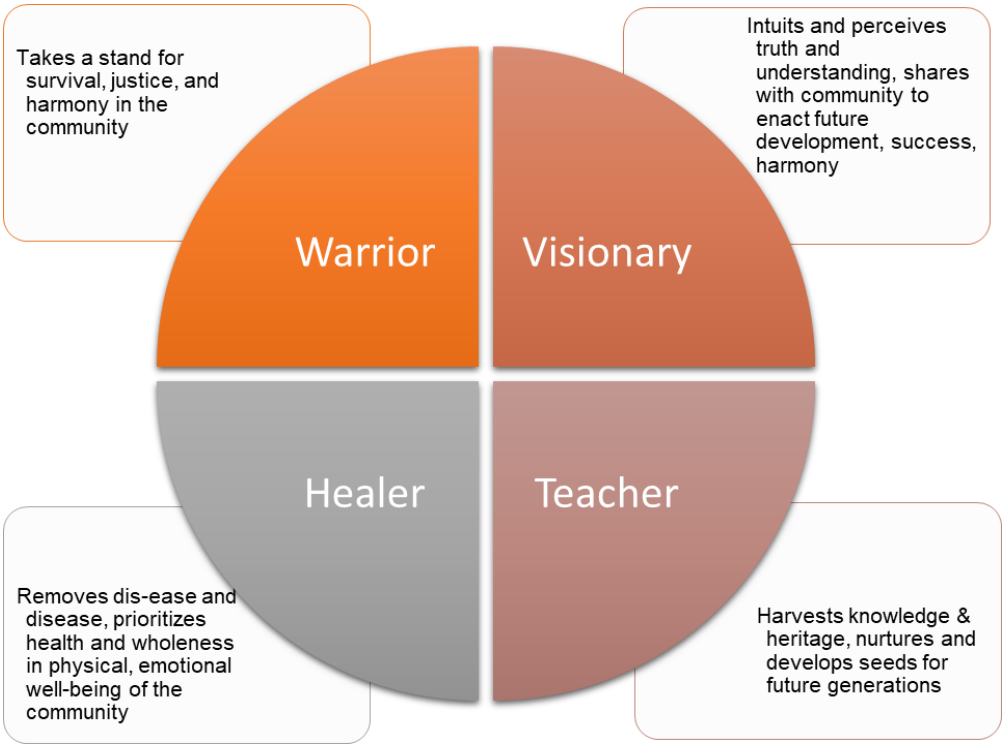
I was inspired by Nievera-Lozano's (2016) dissertation work profiling renowned Pinay scholar–activists highlighting their own decolonizing praxis, a process of liberation in motion, which used a decolonial and feminist epistemological foundation and applied the phenomenological method of portraiture. Nievera-Lozano added to her scholarship through *Pain + Love = Growth: The Labor of Pinayist Pedagogical Praxis*, and continued the dialogue with Pinay scholar–activists using a decolonial feminist lens and added the enlightened perspectives of Buddhist philosophy. From this conceptual framework, Nievera-Lozano (2019) interrogated participants' lived experiences using *sutured* portraiture as she employed a form of storytelling, "weaving" and "stitching together" (p. 327) stories of struggle and joy as each scholar–activists narrative led to increased agency and decolonized liberation. This theme of suturing split identities was influenced by Strobel's (1996) work, *Coming Full Circle*, which described in detail the author's metamorphosis toward decolonization. Strobel (1996) applied the analogy of childbirth to the pain associated with her own awakening, sharing:

> The metaphor of decolonization as childbirth is powerful. It signals the transition from naive consciousness to critical consciousness. It is the critical consciousness that enables the participant to bear the pain: it is the knowledge that something good is being born. (p. 101)

Strobel's works on intersectional feminist and indigenous frameworks for Filipino/a American decolonizing praxis include *Baybaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous* (Strobel, 2010), which documented her process of decolonization and her journey toward understanding Filipino indigenous knowledge systems as sources of empowerment and wellsprings of inspiration for activism. Strobel identified a growing movement of Filipinos throughout the diaspora seeking answers to counter the phenomena of endemic cultural amnesia and loss of identity, particularly among SGFAs. Strobel drew inspiration from the role of indigenous, precolonial *babaylan*, or women who held influential tribal positions and were part shaman, healer, philosopher, and transmitter of knowledge for their communities. Although babaylans continue to play key roles in Philippine indigenous communities, the image of babaylan as spiritual and tribal leaders has been appropriated throughout the Filipino diasporic community to reclaim a sense of wholeness and strength, which comes from knowing one's history and cultural inheritance (Strobel, 2010). In Strobel's collection of narratives from contemporary Pinay leaders highlighted the power of indigenous consciousness, or *indo-genius*, they wielded to influence their respective communities of practice. As part of the 2005 FAWN conference, themed around the role of contemporary babaylan, conference organizers conceptualized themes of leadership using four primary babaylan archetypes to define the Pinay's role as a catalyst in the Filipino community. These four archetypes, presented at the 2005 FAWN conference, include the power roles of teacher, visionary/sage, healer, and warrior, and were outlined in the conference souvenir program (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Babaylan Archetype Power Roles for Pinay Empowerment



Conclusion

To tell the story of Filipino/a American liberation and decolonization required disclosing the Filipino histories of colonization, migration, and postcolonial trauma. Although the body of research articulating the Filipino/a American experience from a decolonial lens continues to grow, further analysis of these experiences is needed as SGFAs continue through their postcolonial journey. As outlined by Nadal's PAID model, SGFAs are moving toward self-actualization and incorporation of Filipino ethnic identity. As SGFAs have been funneled toward the higher education apparatus, they wrestle with issues of identity, colonial mentality and struggle in a place of liminality "as scattered seeds that experience Otherness" (Ferrera, 2017, p. 178).

The implications of this study act as testimony to the Filipino/a experience, as this population continue their journey of enculturation, as postcolonial and transnational subjects, through the transformative experience of higher education. While education has historically been used to indoctrinate Filipino/as to American/Western cultural superiority and centered European/White world views,, I turn to a growing feminist and postcolonial portfolio of sociological and academic research from Pinay scholar–activists who present alternative paradigms from which to understand how change can be initiated from within the educational apparatus.Their leadership steer us towards a more critically informed sociopolitical Filipino/a consciousness—as teachers, healers, activist–warriors, and visionaries—embodied as our modern babaylan.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We must tell our truths, lest we remain invisible.

—Melissa-Ann Nielo Nievera-Lozan, *Portraits of Decolonizing Praxis*

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and the conceptual framework I used to conduct this study. This study employed the qualitative methodology of portraiture to describe the lived experiences that shaped Filipina American (i.e., Pinay) activist–practitioners working in higher education, and how those experiences informed their action-oriented practice working with minoritized student groups from a social justice lens. This research highlighted the importance of diverse representation in student-facing roles on college and university campuses and illuminated how critically engaged activist–practitioners in student-facing roles could impact success and retention for minoritized student groups. Telling the stories of Pinay activist–practitioners in higher education added to the existing body of research on Filipino/a Americans and their experiences in the higher education. A dearth of research on Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in higher education persists, especially work about the diverse AAPI realities such as the Filipino/a American community. Lastly, this study added to the growing body of Pinayist intersectional literature, grounded from a place of power and reclamation and informed by a feminist and decolonial lens. I selected portraiture as a research method because it uniquely centered both the participants' and the researcher's perspectives and would allow me to listen to each Pinay activist–practitioner's story and frame those findings with self-reflection.

The Case for Portraiture

As a form of inquiry, portraiture disrupts the normal paradigm of other research methods, which emphasize the researcher's perspective. By centering the research subjects and their lived experiences, portraiture constitutes a decolonial research methodology by providing the space

needed for participants' stories and depicting the social phenomena grounding their everyday life experiences. By honoring the nuanced narrative of the participant's truth-telling, particularly in the cases of minoritized and historically marginalized groups, portraiture effectively rebalances the power dynamics when power has been disproportionately unbalanced and voices have been silenced (Rodriguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020).

Education scholar Ladson-Billings (1999) named the power of counter storytelling of realities and valorizing experiential knowledge from people of color as a primary tenet of critical race theory (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010). Using counter storytelling of lived experiences by minoritized groups serves as psychic self-preservation and provides a tactic to mitigate continued subordination by the dominant group and a means of overcoming otherness (Delgado, 1989). Portraiture provided a narrative model with heavy use of metaphor and symbolism to translate academic writing to audiences "beyond the academy's inner circle" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10). Featherstone's (1989) essay on portraiture described the methodology as a people's scholarship, as it endeavors to "hear the sound of a human voice making sense of other voices," particularly of women and people of color (p.376).

Sociologist Lawrence-Lightfoot pioneered portraiture, which blends the rigor of systematic and empirical description with aesthetic expression, as a method of qualitative inquiry in the social sciences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Developed as a rebuttal to more traditional research methods in the social sciences, which tended to focus on the pathology of social issues, portraiture inherently sought "what is good here" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9), and not just expressions of goodness but illuminating the earnest work undergirding mission-oriented values of participants. This inquiry approach offers a framework to seek

strength and goodness, rather than deficiencies, and becomes particularly effective when learning from portraits of higher education activist–practitioners (Hackman, 2002).

Qualitative researchers have categorized portraiture as a type of case study approach or participant observation (Hackman, 2002). Although Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) acknowledged portraiture's shared methods with ethnography and phenomenology, what set portraiture apart is its focus on "thick descriptive detail, narrative development, and aesthetic expression" (p. 44). The emphasis on setting the scene and putting the story into context through multiple lenses (e.g., physical, historical, cultural) allowed the audience to locate the participant and determine how their lived experiences were shaped by a myriad of contextual factors. A researcher, as a portraitist, considers context as the framework from which to view human experience. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated, "Context becomes the framework, reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do" (p. 41).

Finally, portraiture centers the presence and role of researchers in a more explicit manner than other research forms. A portraitist becomes an instrument of inquiry from which to locate and interrogate the experiences of participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). A researcher's biases and experiences are named and explicitly identified and are used as a lens from which to process and analyze the data (Hackman, 2002). These factors made portraiture a clear and resonant choice for me, as both a Pinay and as a higher education practitioner residing in Arizona. Embarking on this research not only allows me to seek the goodness in Pinays as change agents and catalysts in their communities of practice but puts my reality into context in Arizona's growing Filipino/a American community and in the field of higher education and as representative of the minoritized students/faculty/staff of color within it.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: How do Filipina American higher education activist–practitioners interpret their life histories and educational experiences from a decolonial lens, as they practice as change agents in the campus environment?
- Research Question 2: In what ways do Filipina American higher education practitioners draw upon social capital and Filipino/a ethnic identity to shape their work with minoritized student populations?

Research Design

This study sought to describe the lived experiences of Pinays working in higher education as both change agents and leaders (i.e., activist–practitioners) who work in their communities of practice with minoritized student groups. Through the qualitative research method of portraiture, Pinay narratives were carefully constructed through intimate and detailed interviews, seeking to center the participants' voices, while using the researcher's perspective as an additional lens of inquiry.

Sample Selection of Participants

I used a purposeful, criterion sampling strategy to identify participants. Purposeful sampling included the intentional selection of individuals based on how the participants can inform an understanding of the phenomenon and meeting specific criteria as outlined by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). I emailed each identified participant (see Appendix A) and followed up with phone calls to further confirm interest, provide clarity on the research plan, and answer questions. Several participants were contacts from my personal network or were referred to me. As such, I also used the snowball method to further identity and recruit research participants.

For participant criteria, I sought out Pinay activist–practitioners who appeared critically engaged with students. Participants identified as Filipino American women (i.e., Pinays) and served in a student- or community-facing role in an institution of higher education based in Arizona. I identified and named activist–practitioners as student-facing, student affairs professionals bound by an agenda to elicit social change, social justice, racial equity, and human rights. Strietzel and Sriram (2022) stated a social justice orientation is an inherent expectation of the student affairs profession that requires action toward a more just society. Beyond the strict definition of their institution, activist–practitioners should view their work as grounded with a vested interest in human rights, social change, and collective societal well-being (Lorenzetti, 2013). As I recruited and selected research participants, preliminary phone interviews were conducted with prospective participants. The phone screenings allowed me to (a) orient prospective participants to the intentions behind the study and confirm their interest before sending out informed consent forms and (b) ask qualifying questions of the prospective participant to determine how they met the criteria for action-oriented and social justice practice in their work (see Appendix B).

Blaikie (2018) conveyed the difficulty of predetermining sample size prematurely before research activities were conducted. Given the nature of qualitative research and the application of the researcher's creativity and ability to identify themes, a range in sample size based on similar research can be derived, but determining a precise sample size in advance of the research would be impractical (Blaikie, 2018). I considered the number of participants, based on the length and quality of interviews and observations I would need to get a rich understanding of each participants' unique story of how they make meaning of their Pinay identity, coupled with their formative educational and professional experiences informed and inspired their work when

working with student populations and community. Given the intimate nature of analysis affiliated with the methodology of portraiture, I referenced Creswell's (2013) suggestion about case study approaches and identified four research participants as my goal sample size range. This sample size range was further informed from dissertation examples from other Pinay scholars using portraiture to research Filipino/a American subjects, including Nievera-Lozano (2016), who interviewed six Pinay scholar–activists, and Cordova (2003), whose participant sample included four second-generation Filipino/a American (SGFA) community leaders.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place in January and February 2023. Data collection consisted of field work methodologies, including two to three semi structured interviews per participant, which were 60-90 minutes in duration. Observations of the participants in professional settings were also utilized to add context to their community work. Participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix C) prior to participating in the study.

Interviews were conducted (see Appendix D) in person as much as possible, at a place that was convenient for participants and situated so participants were comfortable, unhurried, and able to share their stories openly and without interruption. Consideration for background noise was employed to ensure quality audio recordings via a personal recording device or phone. Accommodations to conduct interviews via Zoom were made as needed, although in-person interviews were preferred, and Zoom meetings were also recorded. All interviews were transcribed using Otter AI.

I used values coding to identify themes related to participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs representing their worldview. This type of coding is particularly effective for studies exploring "cultural values, identity, and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences"

(Miles et al., 2014, p. 75). This method was appropriate for identifying themes from Pinay activist–practitioners as they recalled lived experiences, how they made sense of their identities, and how this process informed their work with minoritized student groups on campus.

Observing participants engage with students and student stakeholder groups was key to understanding how Pinay activist–practitioners cultivated collective *kapwa*, or sense of interconnectedness, among minoritized student groups or students of color. Artifacts, including social media posts related to leadership, community involvement, and acknowledgement of their Filipino American heritage, were also referenced. Additionally, varied artifacts associated with personal histories, particularly those which might function as conduits to their awareness of Pinay identity and how that informed and inspired their work with students, were included as data. Observations of attendance or participation at community or work events, particularly those that demonstrated service-oriented or social justice-oriented work, were also pertinent to understanding participants' stories.

I used Dedoose online coding software to analyze and archive the research findings and data. Dedoose was selected due to its relatively low cost, convenience as a cloud-based platform, and user-friendly training resources.

Research Risks

Because the method of portraiture does require a deeper, more intimate connection between researcher and participant, and because the interview and research process include inquiry into other aspects of life outside of just the professional scope, participants may have had aspects of their life they chose to keep private. As a safety measure, I prioritized keeping the line of questioning and environment with a measure of psychological safety and trust for participants and left it to the participants' discretions if there were questions they chose not to answer.

Confidentiality

Participants were provided informed consent forms prior to embarking on the study, with the assurance that data derived from interviews and observations would be used with the original intent of the research proposal. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to review any electronic or video recordings of interviews and corresponding transcripts prior to the final compilation and submission of the dissertation.

Digital documentation and data were housed in Dedoose and in my university-based Google Drive. Any physical documentation, records, or artifacts were kept locked in my office at my residence.

Validity

Member checking techniques were conducted by sharing notes and initial findings with research participants to listen to their views and check for any misinterpretations of observations. As a technique used *writ large* throughout qualitative research inquiry, member checking involves compiling data and sharing initial findings and analyses back to the participants so they participate in an active loop of engagement to verify the accuracy and credibility of the researcher's conclusions (Creswell, 2000, 2013).

Triangulation was also employed to check themes and assumptions with other experts and researchers familiar with Filipino/a American studies and common themes in the Filipino diasporic community. As a method to check for validity, triangulation was derived from a military term for land/sea navigation by referencing landmarks or varied reference points. As such, the method requires checking among different sources to corroborate key findings, which includes verifying findings with participants (Creswell, 2000).

Lastly, the use of thick description, applied heavily in portraiture to set the scene and accurately locate the participants and their environments, provided detailed accounts of the setting, time, place, and participants. By transporting the reader into the setting and helping them experience the phenomenon from the participants' eyes, the researcher's account presents authenticity and credibility (Creswell, 2000).

Limitations of the Study

The sample size of Pinays working in higher education in Arizona is a limited population, and I identified participants for this study primarily through a combined effort of outreach to my personal network with the Asian American and Filipino American communities in the Phoenix metropolitan area and the snowball sampling method. I purposefully selected participants who appeared critically and intentionally engaged in their communities of practice, leveraging their positions in their institutions to act as agents of inspiration and change with student populations and other community affinity groups.

Conclusion

> I believe when a Pinay writes, and she is the subject of her own narrative, then she is subverting those master narratives which have figured her as a voiceless and passive object.
>
> —Barbara Jane Reyes, @bjanepr [Instagram]

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the conceptual framework and methodology that framed the study. This research contributes to the body of work on the Filipino/a American experience in higher education, specifically from the perspective of staff and administrators serving minority student groups. I investigated the roles of critically engaged Pinay activist–practitioners working with students of color, and other minoritized student groups,

as I sought to illuminate Pinay voices and experiences. To capture the depth of detail from these experiences and how Pinay activist–practitioners engage themselves in community activism, portraiture allowed me to center my role as portraitist as "an instrument of inquiry" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13), and my own introspection and discovery of agency draws me to investigate how other Pinays draw power from their identities.

CHAPTER 4: PORTRAITS OF PINAY PRAXIS

> As Pina/xys, we live not only at the margins but also at the crossroads where identities, oppressions, and privileges meet. While we all live this experience, it is a deliberate choice to confront it and use as a way to make change in the world.
>
> —Jen Soriano in Writing Pina/xysm, *Closer to Liberation (Pin[a/x]y activism in theory and practice)*

Pinay Identity as a Decolonial Construct

Upon birthing the concept of Pinayism, Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales allowed for a spectrum of possibilities, or a "multiplicity of what it means to be Pinay" (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005 p. 140). As a result, an acknowledgement that Pinayism is both revolutionary and decolonial in its self-determinant nature, and inherently a catalyst for change. In this project, I interviewed and examined the varied experiences of each participant, and how those experiences influenced each Pinay to work in higher education in service to underserved and minoritized students and their communities. Further, I wanted to learn more about *how* they embodied Pinayism, practiced forms of activism, and challenged traditional definitions of what success looked like.

The themes that emerged from the data included: (a) the role of families as cultural portals to ground Pinay ethnic identity and the transmission of cultural heritage, (b) the lack of representation of Filipino/as as support systems during formative educational years served as the impetus for participants' current work in education, and (c) participants defining and living success on their terms by living "resistant socialities" (Nievera-Lozano, 2016, p. 283). The term *resistant socialities* was born to define the ways that Pinays, as women of color, employ microstrategies of resistance in their professional lives. These socialities are demonstrated by

opting out of the usual linear career trajectory, prioritizing purpose and impact, over monetary reward and formal job titles. The portraits of Pinay participants in this study reflect varied forms of activism (e.g., in the boardroom, through church, political engagement, community organizing), and further demonstrate how their realities diverge from the model minority myth or other such normative tropes assigned to AAPI women.

Table 1

Participant profile and characteristics

Participant Name*	Place of Birth	Family migration origins	Age Range	Employer	Role
Allison	Philippines	Parents enlisted in the US Navy	25-30 years old	Non-profit educational services consultancy	Project Manager, new initiatives; adult learners
Mikaela	Philippines	Chain migration, farm workers; father enlisted in US Army	50-55 years old	Regional, public flagship university	Senior Director of Development; veterans' center
Monica	United States	Grandfather was Filipino, farm worker from *manong* generation	50-55 years old	Local Community College	Program Analyst, Nursing program
Elena	United States	Father was a farm worker from *manong* generation	65-70 years old	Non-profit, local community college	Director; Chair, of Governing Board

*Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Arizona: A Snapshot Extension of Diaspora

As a Pinay living in Arizona, learning about the journeys of other Pinays helped me to process and make sense of my place in these environs. Much of the existing research on Filipino American communities has centered on areas in the American West, which have acted as entry points for immigration, and later blossomed into communities, as Filipinos provided the labor in agricultural towns and canneries. There remains limited research on Filipino/a Americans as later

generations continue their diasporic journey in regions which are experiencing rapid population growth, such as the American Southwest. Two primary threads connect the migration stories of each participant's family: (a) a history of family members working as farm workers, and (b) a military affiliation, usually from the participant's father enlisting in the U.S. Armed Forces as a pathway to U.S. citizenship. Both connections related to family migration stories are consequences of colonial rule on the native Philippine economy. These stories continue to reflect the story of the export of the Filipino people, as human resources, as one of the primary economic drivers (Le Espiritu, 1995).

All of the participants had a history of parents working as agricultural workers in either California or Arizona. Filipino migration related to agricultural work began at the turn of the 20th century, spurred by restrictive immigration legislation excluding Chinese, Japanese, and Korean migrants. Farmers and cannery owners along the Pacific Coast hired Filipinos, and Mexicans, at low wages, to form "the backbone of this harvest labor supply" (Le Espiritu, 1995, p. 9). One participant, Monica, had incomplete knowledge of her Filipino grandfather's backstory. As a Pinay of Filipino/Latino ethnic background, she had an incomplete history of her Filipino roots; her grandfather was most likely a seasonal farm worker who had made his way to California by ship, and found his way to Arizona as he followed the work harvesting crops with the seasons. There was a small pocket of mixed "Mexi-pino" families in South Phoenix, segregated by class and racial divides, this community reflects the mixing of two marginalized communities.

Although military affiliation was not the sole impetus for these participants to have relocated to Arizona, most of the participants had a family member enlist in the U.S. military, mostly as a pathway to citizenship, but also as a "springboard for escaping from poverty" (Le

Espiritu, 1995, p. 15). The Philippines has housed some of the United States' largest overseas air force and naval bases, as a result of the Military Bases Agreement of 1946. As a result of the looming presence of these bases, by the 1980s, the U.S military would become one of the largest employers in the country, second only after the Philippine government. For many Filipinos, enlisting in the U.S. military represented the American dream consisting of high wages, opportunity, and citizenship for themselves and their extended family members (Le Espiritu, 1995). Most of the participants had a family member who had been based or retired from a military base located in southern California or Arizona. As such, the significance of having relied on the U.S. military as a channel to escape poverty or as a route to U.S. citizenship and all the benefits that this implies, may have an additional consequence for our participants' parents of feeling indebted to the institution or the United States. This concept of indebtedness is referred to as *utang na loob*, which translates to a "sense of inner debt" (David, 2013, p. 107) or gratitude, and is a core Filipino value related to the highly collectivistic nature in Filipino culture. Feelings of indebtedness can be revealed in two ways: (a) the need to reciprocate can influence participants' motivation to give back by way of service to the community or to society and (b) can also lead to feelings of deference, or reverence, for an entity, such as an individual or group (e.g., family) or a government, organization, or institution (e.g., the military). As we unpack the lived histories of Pinays in this study, we also trace how these origin and migration stories continue to influence and shape the lives on second generation Filipino/a Americans.

Monica: Just a Girl From the Southside

I had known Monica as a classmate in my doctoral program, and despite having worked closely together on multiple projects over the course of nearly 3 years, I had not known that she identified as part Filipino. I had known her to only identify as a Latina, and only found out about

her Filipino roots when she learned I was actively recruiting Pinay higher education practitioners for my study, and she asked me casually why I had not invited her to interview.

Much of our cohort instruction had merged to Zoom sessions, as we had started our doctoral program during the COVID-19 global pandemic's early progression. Despite having only met in person a handful of times, I felt a deep sisterhood with the women in my doctoral program, and so I felt a closeness with Monica. She had shared with me previously that her husband was Filipino, but I felt a little shocked that she had never mentioned to me herself that she was part-Filipino. "I thought I told you, or I thought you already knew," she said to me nonchalantly. Although she appeared proud of her Filipino heritage, it was a part of her that was hidden and revealed to only those close enough to trust.

Our first meeting took place in her home upon her suggestion. She and her husband, Paulo, had recently sold their home in north Phoenix, and decided to downsize. She had just started a new job at a local community college, all while selling her home, purchasing a new home and moving—during the holidays. As I was welcomed into their new house, I could see they were still settling in. A few moving boxes were still strewn about, waiting to be unpacked, and several pieces of furniture had temporary holdings in the living room and the back porch. Monica was a gracious host, despite a stressful day at the office, where she was still learning her new role at the college. Paulo, meanwhile, was in the kitchen cooking up Spam fried rice and fried chicken. It felt immediately familiar . . . like home.

Piecing Together a Pinay/Latina Mestiza Identity

Monica's grandfather had immigrated to the United States with his brother, Eddie, on a steam ship, but after that the trail appears to run cold. But passed before she had an opportunity to meet him. Much of what she knows of her Filipino identity was limited to what her mother,

and her aunts, as Mexican/Filipino Americans, would transmit to her as a child. Thus, her knowledge of her Filipino identity and Filipino culture is limited to food customs and oral history. He most likely was a seasonal agricultural worker who traveled through California, and the Southwest, moving with the harvesting season of various crops. Guevarra's (2012) work on Mexican Filipino (i.e., Mexi-pino) families in southern California reflected the histories of these communities. Filipinos and Mexicans shared an oppression and colonial histories as marginalized peoples, and shared cultural attributes as a result of the Spanish colonial past; namely, Spanish and Catholicism. Both cultures also shared a deeply collectivistic cultural characteristic, making the blending of Filipino and Mexican communities as co-ethnic realities appear intuitive.

The earliest Filipinos in Phoenix, Arizona, were recorded around 1920, and were primarily young men who hailed from the island of Luzon, from the Ilocos region (Murray & Soliday, 2007). Filipino laborers were prohibited from bringing over their wives, and also prevented from marrying White women due to miscegenation laws barring relations between white and "Mongolian" (Murray & Soliday, 2007, p. 65) partners. Sharing the mutual experience of hundreds of years Spanish colonization, Filipinos and Mexicans shared several cultural experiences: Catholicism as the primary religion, Spanish as a dominant lingua franca prevailing even in the systematic labeling of our kin groups with Spanish surnames, and a strong communal sense of identity. Further, in many communities with the shared histories, Filipinos and Mexicans often worked side by side in America's agriculture fields and orchards, canneries, and factories providing the physical labor needed to fuel the economic growth to fully incorporate the western United States, in states such as Arizona, California, Alaska, and Hawaii (Gueverra, 2012). Monica shared:

> Growing up, we identified with nothing but Filipino in my first early years, because my mom was a single parent and she's half Filipino and half Latina. She doesn't know a lick of Spanish. She doesn't know a lick of Tagalog. All she knew was English. She raised me until I was about 13, and then she sent me to live with my grandma. Then I learned, oh, I'm Filipina *and* Latina. But inside, I felt like an Oreo cookie because my mom never really sat me down and explained that this was your background, this is your heritage. (Interview Transcript 1, January 20, 2023, p. 12)

The term "Oreo cookie" struck me as harsh and represented one of the worst insults a person of color could hurl towards another person of color, akin to calling someone a banana or a coconut (i.e., either yellow or brown on the outside, but white on the inside). As the term denotes, being white on the inside means someone lacked knowledge of their culture or being true to their culture. In Monica's case, the lack of cultural knowledge was accurate because she had little knowledge of either her Pinay of Latina identity to reference or pull together her mestiza identity, at least not until later on. She shared, "I wasn't educated to know my own identity during that time. It's an embarrassment until today. I'm embarrassed because I'm not bilingual."

Scholar and expert on Filipino/a American psychology, David (2013), studied at length the effects of loss of *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness), on empowerment, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Desai (2016) expanded upon the links found between common social issues experienced by colonized peoples as social toxins, which he found were "inextricably linked to the colonial process" (p. 34). These issues include poverty, high rates of teen pregnancy, high school dropout rates, substance abuse, depression, family violence, and suicide (Desai, 2016).

I did not find Monica to demonstrate a disdain or self-hatred of either ethnic identity, but there was clearly a sense of shame and embarrassment of her lack of cultural awareness, enculturation to both sides of her cultural heritage and identities (i.e., Pinay and Latina). In this sense, in the telling of her story and professional and educational experiences, Monica experienced marginalization from others, but also participated in self-marginalization due to diminished self-esteem and confidence.

Despite lacking an early incorporation of her Filipino heritage, Monica sought ways to fulfill the gap in her cultural knowing (i.e., awareness). She married Paulo, who is Filipino, and they both wanted to raise their son, Michael, with a stronger background on his Filipino heritage. Monica shared, "I want my son to know his identity, who he is and where he's from, so that he can stay true to himself."

In the early days of their marriage, the motivation to reclaim that loss of culture was an early priority. Monica and Paulo had a Filipino wedding, and got married wearing traditional *barong Tagalog*, traditional Filipino formal wear woven of delicate pina fibers, and had *lechon* (i.e., roasted pig) "with an apple in its mouth" catered as the main dish at their wedding reception. Monica referenced Paulo, and his mother, as a *cultural portal* through which she was able to access Filipino culture, language, and heritage (Ferrera, 2017).

Monica's view of community was not limited in prescribed boundaries of culture or ethnicity; she grounded her collective *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness) in her church community and by coaching underserved students. It became less important for her to be connected to specific Filipino or Latino organizations, but instead sought to find ways to be of influence and be in service to others in diverse church groups settings. Monica found the greatest sense of belonging, and a sense of unconditional love, in church, where she was accepted as she was.

Persistence as Resistance

I recall Monica telling bits and pieces of her story in class sessions and knew she had experienced more challenges on her journey to the doctoral program than others in our cohort. Monica recounted having a difficult time navigating schooling throughout elementary to high school, experiencing rough treatment by teachers. She shared:

> Coming from that background, and then divorced parents, and the three of us with a single mother, trying to make ends meet living in a three generational household because my grandmother was living with us. There was a lot of abuse in my family growing up. It took a lot of years for me to not only recognize that it was abuse. . . . I was a terrible student. I was terrible. Not only was I rebellious, but I have the type of personality where if you make me do something I do not want to do, that is the last thing I will do for you. I don't know if it's the nature of the beast, but that was the kind of girl I was growing up. I was combative. I was rebellious. It was very hard for any adult to really love me at the surface of who I was. You really had to get to know me in school, because right off the gate the teachers treated me differently. They did not get the good Monica, they got the bad Monica. So elementary, junior high, high school, did not go well for me at all. I went to five different high schools in Phoenix. . . . In hindsight, [the teachers] were discriminating against me. Because they were indifferent to me and the way that the behaviors were in my response to the cold environment, the hostile environment. I've been pushed up against a wall by a teacher, pulled by my jacket. I mean, it was my behavior in response to their behavior. So for me in high school having to get in trouble led into other trouble. It was just not a good experience. I didn't graduate with a high school diploma and I didn't graduate with a GED. I have neither until this day. I have to

> be careful how I present that . . . but it's the truth. (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, p. 8)

Monica had three children as a young, single, teen mother, and had to find a way to make ends meet living off of food stamps and government assistance. As she contemplated how to better her prospects for the future, she heard about a friend who was attending college classes at the local community college in her part of town. She subsequently enrolled at South Hills community college where she experienced, for the first time, an environment that welcomed her and found instructors and peers who made for a positive, and supportive learning environment. Monica described:

> It's what happened internally. The transformation of finding a sense of belonging. My first semester I failed miserably, and I left for one academic year. I found the boldness and courage to go back. I started to find myself making friends, getting familiar with the activities, getting to know my peers, getting to know my professors. There were three professors during the time that were Latino that I was able to relate to. And so, it was that sense of belonging with my community, with that family, that I started to find those similar feelings you have at home. That's when the transformation started to take place and I started really listening to the professors. (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, pp. 9–10)

Mentorship and guidance from Latino professors showed her she could play a similar role helping students who were like her: first-generation, low-income, minoritized students who needed the extra help navigating the collegiate environment and the extra encouragement to persist and complete their studies. She recalled her exposure to a few Latino professors, which

proved pivotal for her, but one professor sent a clear message to Monica about the possibilities that were in her reach. Monica stated:

> For me, it was beginning to know who they were, where they came from. If they could do it, I knew I could do it. . . . I realized, this is what I love. This is what I want to do, and I saw the professors not only being able to teach and be passionate about what they teach, but they enjoy the students. One of my professors told me, because I told him I wanted to teach, "Monica, you do know that only 1% of Latinos get their doctorate degree, and that's not even including Latinas." (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, p. 10)

Buoyed by that statement as a challenge of sorts, Monica went on to not only complete her associate degree, but also two undergraduate degrees and two master's degrees. Now enrolled in her doctoral program at the time of this study, Monica's accumulation of certifications and degrees appeared to be at once a triumph and a challenge thrown back in the face of institutions that were not designed to serve her. She stated:

> I went from an associate's by the skin of my teeth to finally getting a bachelor's because I didn't think I could get a bachelor's degree. I did not think I was smart enough. At least the way I was raised, you don't even imagine yourself going past an associate's. (Interview Transcript 1, January 20, 2023, p. 4)

After graduating with her bachelor's degree, Monica went on to work in various roles in higher education. Throughout the varied roles she had held in higher education, all her positions involved academic advising and success coaching. Monica found motivation to give back in a way where she could impact the outcomes of students who were like her (i.e., first-generation college students), lacking family and social support, who by all socioeconomic factors would be considered at risk. She shared:

> Where was our guidance? Where there weren't any advisors, there weren't any counselors, or even women I could relate to that looked or sounded like me, or had a background like me. It was important to go back and give back to that community, the best way I knew how to be close that community again was the community college. (Interview Transcript 1, January 20, 2023, p. 3)

Although her list of credentials was growing, her accomplishments had not always been met with praise or recognition by her family. During a phone conversation, Monica recounted to me that her sister would make snide comments about how "Monica is always in school." They did not appear to value her academic achievements or see her educational status as a means of subverting the oppression or discrimination she experienced in school, growing up in south Phoenix. Through her various graduations and commencement invitations, her immediate family was often absent from such events. Their indifference to her goal of being seen as educated, and good enough, was still gutting for Monica, and she admitted to shedding tears of disappointment. Still, she remained undeterred.

In pursuit of her goal of becoming a college professor, Monica was working diligently on writing her dissertation with the goal of defending in late 2023. When asked what was next in store after the doctoral program is complete, I was surprised to hear Monica's response. She harbored no aspirations to move up into management or following the tenure track/faculty route. In her eyes, she already had the "dream job" of advising and coaching students at the community college level and planned to start teaching classes in the fall as an adjunct instructor online. Her eyes were set on eventually teaching online full time, and becoming a "digital nomad," traveling the world with Michael and Paulo while continuing to do what she loved. Monica said, "You're

still looking at a masterpiece in the making. . . . I'm an overcomer. In my belief, I'm not a victim, I'm a victor" (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, p. 7).

Allison: Claiming the Inner Pinay as a Love Letter to the Ancestors

I came to learn that Allison was the newly minted chair for a local mentorship program affiliated with an Asian American networking group in the Phoenix area. I had previously been a mentee in the same program and served as a mentor a few times; the program had grown to nearly 30 mentorship pairings, which was quite possibly the largest cohort the program had ever had. Having connected with several meaningful friends and mentors as part of my participation in the program, I felt gratified to learn that the program was not only in good hands, but was also growing. I was curious to learn more about the individual at the helm of the mentorship program and sought an introduction from some mutual friends.

Prior to our first official meeting, I met Allison at the networking group's annual awards dinner and winter gala. She was scheduled to present the graduating mentorship cohort and was to be recognized as member of the year. In the banal backdrop of a Scottsdale hotel ballroom filled with the who's who of Phoenix's Asian American community, there was an eclectic mix of civic and business leaders eager to mingle. Attendees were dressed up, displaying a mix of the flamboyantly dressed in gowns, some in traditional cultural attire, others in suits. Allison had dressed intentionally and had applied the right touch of glam in preparation for her moment on stage. She stood out by wearing a gold sequined v-neck dress and wore her long hair down. Despite her bold sartorial choices, I found her demeanor reserved and guarded as I introduced myself to her.

As the evening progressed, Allison was called to the stage to promote the mentorship program and was later presented with the member of the year award. Allison had prepared a brief

acceptance speech where she acknowledged the AAPI group's impact in the community and described herself as "a girl growing up in the suburbs of Gilbert" where "she was often one of the only Asians in the room and felt the need to hide that part of herself to try and fit in" (Allison, personal communication, January 21, 2023). Being recognized by the larger AAPI community in the Phoenix metropolitan area in this way was especially poignant for her.

From the back of the room, I was struck by the enhanced projection of Allison's voice as she took in the moment, and she proudly proclaimed:

> It wasn't until college and into my professional career when I got more involved with API-related organizations and employee resource groups that I realized how powerful I am to exist, being born from Filipino immigrants and understanding that the blood of over 300 years of colonial resistance was running in my veins. So, to celebrate culture, to uplift my community, and to be proud of my identity, is an act of resilience and a love letter to my ancestors. (Personal communication, January 26, 2023)

In that space, Allison proudly proclaimed her Pinay power. I beamed as I witnessed this young Pinay finding power in her identity, in a rare moment where Asian Americans in Arizona were convening to celebrate one another, about half of the audience hooted and cheered while the other half appeared to shift uneasily in their chairs. This group often talked about empowerment but was a bit too reliant on corporate purse strings to really talk openly about topics on historic oppression and decolonizing strategies.

Awakening

Allison was a second-generation immigrant, born in the Philippines, where her family came from the Kapampangan region in Northern Luzon. Both of her parents came over through the process of chain migration, being sponsored by existing family members who were already in

the United States, and both her parents had joined the U.S. Navy, which is where they met. Allison's grandparents lived with her family, providing a strong conduit to her Filipino identity and roots. They spoke their native dialect, Kapampangan, at home, and provided much needed support to her mother in raising the children while her father was deployed to duty assignments overseas, or on other naval bases throughout the country.

Allison's childhood memories were filled with living and playing with a large extended family, with many aunts, uncles, and cousins around to help her learn English and navigate U.S. culture. As she grew older, she then became the translator for other family members who had moved to the United States. This duality in English language learning was common for all of the participants; although bilingual or multilingual capacity is now considered a competitive advantage, when learning English as a second language in a household filled with varied Filipino language dialects, minoritized groups may learn the lesson that English acts as currency for assimilation and acculturation to the dominant culture, and the language of home becomes is considered less than. Pinays experiencing this mixed message are then assailed with a deep insecurity in expressing themselves in English. Allison shared:

> Till this day, I don't necessarily understand a lot of like, English sayings and things like that because I just never grew up hearing them. And you know, I often had to ask some of my friends growing up, just like, oh, like "What do you mean by that?" Like, "Why do you do that?" Like for instance, "Knock on wood,' right? Like, what is that?" (Interview Transcript 2, February 17, 2023, p. 2)

Allison was categorized as an English as a second language learner because her family indicated English was not the primary language spoken at home. So, despite being a high-performing gifted student, Allison was required to take English proficiency tests every year until

she was in sixth grade. The lack of cultural sensitivity to the realities of immigrant children in the educational apparatus only serves to further minoritizes immigrant households and can contribute to insecurities in public speaking and the ability to speak up.

Growing up in an affluent suburban neighborhood in Gilbert, Arizona, Allison recalled her schools being predominantly white. She stated:

> There were few people of color in my classes and at school in general. Actually, growing up into that school, I found that most of my friends were actually the people of color. So like looking back, I'm realizing now that, like, I was really trying to find my community through them in the sea, of you know, like, mostly white students. So yeah, like most of my friends were people of color. And we were, you know, the only minorities on campus. (Interview Transcript 2, February 17, 2023, p. 9)

Disillusioned and Weary: Attempting Change From Within

Allison applied to several colleges in Arizona and California and was accepted to all of them. She opted to stay close to home and chose to attend State University A because they had offered her a full-tuition scholarship. It was close enough to be able to make quick trips back home, but distant enough to ensure she was getting the full college experience, live in dorms, and gain some independence.

Allison quickly got incorporated into State University A's student activities. She first got invited to an Asian American club, and then eventually got an invite to a Filipino American student club. She shared:

> Through my involvement . . . getting to know more about like historical context of Asian leaders . . . and how important it is to be active in . . . civic engagement and things like that. . . . I understood that . . . I needed to get back in touch and reflect on my cultural

> values . . . and why did I, you know, feel that I had to separate that part of myself when I went to school and when I was with other people. . . . I would say that that was a key moment in my life that really triggered that cultural awakening. . . . Identity is . . . political and you can't necessarily separate your experiences of . . . being a person of color from your work and your life. You see it in various aspects whether . . . it's in your face or not. It's there and we have to understand how we navigate these different systems and understand that . . . these systems weren't made for . . . people like us and we need to work as a community to . . . unravel that, so that we can create space and make space for us. (Interview Transcript 2, February 17, 2023, p. 13)

She completed a degree in biology, thinking she would pursue the career track toward becoming a pharmacist, but a mentor in the AAPI student cultural center encouraged her to reassess whether she was pursuing this career path for her parents or for herself. Although she ended up completing the coursework for the biology degree, she opted to pursue a graduate degree in higher education to continue her work with student engagement, in particular with students of color. The decision to transition away from a career path toward becoming a pharmacist was a difficult one and put her at odds with her parents' expectations. Allison found the courage to assert herself and demonstrate agency. She stated:

> I think up to that point I didn't really understand why . . . I couldn't really speak up about certain things. And . . . looking back, I think part of that was this cultural aspect of . . . "don't make any moves, just follow orders." You don't want to like, cause any issues or like, burden other people. And so . . . learning about that and starting to unlearn some of those behaviors . . . really helped to ground . . . and question why we thought that way, and how the that struggle. . . . For our, like ancestors, and you know, our families, our

> community, to try to make it here in America, that those were some of the practices that they . . . do in order to survive. I think now, we're in a point where we're beyond surviving, right, and we're trying to thrive. Like, how do we that—we need to really push the boundary and make that space. (Interview Transcript 2, January 17, 2023, p. 14)

In reclaiming her cultural and ethnic heritage during college, Allison was able to uncover a level of confidence and agency, guided by her commitment to continue working with minoritized student groups, and making spaces for students of color who needed the permission to discover themselves and explore possibilities. While she was completing her master's degree at State University A, Allison was working nearly full time as a graduate assistant for the Asian American Pacific Islander Cultural Center on campus. The center was having a difficult time finding an executive director, and Allison helped to fill in during that time of staffing transition. She loved every minute of it—building a community of support for students of color while coaching and mentoring students.

Eventually, Allison sought opportunities to kick off her career as a full-time student service professional and applied to roles out of state. She landed a position overseeing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming for a college based out of Northern California. During her 3-year tenure in the role, she arrived as an entry-level coordinator, and through various shifts in staffing yet again, Allison found herself filling in the gaps and stepped in to oversee the programming and operations for the DEI center. She shared:

> We worked with students and provided resources through our space and through the programs that we put on, but we also—being the primary DEI really anything on campus, were charged with also training faculty and staff, as well as you know, other partners

externally with you . . . any sort of DEI training. (Allison Interview Transcript 1b, January 26, 2023, p. 1)

After some time in her role, Alison found the university did not allocate appropriate resources to support the DEI center in a sustainable way. She shared:

> As much as they said that they valued DEI and social justice, it didn't necessarily feel like that in terms of the level of financial and structural support that we needed on campus. . . . Their budget for everything that they did was not institutionalized. So every year, they would kind of have to come to bat for any sort of budget, put in a proposal so that they have funds to put on programs and provide the resources that they do for students. (Interview 1c Transcript, January 26, 2023, p. 4)

In 2021, during the COVID-19 global pandemic, Allison decided it was time to move back to Arizona to be closer to home. Her need to be near her family, coupled with the high level of burnout she was experiencing overseeing the DEI center, forced her to make the difficult decision to quit her position. Colleges and universities had instituted hiring freezes, and Allison was finding it difficult to land a new role. It took her about a year to find the right opportunity, in spite of her alternative strategy to look outside of higher education altogether. At the time of the study, she worked remotely for an educational services company focused on creating workforce development solutions for colleges and universities, with an emphasis on growing capacity in service of adult learners. Although the work was interesting and challenging, it varied drastically from her former reality working day-to-day on a vibrant college campus, passionately doing the hard work behind DEI education and process integration. Unfortunately, the common thread with many women of color in higher education is the high level of burnout, coupled with lack of mentorship, and experiences of feeling invisible, which translates to high attrition rates; this

experience has remained consistent with faculty, administrators, and student affairs practitioners (Maramba, 2011).

In Allison's case, she embarked on a path toward self-care and self-preservation by moving back to Arizona to be closer to her support system and family. The COVID-19 global pandemic forced many to reevaluate life's priorities, and much of today's workforce is choosing to prioritize work–life balance and flexible scheduling as a radical act of resistance against prescribed capitalistic norms of productivity. Allison had sought to reconnect to the AAPI community in Phoenix with more intentional participation in organizations such as the pan-Asian networking group and chairing their mentorship program. Her story was just starting, but her leadership will have both a ripple effect and micro-impact on the organization and the mentors and mentees.

Mikaela: Flipping the Script

I had worked with Mikaela previously in working with military affiliated students at one of the large, public state universities based in Phoenix. She was a military student advisor at the time I worked as a student recruiter, and our departments worked in tandem to advise military students. I experienced that pang of positive recognition that happens when I meet another Pinay working in higher education; I felt a sense of relief because I realized I was not alone as another Pinay in this space. It is difficult to describe; it is akin to walking in a crowded room or party where you know no one, and then by happenstance, you run into one of your closest friends. The perceived camaraderie was immediate, and further solidified as we came to know one another over the years.

Mikaela was born in the Philippines in Vigan, in northern Luzon. Her aunt had sponsored her father to emigrate to the United States, at which point they landed in California, where her

father worked as an agricultural worker in the fields for several years. He enlisted with the U.S. Army through a recruitment center in a nearby mall, which was also a common way for many Filipino/a individuals to acquire citizenship at the time. The life of a military family is often a transient one, marked with frequent moves, where uprootedness and separation from familial and community support systems are normalized. Military spouses and military children become particularly adept at moving every few years, often with little notice, and must learn to develop connections and makeshift support systems quickly. Mikaela and her mother moved to Germany, where her father was stationed, at the age of 4. Her family would continue to be based in Germany on a U.S. Army base for much of her grade school years. This is a personal experience I share with Mikaela because we both came from military families and were raised on military bases abroad. As military children, and the children of immigrants, we had the unusual privilege of straddling Filipino and American cultural norms, but also a third dimension of the host country where we happened to be based (i.e., Mikaela's childhood was spent in Germany, and mine was spent in Japan).

No—We Do Not Own a Piano or a Karaoke Machine

Despite the frequent moves and changing social network of close family friends and schoolmates, Mikaela enjoyed a loving household where her parents insulated their family unit with a steady and nurturing influence. Not only did they model the behaviors for servant leadership and civic engagement early on, but they also taught their daughters how to navigate social circles outside of the Filipino community. This strategy of acculturation is a message for second generation Filipino/a Americans to learn early on as means for survival and is further reinforced as soon as they are introduced into the educational apparatus. Mikaela shared:

> My parents started off very, very humble beginnings, very modest. And I remember living in Germany. It was modest, but my parents gave me the best childhood they knew how. What they were told was the best way to raise your children in America. And I know that's one of their regrets because of that. So, when I was in kindergarten, [in] Germany, [I] went to an American school. And my kindergarten teacher told my parents, "The only way your children will be successful in the United States is to only speak English to them." So, my parents took that to heart and I am one of the products of that can't speak a lick of Filipino because that's the only way I can make it in America. And now my parents realize that it's not true. . . . But hey, when you're 22. That's how old my parents were. They didn't know any better. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, pp. 8–9)

Not only did Mikaela grown up as a military child, but she also enlisted in the U.S. Army shortly after graduating high school. There was an additional layer of influence from military culture that encouraged the erasure of Filipino/a ethnic identity, further impacting Mikaela's ability to process and make sense of her whole self. She shared:

> Growing up, it wasn't my, it wasn't a thinking about having a Filipino identity because in the military, that's not a priority because we are all one. So, I remember growing up, I had Black friends and white friends and other Asian, Hispanic friends and it was never classified of our race . . . I never felt that way. And this is in the 70s and 80s. My Filipino identity actually didn't come into play until I moved to San Diego, where my school was 80% Filipino . . . when I went to high school and in all honesty, I hated it. I hated my identity at that point, because I grew up and there was no racism, how I was brought up. I don't know if this was because my parents did a remarkable job of never having to

> expose or I was just very fortunate to have that type of upbringing. I never had Black friends or white friends or non-Asian friends who pointed out my Asian-ness, that was never a thing . . . when I came to San Diego where there was this hard division of, "You're gonna hang out with your Black friends. You're gonna have out with your Filipino friends." . . . Like, there was this separation and I was not aware of that in Germany, or in other places. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, p. 9)

Mikaela recognized the disdain and internalized racism she felt against other Filipino/a individuals. She found a crab mentality rampant among the Filipino/as in her new high school, which is a phenomenon commonly witnessed in Filipino American communities and other ethnic/immigrant groups, where the desire to outdo or surpass one another is manifested at the expense of peers or others in the community (Nadal, 2010). Mikaela said, "I didn't like being in high school and seeing how Filipinos would one up each other who's gonna buy the better Honda, and I was like, I'm not part of this . . . I was just turned off by it." She also shared:

> I did not want to fit the mold . . . I was deliberate in my separation. And I think it's because I wanted my own identity, like don't clump me with the rest of them because I did not grow here [in San Diego]. . . . We don't have roses in the front of our house and do not own a piano . . . we don't own a karaoke machine. So, I think I was just so fixated on not fitting the stereotype, because that's not how I was brought up [by] my parents, because they were told when we were young to only speak English. So, my parents really did their version of being Americanized. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, p. 11)

Mikaela's candid reflections on her rejection of the Filipino community, or at least what she was able to observe of her peer group, was probably one of the most overt examples of colonial mentality among the study participants in this study. Colonial mentality, or internalized

oppression, can be held by Filipino/a Americans in varied ways; it can mean subliminally equating whiteness and American or Western ideals as better, or involve an open distaste for characteristics of Filipino culture (David, 2013). I clarify this is in no way a judgement of participants who exhibited signs of colonial mentality; indeed, colonial mentality as a condition has been socialized into Filipinos and Filipino/a Americans for hundreds of years as a result of colonization and empire. It is a choice to decolonize; and to decolonize is a journey. Strobel (2015) stated:

> Decolonization is a source of courage and agency to choose and act in ways that uplift the Filipino American community, and in ways that engage and contest the dominating aspects of white culture. To understand that culture is a site of ideological struggle is to develop the ability to become a border crosser, in order to build coalitions with other oppressed groups, and use one's position as a starting point for dialogue with people similarly located. (pp. 144–145)

Throughout Mikaela's tenure in the U.S. Army, she began to experience overt racism perhaps for the first time. She had grown up in ethnically diverse schools and neighborhoods and had to integrate and work closely with other military service members who hailed from all parts of the country which were less racially integrated. Mikaela described:

> I . . . saw racism as an adult serving [in the military]. I never had to come across it, but in the military I did. But there was a level of ignorance and not understanding or clumping me with all other Asians. "Oh, you must use chopsticks," and then that's when I started to feel like, no, I need to defend my Filipino identity. And so, that's when I started to really focus in on that. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, p. 12)

Mikaela's evolution toward an acceptance of her Filipino identity aligned with the stage of incorporation in Nadal's (2004) Pilipino American identity development (PAID) model. Unlike other participants where their arrival at incorporation occurred mainly during their collegiate years, Mikaela's arrival to that stage did not happen until she was in her 40s, spurred by befriending a set of individuals, mostly of Latino/Latine background, who were heavily engaged in their communities in the East Valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area: She said:

> I think my deep love of my identity, and really being loud and proud of my Filipina [identity] is now—moving to Mesa and hanging out with my Hispanic friends. . . . I have evolved to be very loving of all Filipinos. . . . I kind of lost my way and came back and embracing it. I've always loved being a Filipino. I think I was just kind of lost and how to define that and really showcasing the better version of what Filipino looks like. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, p. 12)

Seeing activism and ethnic pride practiced and modeled by peers appeared to have an effect on Mikaela, and she started to fully step into her Pinay identity. Strobel (2015) acknowledged this cross-border/cross-cultural solidarity as a means of grounding an individual's Filipino/a identity toward coalition building and allyship. Mikaela described her own path, sharing:

> So, when the Black Lives Matter movement happened, I was there. I marched. I made my signs. I bought my t-shirts. I wore them when I probably wasn't appropriate to wear them. And who was gonna say anything to me; when the AAPI had their parade in Mesa, I did that one. When the, when the overturning of Roe vs. Wade, I was there marching in the Capitol. I will march because I served this country to do what I want to do in, in the face of those kinds of things. . . . I do not shy away from moment when you need to speak

> up. When there's injustice happening. When someone doesn't have a voice or feels weak. I've always been strong enough to get to the plate and defend or protect what I think is right, to do the right thing to do. And I think joining the military only validated that if I'm in a position, I cannot back down from that. . . . I'm a fighter. I will fight. (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, pp. 17–18)

Leading From the Liminal Space

After a brief stint in the U.S. Army, Mikaela went on to attend a large public university located in Miami, Florida. Although she took pride in being an alumnus of the institution, she admitted she felt invisible as a student on campus. Her diminished sense of belonging was further exacerbated due to the lack of representation of AAPI, either as students, faculty, or supporting staff, and left a lasting impression on Mikaela. She said:

> [I felt] zero belonging. I felt very alone. I would say 85% of my life was in the library. I lived off campus . . . before cell phones, only pay phones. There's not a lot of Asians in Miami at the time. So I have no place, honestly. . . . I could not find anyone that looked like me. In fact, my first day at Miami I had a bill to pay, and the lady there basically says, "You're gonna have to figure it out." I was crying and crying on the phone with my sister, and it was my brother-in-law who actually paid my bill. Like, if he didn't help me . . . I would have had to find another way of you know, going to maybe drop out. . . . I did not feel that support. I love my school. I just don't think, at that time, they know how to . . . so I think this is personally why I am so driven to do what I do because I won't want students to feel what I felt. (Interview Transcript 2, February 22, 2023, p. 6)

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, Mikaela oversaw the operations of the veterans' center at the large, public, regional university where she was employed. The executive director

had left the organization for another role, and as one of the most tenured staff members with the veterans' center, she became the intuitive choice to help maintain operations and student service levels. She managed the COVID-19 protocols, staffing, and schedules, working through campus closures and staffing shortages; through it all, she ensured services for all the veterans and active-duty personnel attending the university remained uninterrupted. In recognition of her competency, Mikaela was appointed interim director, which marked a culminating peak in her career. She shared:

> I've been on the bottom for so long. I have been looked over; I have been passed [over]. . . . This is also why I currently keep [my last name], even though I've been divorced for a while. . . . When I open the door to be an, "Oh, *you're* Mikaela L.?!" But now what have done to change my mindset that all these things I thought was my setback, being brown, being a woman, being a veteran. . . . I make sure that I am deliberately standing out. . . . By making sure that people see me as a unique figure, being a Filipino, female, first gen [college student], wasn't born here . . . I make sure people know that . . . it's possible for me, but also to show that I *earned* this, I did it the hard way. (Interview Transcript 2, February 22, 2023, p. 6)

Ultimately, when it came time for the new executive director to be named, a colleague, a white male veteran, was chosen as the new director. Mikaela said, "Even though I didn't get the job, I'm thankful, I still have a director role. . . . I am on my own path." Although I could sense the disappointment in her voice, I could also sense a steel-like resolve and a confidence acquired after having been tested as a leader. Mikaela shared:

> When I got to the boardroom, no one was like me. There were other white guys and there's me. I'm one of them. That's when I was like, "Oh wait, I'm here. I've arrived." . .

> . I flipped it and said, "You *will* listen to me. You will respect me as a colleague." . . . Once I became the interim director, my provost, he really said . . . "You're the right person for the job. You have the right personality . . . you're a go getter." And so, he was saying things that I needed to hear. . . . I felt like, "Holy crap! I am. I *am* this good! No, I'm worth it!" So, that's when I switched it. (Interview Transcript 2, February 22, 2023, p. 7)

Mikaela nonchalantly shrugged off the importance of job title, realizing her impact on students and the veteran community whom she served had little to do with her title or where she sat in the hierarchy. She measured her impact on how much money she could raise for student veterans, how many jobs she could line up for student veterans, or how many students or young professionals she could mentor and cheer on to achieve their goals. Her measurement of success was the impact on the people and communities that she represented and served, and she had taken herself out of the hierarchy. Several times, Mikaela had been encouraged to pursue a master's and doctoral degree by senior administration at the university, purportedly to qualify her toward a senior leadership position such as a dean, executive director, or vice president. She shared, "You know how many people who've asked me to go get my master's degree and I'm like, 'Why?' I did this with blood sweat and tears—I'm old school." She had laughed, again shrugging off others' attempts to direct her path. Although she never struggled in school, Mikaela also did not *love* going to school. She said, "I just get it done. I'm living proof that you don't need to be bound or follow this rigid kind of ladder" (Interview Transcript 1, January 27, 2023, p. 5).

Elena: Practicing Activism From the Boardroom

I came to know Elena from our mutual association with a pan-Asian professional networking group in Phoenix. I had applied to their mentorship program and was lucky enough to be paired with Elena as my mentor. When interviewing with the mentorship committee, I distinctly remember I was seeking guidance from another Filipina, if possible, who could help me navigate the conflicting worlds of motherhood and career. Elena was a senior leader at a large investor-owned utility company, charged with managing the company's vast community development and corporate social responsibility responsibilities throughout Arizona. Elena exuded maternal authority and was exceedingly professional and practical in her guidance during our time in the mentorship program. All at once nurturing, and softly stern, she elicited the respect of all who worked with her. Although our formal mentorship only lasted about 6 months, we continued to meet to catch up on the ebb and flow of our lives, and I have enjoyed a close friendship with Elena going on 10 years by the time of this study.

Elena retired from the utility company after 24 years of service in 2014 and was immediately tapped by multiple community organizations to help chair their boards or help represent their interests. Elena and I often shared a good laugh at how she had failed at retiring because her schedule was just as packed and busy as ever. It is evident to me that staying connected with Arizona's communities, and particularly with young leaders, is what kept her energized and full of life. Whenever Elena and I would catch up over dinner, she provided me with personal updates on her family, upcoming travel, and only sparingly dropping hints on what she was up to, which could range from presenting at economic development conferences, facilitating town hall discussions on sensitive topics throughout the state, or chairing board meetings.

I recently witnessed Elena conduct a half-day training on town hall meeting facilitation techniques to 20 visiting fellows from Southeast Asia who were part of a sponsored cross-cultural fellowship focused on civic engagement and community development. On that occasion, Elena was representing one of the many organizations where she volunteered her time. During the presentation, the executive director of the non-profit described the organization as a "multi-partisan" organization which facilitates training and community meetings to bring people together to solve the community's most sensitive and pressing issues (Elena, personal communication, March 7, 2023). The intent of the organization is to bring people together with intention, with the goal of arriving at solutions where many voices are included. Founded in 1962, the nonprofit promotes the values of education, connection, and consensus building - all buzzwords that I realized embodied Elena's approach toward community engagement and her own brand of activism.

Grounded in Small Town Principles

Elena was born and raised in Citrus Bay, California—which is a small, rural farming community east of Fresno—in the 1950s. She recounted to me an idyllic upbringing, taking baths in a metal basin outdoors under the shadow of a fig tree, and a large backyard to run around in with lots of grass and trees abound. Although Elena recalled her parents starting off with humble means, their home was not only a port of entry for other Filipinos migrating to the area, but was also an important portal where Filipino individuals in the area could socialize, meet, and enjoy seasonal celebrations. Elena shared:

> We pretty much knew all of the Filipino families and Filipinos in the community at the time. Not just in our community, but in a couple of other surrounding communities as well. My parents hosted all of the big celebrations from Christmas, New Year's, Easter.

> So even just random Sundays where people would come over, so it was very family oriented. My parents were very active in the Filipino community, they would host dances for the other communities to come over. (Interview Transcript 2, February 25, 2023, p. 2)

Despite being an only child, Elena was surrounded by community and an extended family composed of other Filipinos seeking a bit of home. Filipino families often served as sources of comfort and community to the *manongs*, which were Filipino men who came over as migrant workers but who were unable to bring over families; as a result, they lived solitary and transient lives, moving with the seasons wherever the work might be. By hosting other Filipino individuals in their home, and hosting parties and key holiday gatherings, her parents provided a much-needed social glue for the Filipino community. These subtle acts of community organizing and *bayanihan* (i.e., spirit of community) helped plant subtle seeds of influence toward her impact as a community leader today.

Although Filipino individuals remained a small minority in her rural community, she could not recall racial strife growing up. White and Hispanic families worked the fields, harvesting seasonal crops and working side by side. During the summers, she worked in fruit packing houses, tallying nectarines and plums, which was an important job because the workers got paid by the piece. Another summer, Elena recalled picking grapes with a friend and delicately laying them out in the sun to make raisins. She shared:

> My parents told me to go out and see what it was like. If you don't go to college, you get to do this! We were picking grapes out in the field early in the morning at dawn. You're covered up and it's hotter than heck, it's the Central Valley. It's almost like being in Arizona, maybe a little more humid. So, you're picking grapes, you're plucking, you have your little pruning shears, and you put the grapes in a bucket. In the meantime,

> you're also spreading out this specially treated paper, if you're not careful you could get paper cuts. You spread them out in the middle of the road between the grapevines and spread it out so the grapes could get dried to become raisins. This was paid by the piece. My friend Donna and I were not very fast [laughing]. It was nasty. It was dusty. It was dirty. There were spiders and it was just gross. We did that for maybe three different weeks in one summer. That was a hard lesson. But it was a lesson, nevertheless. And just kind of an appreciation for what fieldwork is like. (Interview Transcript 2, February 15, 2023, p. 4)

Some months she picked oranges and other times avocados, all of which gave her an understanding and respect for the hard work that agricultural workers and migrant farm workers had to endure to earn a living. She used the money earned from picking produce to buy herself nicer clothes. The clothes were not only a reward for hard work, but also a signal that she was already preparing for a life beyond Citrus Bay. From the moment she started her schooling, Elena was a precocious and gifted student. She loved school and found all her teachers supporting and caring. She was class valedictorian in middle school and maintained straight As. As a California Regent's scholar, Elena received a full scholarship to one of the regional state universities, where she recalled experiencing a cultural awakening.

Finding *Kapwa* Among the Redwoods

Situated on 2,000 acres on forested hilly terrain overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Elena had chosen to attend one of the regional state universities after a planned visit in high school. She fell in love with the campus and could tell that she would thrive on the smaller campus environment, which appeared warm and inviting, in stark contrast to the larger University of California (UC) campuses. Despite having a near perfect high school record, Elena still doubted whether she

would be admitted to the university. Imposter syndrome plagued her for the first time, and she experienced culture shock as she transitioned from being a top performing student in a small town to now participating in small classes filled with top students from throughout the state, who were most likely in the top 10% of their high school graduating classes. Elena shared, “From my perspective, they were all using bigger words than I did. I didn’t know if I was going to make it here. It was a very different educational experience” (Interview Transcript 2, February 15, 2023, p. 6).

The faculty encouraged debate and dialogue in class, which was new to Elena. She described the environment as the epicenter of “hippie-dom.” Faculty encouraged critical thinking skills with which to analyze the rapidly changing political landscape. Although she found it challenging to get acclimated in her freshman year, she got more involved in student activities, became a resident assistant, and found herself adjusting to the “inner circle of life” at the college. Elena joined a pan-Asian American student organization, and eventually met enough Filipino students to help establish the university’s first Filipino American student organization:

> While I was there, I actually met another Pinay, my friend Carmen, who’s still a friend now, although we don’t keep in touch as much as we used to. But finding another Filipino face—not that I was overly conscious of my ethnicity at that point in time—but to see somebody who looked like me on the campus was a relief really because I was realizing, not only have I been thrown into an environment that’s totally foreign, but I don’t even see anybody who looked like me. (Interview Transcript 2, February 15, 2023, p. 7)

Like other participants in this study, Elena saw her collegiate experience as a pivotal junction in her awareness of her Pinay identity, and her acknowledgement of how it felt to feel a sense of

kinship with other Filipino/a individuals as she navigated college life. The sense of relief that she felt was a poignant reminder of the importance of *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness), especially because Elena was raised in a community where the sense of *kapwa* was strong and regularly cultivated by her parents.

Playing Her Part in Filipino/a American History

As part of her major in community studies, Elena was required to complete a 6-month field study. Upon the suggestion of one of her fellow Filipino student organizers, she learned about a community organization called Filipino Community Youth Club (FCYC) based out of Seattle, Washington. FCYC, as its namesake implies, worked with Filipino youth in a highly urbanized, low-income section of Seattle's central business district. Their work included immigration law, youth employment, and cultural activities. FCYC was best known for their award-winning drill team, which showcased Filipino/a American students in middle and high school, playing tribal drum music and performing highly choreographed traditional Filipino dance numbers.

Elena began working with FCYC in 1975, during a time when the Black Power and Chicano movements, among others, were spurring minoritized groups to learn more about their culture and history, and to organize against systemic oppression and discrimination. Asian Americans, and Filipino/a Americans specifically, experienced similar cultural awakenings at this time, and Elena had a front seat to witness the organization of these movements during her time with FCYC. During her time in Seattle, Elena worked with Fred Cordova, or Uncle Fred, who was one of the first community organizers to see the value and urgency in archiving Filipino/a American history and retelling the narrative from the Filipino/a American perspective. She shared:

> He rolled out the very first Filipino American history class at the University of Washington, and I was his teaching assistant for that class. It was a great experience because not only was I helping Uncle Fred, I was learning as well. That was very enlightening for me, and to dig in a little deeper into your own cultural roots here in the United States, and understanding the different waves of Filipino American immigration, and what all the different waves experienced through immigrating from one country to another. You had people starting to capture all of this, whether it was formal documentation of experiences, or taking creative approaches to capturing the story in different art forms, whether it was poetry, or music, or plays. All of this stuff was just emerging in the 70s, and it was very energizing to be a part of that, and you're learning from that. You also knew that you had a role to play to convey information to others. (Interview Transcript 2, February 20, 2023, p. 3)

Uncle Fred and his wife, Dorothy Cordova, Elena went on to create a national Filipino American historical organization, which had over 40 chapters throughout the United States at the time of the study. Elena helped found and organize the Arizona chapter of the organization in 2017 and continued working as the chapter chair and president. The group focuses on collecting artifacts and oral histories on Filipino individuals in Arizona, starting with those who settled in the territory as early as the 1920s, to Mexican/Filipino (i.e., Mexi-pino) families and their origins in South Phoenix, and contemporary stories of the growing Filipino American community throughout the state.

Giving Voice to Underserved Communities

John F. Kennedy's call to service stood out to Elena as a young child and served as inspiration to the servant leadership ethos that guided her leadership style. Elena described:

> His words, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country," resonated in my head and I was a kid still. He started the Peace Corps and all of that kind of effort for the U.S. to lend a hand to others in the global sense. And so, that was kind of the sentiment grow up. (Interview Transcript 1, February 3, 2023, p. 6)

Elena recounted how fortunate she was to receive full scholarships to two world-class universities in California. She felt a deep sense of obligation to give back to the community because the state (i.e., state universities, as recipients of taxpayer dollars) invested in her education and her future potential. She shared:

> If I look at that and think about [California], and how others invested in my education, as a daughter of immigrants, was able to attend a world class university. I was blessed to have that opportunity because other people were willing to invest. I think that still motivates me to do all the other things that I do even today . . . those are the kinds of things that kind of converged for me. It was my environment, it was family, it was being at the right place at the right time in terms of what got me through higher ed at world class institutions. It touches on everything else that I've been doing. It's community development, education, but it's also the civic engagement piece that I'm involved with as well, in having a voice in determining futures for communities. (Interview Transcript 1, February 3, 2023, p. 6)

Elena talked with tenderness about her immigrant parents. The rural community clearly anchored much of her life's work and subsequent success by her desire to develop community capacity with an emphasis on small, tight-knit communities—like the Citrus Bay of her childhood. At the time of the study, she and her husband, Gerald, continued to reside in a rural community in Pinal County, about 40 miles south of Phoenix. Even though her community and

nonprofit work kept her schedule full in central Phoenix most of the week, she remained an influential figure in her community, where she chaired the governing boards at the rural community college, and several economic development interest groups in Pinal County.

Elena embodied the spirit of *bayanihan*, translated from Tagalog as the *spirit of community.* She was selfless in giving herself and her influence as a mentor, facilitator, and relationship builder. She stated:

> Do I feel that I have an impact? Yeah. I mean, it's subtle sometimes . . . just being present in who I am, is being a little bit of an activist. Where I currently choose to get involved is mostly making sure other people feel like they have a voice, but also just my being involved matters. . . . All the organizations that I'm affiliated with has some component of touching community. That's another big thing, I gotta have that in my life, that gives me energy. If you can see and feel how a community shifts or changes, or people are moving in a positive way in their abilities to be successful, you know it's all good. (Interview Transcript 1, February 3, 2023, p. 7)

Conclusion

As I concluded the interviews during the data collection period, I was struck by just how much of myself I recognized within each portrait. When Monica was recalling her feelings of feeling like an *Oreo cookie*, I felt that betrayal of self, growing up as a young Pinay—the angst of not feeling quite Filipino enough, not knowing enough about my own heritage and my people. When Mikaela talked about how she denigrated other Filipino/a American youth when she first moved back to the United States, after having lived on military bases abroad for several years, I felt that too, with the guilt that came alongside it. I had no name for the vestiges of colonial mentality, although I know now that is what I was manifesting toward my fellow Filipino/as.

When each Pinay described their experiences at large, public institutions of higher education—feeling lost or untethered because they struggled to find their communities and could not find students, staff, or faculty who looked like them—I remembered how small, voiceless, and unseen I felt as an undergraduate student.

Despite these experiences of otherness, or unrootedness, each Pinay in this study continued to demonstrate resilience in spirit and had carved out success on their terms. Their motivation to speak out for others, and to work in education as a means of building human capacity in communities of color and other underserved areas, are examples of how marginalization ignited their activism. As Pinays negotiate their roles in postcolonial circumstances, we witness subtle acts of subversive behavior, radical acts of self-care or an outright rejection of the labels, or prescribed pathways, laid out before us. To witness Pinays arrive at a place of acceptance of their identities, and finding empowerment a result, is purgative and energizing. In the next chapter, I walk through several prevalent themes gleaned from the data, and implications for research to build upon these findings.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Telling the stories of Pinays brings their realities out from the liminal space and into the light, bringing our stories as Filipino/a Americans in the collective diasporic community as examples of how we navigate places where we remain invisible and minoritized, such as higher education. The higher education context is significant because, historically, education has been used as a "colonial tool" of empire in the colonization of the Philippines to aid in replacing native language, culture, and religion. Filipino/as throughout the diaspora suffer from the effects of cultural amnesia, or a lack of knowing Filipino history and culture, from which to draw ethnic pride, self-esteem (Constantino, 1970, pg. 22). Following in the steps of a growing body of decolonizing Filipino/American research, this study adds to the literature by highlighting the experiences of Pinay activist–practitioners working in higher education, by providing examples of *resistant socialities* where participants defined success on their terms and demonstrated resilience and creativity while working in institutions that have historically marginalized us. Because the study visited the experiences of Pinays living and working in Arizona, where the Filipino/a American population has been further marginalized and decentralized, an additional layer of liminalism, invisibility, in a region with less density of Filipino/a Americans is also of note. Activism may look less radical in these socialities but are no less effective; indeed, "the first acts of resistance against the powers of oppression involve extending kindness, justice, and empathy" (Hune et al., 2013, p. 425) to students and the communities we represent and serve.

In this final chapter, I examine Pinay participants' responses against my inquiry about how their lived experiences served as the impetus toward their work in higher education in service to minoritized student populations. Further into the analysis, I also parcel out themes demonstrating how Pinays drew social capital from families, colleagues, and their communities

of practice, to then implement change—most of which involved expanding educational opportunities and providing support to minoritized student populations. These *her*stories of practice offer alternative leadership paradigms, nonlinear and nonhierarchical in some cases, and illuminate the ways that modern babaylan walk among us, as "wisdom-keepers," healers, and "provide stability to the community's social structure" (Strobel, 2010, p. 1).

Findings

Most of the Pinays in this study were already individuals known to me through my personal network, with the exception of Allison. Participants proceeded with the study knowing a good deal about me, my background, my work, and my social network; as a result, I was a known entity who had been vetted to some extent. Therefore, I was able to gather rich data and descriptions from the participants based on a measure of trust. They revealed parts of their history that might have otherwise remained concealed, and I felt a responsibility to do their stories justice. I consider these Pinays as part of a collective sisterhood, similar to how Tintiangco-Cubales (2021) described her motivation as she developed *Pinayism*, while in search of "radical Pinay sisterhood" (para. 1). I support them at community events for causes that are of personal significance to them, and whenever possible, I extend my network to them by introducing them to students, or other colleagues or connections who might be mutually beneficial for their personal or professional pursuits.

While proposing the parameters of this study, I held the assumptions that I shared much in common with the participants' personal stories and journeys. Although I uncovered some stark differences, the process of data collection validated much of my own experience as Pinay and helped me find the words to name much of the sense of otherness I have experienced in my entire life. Strobel beautifully described this process of praxis as "finding soul-mates for the

Journey" (Strobel, 2015, p. 5), an illustration which I find fitting as I embarked on my own evolution toward a decolonized self through this research.

"Re-membering" Pinay Identity

I reference Leny Strobel's works heavily as a source of inspiration and guidance, particularly *Coming Full Circle* (2005) and *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous* (2010). Filled with imaginative description, the work describing her journey toward decolonization is filled with vivid analogies referencing cyclical imagery and is steeped in mysticism and folklore. The apt description of a journey, or process, aligns with Nadal's (2004) Pilipino American identity development (PAID) model. Both frameworks describe a healing, cathartic process that cannot be rushed, predicted, or timed. And the extent to which each Pinay embraces the process will differ. There is no wrong or right way to embark on this journey of praxis. I shine light on these Pinay's stories to validate and make space for their lived experiences, to honor the struggles their families endured before them, and to bring Pinay stories out from liminality.

The Family Unit as Cultural Portal

For Pinays, the seeds for cultural knowing and identity begin at home, reinforced by our parents and an extended, multigenerational familial unit that includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins—and even, fictive kin associations. When this fount of cultural knowledge becomes tainted, dimmed, or interrupted entirely, there is a piece of our identity that becomes inextricably lost.

Language is often the first component of cultural knowing that Pinays are asked to forget. Mikaela recalled distinctly when her teachers at a Department of Defense school in Germany, where her family was based, told her parents the best thing they could do to ensure her success

was to stop speaking to her in their native Filipino dialect, and opt for English only. In fact, for many Filipino/a Americans, this strategy of English only at home by Filipino parents was thought to secure economic and educational success (Strobel, 2015). Very few second-generation Filipino/a Americans have the bilingual capacity to converse with their parents in their native dialect, be it Tagalog, Visayan, or Ilocano. Like myself, I can comprehend what is being said, but my brain and my tongue feel disconnected when asked to put together a Tagalog sentence. I shared a similar experience with Elena,while it was never explicitly stated that my parents wanted me to speak to them only in English, they just never expected me to speak to them in Tagalog at home. It was Tagalog or Taglish (i.e., a combination of Tagalog and English) when they spoke to me, and a one-way English conversation towards them in return. Allison, as the youngest Pinay included in my study, was raised in a household where her grandparents helped raise and educate her. She grew up acting as the family translator for extended family members who were newly arrived from the Philippines.

Family units, and fictive kinship ties with family friends and community members, helped to assert the sense of Filipino community for Elena, who was raised around a Filipino/a American community. Elena recalls how even as an only child, with her parents in the rural town of Citrus Bay, she was always surrounded by the Filipino community; her parents would regularly host meals for other families, holiday celebrations, and dances at their home. Although she did not retain the ability to speak in Tagalog, her strong sense of *bayanihan* (i.e., sense of community) and the importance of *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness) were firmly established and modeled by her parents because of their leadership roles in a small town. At the time of the study, Elena was still a champion for rural communities in Arizona and had extended her reach

and influence to working with nonpartisan organizations in the state that focus on improving educational access and expanding economic opportunities for underserved communities.

Monica, on the other hand, who had the least exposure to her Filipino identity as a mestiza of Latina/Filipina descent, continued to seek and mend her Pinay identity. Monica's maternal grandfather was Filipino, and tales about him came alive for her through her aunts' storytelling. He died when her mother was only 14 years old, so her own mother's connection with Filipino identity was interrupted and fragmented, and because she lacked this knowledge of her cultural and ethnic identity, she never imparted those lessons to Monica to understand and make sense of who she was. Monica would later share with me that she grew up in a troubled household, where she experienced abuse and lived estranged from her mother for extended periods of time. It was only when she was sent to live with her grandmother did she come to know more of her Latina identity, but her Pinay self remained unexplored. In a continued search for *kapwa* and an understanding of her ethnic identity, Monica told me she recently took an Ancestry DNA test, which confirmed she was 27% Filipino, 33% Mexican, and 33% Spanish. Her marriage to Paulo, a Filipino who immigrated to the United States as a teenager, also helped her to bridge her knowing to that part of her identity. She hinted that her choice in a life partner was partially influenced by knowing that her aunts would immediately approve and love him because of his Filipino heritage. Although these connections were not available to her as a young girl growing up in South Phoenix, I marvel at the self-assured woman I know now, and her ability to inspire students to persist in finishing their education.

Marginalized on Campus

One of my chief presuppositions before starting data collection included an assumption that participants experienced early marginalization throughout their educational experiences, and

the lack of support and representation from AAPI or Filipino faculty and staff members left participants feeling invisible and alone. I hypothesized feelings of otherness perpetuated by lack of diverse representation on campus would be the impetus for participants to help fill that gap for future minoritized student groups. This feeling of otherness was confirmed by all participants, with specific and vivid recollections of how they experienced otherness. Mikaela grew up in an ethnically diverse environment as a military child, growing up on military bases and attending schools with a heavy representation of military dependents, who mirrored the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the U.S. military. It was not until she attended a large university in Florida as an undergraduate student did she feel the effects of being in a less diverse environment. She mentioned feeling no sense of belonging and described the campus as cold and unwelcoming.

Elena was, for the most part, effusive in her description of schooling throughout her elementary and high school years and recalled her undergraduate years wistfully as a halcyon period of freedom and self-discovery. I was struck by how it sounded almost too good to be true; she found all her teachers and counselors supportive and nurturing and mentioned no examples of racism against her while at school. However, she was accustomed to overachieving academically, and was extremely driven to succeed. For as long as I have known Elena, I have known her to have an optimistic disposition, and she deftly eliminated awkwardness or unpleasantness in conversations, no matter how difficult. This was a skill that made her a renowned expert in relationship management and diplomacy, which explains why she was highly sought after to chair boards throughout the community. I say all this to theorize that Elena probably did experience instances of racism growing up in rural California, but she deliberately minimized those in her memory as having little impact.

As Elena completed her undergraduate studies, she recounted to me the first time she met another Pinay on campus, who was her good friend, Carmen. The way she described their first meeting struck me, because I could sense the relief, she felt knowing she was no longer alone. Allison shared two separate experiences where she distinctly remembered when she first had a Filipino friend in elementary school, and then the first time she met a Filipino student while at college. Allison said, "I'm realizing that I missed this part of myself . . . I didn't realize how much I miss that sense of connection" (Interview Transcript 2, February 17, 2023, p. 7).

Monica talked about how she was targeted and roughed up in high school by teachers. She acted out because she did not feel welcomed; she described school as "cold" and "hostile" (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, p. 8). The transformation she experienced took place at community college, when she gravitated toward three Latino faculty members. Seeing faculty who looked like her and shared her experiences as a Latino, she felt seen and acknowledged for the first time, and knew she wanted to impact students in the same way they had impacted her.

These recollections made it clear that students of color can feel othered and feel unwelcome when there is a lack of representation of faculty and staff of color on college and university campuses (Maramba, 2008). They also remember vividly when they find pockets of community on campus that can help reinforce feelings of belonging. These findings make it clear the importance of cultivating recruitment and retention strategies for faculty and staff of color is paramount to supporting a diverse student population and ensuring their retention and success.

Creating Bayanihan

Participants in this study found ways to create community as a strategy of resilience, despite living and working in a region where finding pockets of Filipino/a American community can be notoriously difficult. Each Pinay has an example of how she cultivated *kapwa*, and

bayanihan by nurturing community wherever she found herself. This was the essence of Pinay leadership, of babaylan walking among us, acting as steward to our collective well-being and understanding the power of community.

Mikaela actively created community among her staff and student workers at the veterans' center. She was seen not just as a supervisor or coworker, but also as a mother figure. Her social media feed was filled with her cheering others on, celebrating their wins and accomplishments, truly wanting to see those around her be the best versions of themselves. Her social circle was diverse and seemingly devoid of Filipinos despite being extremely proud of being a Pinay. She was vocal and unapologetic about her efforts to support causes to combat racial injustice, oppression in its varied forms, misogyny, and hate. She could be found collecting essential supplies to deliver to Native American communities during the COVID-19 global pandemic, marching in protests against AAPI Hate, the repeal of Roe v. Wade, and participating in marches for Black Lives Matter.

Monica found her community in church, where she leveraged her leadership skills to help others in need through church projects and programming. She led orientations for new members, bible studies, and conferences. She admitted to me it was a little-known detail of her life that she purposely kept quiet, but it was clear her connection with a community of faith had served as a key strategy for self-care and reflection, especially during periods of tragedy and adversity. Monica referred to her spiritual practice as "walking victoriously with the Lord" (Interview Transcript 2, February 1, 2023, p. 7) as the source of inspiration and energy from which to ground everything she did, leading from a place of compassion with her students and their pathways to success.

Allison led a mentorship program for an AAPI networking group in the Phoenix area, which was a role where she found familiarity and comfort, harkening back to her days as a program manager working with AAPI students on campus. Although no longer based on a bustling college campus, she continued to champion initiatives to serve first-generation, minoritized student populations and focused on support efforts for adult learners.

Elena had the longest career of community-oriented work of all the Pinays in this study. She led from a place of empathy and consensus building, knowing that solutions to society's most pressing issues required greater collective buy in if it was to be sustainable against political fluctuations between parties. Elena was most impassioned about capacity building in rural communities through economic development and increasing educational access to underserved communities. She traveled throughout the region, speaking at conferences, facilitating discussions, and representing nonpartisan groups in support of increasing educational access. Although her work was not particularly focused on AAPI student populations, she had expanded her focus to economic empowerment of students and a wider community.

Resistant Socialites: Creating Our Own Paths of Leadership and Influence

Lastly, I wanted to celebrate the creative ways the Pinay participants resisted traditional hierarchical pathways toward career success, created their own pathways of success, or chose to redefine success on their terms.

Mikaela came so close to getting the executive director position, thanks to the success she experienced while serving as interim executive director during the COVID-19 global pandemic shutdowns. Mikaela was uninterested in the exact title she held; she was more interested in the impact she will have for future student veterans in the ways of fundraising for new scholarships

or industry partnerships that will lead to high-wage jobs. Mikaela quipped, “I want to be the director of doing things and moving things” (Interview Transcript 2, February 22, 2023, p. 8).

Once the university was in a position to reinstate the candidate search, the hiring committee decided to appoint a colleague of Mikaela’s to the role instead. In the retelling of the experience, Mikaela was gracious even as she was overlooked and passed over. Undeterred, she said, “I am on my own path” (Interview Transcript 2, February 22, 2023, p. 7). She chose to flip the perception of her identity as a deficiency (i.e., being Brown, an immigrant, a veteran, and a woman) and decided to leverage her identity as a position of power and being armed with the knowledge of all those intersectionalities.

Monica decided that landing an advising position at the community college would be her last staff position and would then pursue adjunct faculty teaching online as her retirement plan, enabling her to travel the world. This is another example of a Pinay refuting the need to climb a career ladder to define happiness, success, or even as a measurement of how to impact the most students.

Allison opted out of the traditional student service professional career path earlier on in her career, primarily due to burnout and a disillusionment with academic bureaucracy. Since relocating back to Arizona, she had decided not to pursue another campus-based position working directly with students, partly out of the need for work–life balance and self-care, but also as a protest to the dysfunction she witnessed at her last campus-based position, where she found lack of investment in diversity and inclusion initiatives. She continued to debate whether she could be fulfilled continuing to work in higher education and had found alternate ways to connect with the AAPI community, and supporting diversity and inclusion priorities at the nonprofit, community organizational level.

Elena retired from a successful career as head of a community development division where she supervised a cadre of community managers overseeing Arizona. She opted for early retirement to focus on passion projects in K–16 education and other economic development projects. She continued to teach and mentor young leaders and students several times a year as a way to develop future leaders in the community. She was selfless with her time and seemingly tireless in her work, drawing energy from the young people whom she inspires.

The counter narratives of these stories represents an alternate explanation as to why more AAPI, and more specifically Filipino/a Americans, are underrepresented in corporate and academic senior leadership positions. Given the intrinsic nature of Pinays to want to cultivate *kapwa* (i.e., interconnectedness) and *bayanihan* (i.e., sense of community) in their work, the Pinay narratives in this study act as examples of consensus and community-oriented leadership paradigms. These examples of leadership are both entrepreneurial and anti capitalist at the same time, refuting the hierarchy of the educational apparatus, measured only by whom they can touch and inspire.

The Rationale for Portraiture

Developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), portraiture was an ideal method to analyze the lived experiences of Pinay participants because it allowed me to acknowledge and center my role as portraitist and as a fellow Pinay. In portraiture, the role of the researcher is most evident and the most visible than in any other research method; informed by similar experiences as a Pinay working in higher education, I became “an instrument of inquiry” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13) throughout this process as I compared their experiences to my own. Participants were encouraged to walk me through their formative

educational experiences and how those shaped their lives, career paths, and how they were ultimately inspired to work in service of minoritized student populations.

Due to the relatively condensed data collection period of 2 months, it was important that rapport and trust be established quickly so participants felt comfortable sharing detailed personal experiences. It was possible for me to establish the necessary rapport needed since all the participants either knew me, or knew of me, based on our mutual networks and membership in the local Asian American/Filipino communities in the Phoenix market. For other studies utilizing portraiture, a longer data collection period would allow for the necessary rapport building and trust should the sample participant pool include subjects with no prior connection to the researcher(s). Qualitative research valorizes a distanced approach to relationship development between researcher and subject during data collection to ensure for validity and pragmatism; however, in portraiture, the method requires an active negotiation of intimacy and a reciprocity between researcher and participant on an ongoing basis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I was aware of the responsibility I had toward participants; passages about their past, once narrated to me, could prompt deep reflection, regret, or perhaps even cause the participant to relive trauma. I took care to assess the comfort level of participants with the questions and the direction of the discussion, and further reinforced psychological safety through member checking the data. Member checking reaffirmed trust in me, and participants could trust that I was representing their stories accurately, and not appropriating their words toward incorrect assumptions about their memories and life histories.

Because the participants recognized me as a co-ethnic, fellow Pinay, there was a tacit understanding between us that I was revealing their stories from an altruistic place, what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) referred to as “empathetic regard” (p. 146). Coming to this

understanding with the participants was aided by the fact that I come *from* the Filipino/a American community and am a known entity in the Phoenix metropolitan circle of AAPI. However, a researcher not of the community may require more time to develop reciprocal relationships to get participants to reveal equally rich data or stories or may not be able to get participants to reveal much more than surface-level details. Thus, portraiture remains true to its reputation as a decolonial research method because it validates and empowers participants' stories and presents research as democratic knowledge sharing (Smith, 1999).

Implications for Future Research

Through Pinay narratives, it became clear that identity-based student clubs and student cultural centers can play a key role as cultural portals and helped participants to connect to their Filipino/a American identity while in college. As traditional campus enrollment continues to decrease in favor of hybrid learning options to cater to adult learners and working professionals, I wondered how diversity and inclusion interventions such as ethnic studies programs, student cultural centers, and identity-based student clubs transformed to meet the needs of minoritized student groups. With more adult learners, more students learning online, and fewer students coming to campus, I wondered how BIPOC (i.e., Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and LGBTQIA+ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual) students could continue to feel welcomed and seen, and feel a sense of belonging to the institution and to learning communities.

Implications for Practice in Higher Education

Despite being one of the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States, AAPI's remain largely under-researched as a population, in the context of higher education. The dearth of research is largely due to the negative and incorrect stereotypes of the model minority

myth, where administrators and researchers alike make false assumptions that all AAPI students have access to higher education and have unilaterally high levels of academic achievement. (Museus & Maramba, 2013). There is a continued need to pursue research on the varied ethnic groups within the AAPI category to disaggregate data on AAPI students, faculty, and administrators and how they experience higher education or the academy. By understanding the varied experiences of AAPI groups, student affairs staff and administrators can be better equipped to create culturally-sensitive interventions or support systems to serve students.

Filipino/a American students may experience negative psychological effects because of a push and pull "between two systems, the old and the new" (Wolf, 1997, p. 475), caught in between two cultures. Training for student affairs professionals on the diverse experiences of the AAPI group, could include an understanding of the racialized and colonial histories of Filipino/a Americans, and what type of programming or interventions could be applicable towards diminished self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and familial pressures. Pinays experience distress as a result of familial pressures and the pressure to excel academically. Wolf (1997) and Le Espiritu (2003) assert that Pinay students tend to experience higher rates of depression and distress as a result of embattled assimilation. Specific interventions for other AAPI groups based on an understanding of migration stories and nuanced challenges within each community is necessary to ensure that all ethnic groups have their needs met as distinctly unique communities.

Finally, there are implications to recruit and retain Pinay student affairs practitioners, and this can be generalized for student affairs practitioners from other minoritized groups. Based on the findings of this study, while Pinays find themselves in student-facing roles inspired by formerly being marginalized in previous educational experiences, their desire to give back in service of students can lead to high rates of burnout. Study participants experienced some

measure of burnout or disenfranchisement in their positions as student affairs professionals. Not only does it remain important that colleges and universities ensure a diverse pipeline of candidates continue to serve in these positions, but the retention strategies employed by colleges and universities must also be trauma informed and include culturally sensitive frameworks to minimize burnout and employee turnover. Practitioner-oriented research is needed to inform hiring practices and human resource policies. Attrition for early career student affairs professionals is notoriously high (50-60%), adversely impacted by long hours and low pay (Marshall et al., 2016). A focus on work-life balance, and investment on employee-centric human resource policies, such as fair pay policies, mentorship programs, would help ensure that student affairs professionals from minoritized groups feel valued and incentivized to stay in their positions.

Conclusion

I pursued this research as a search for self and as a way of making sense of how I ended up in predominantly white institutions of higher education in the Sonoran desert. I was resolved to confirm that I was not alone, to bring my fellow Pinays out from liminality, and to show the world our stories as relevant descriptions of Filipino diaspora, U.S. history, and feminist testimony. I recounted the lived experiences of Pinays as they find themselves in decentralized pockets of diaspora, such as Arizona, because it showcased how Pinays have continued to cultivate *kapwa* in meaningful ways wherever they find themselves. I appropriated the image of babaylan to describe my participants as a re-imagining of an indigenous leadership archetype—babaylan are fluid, adaptable, and represent a source of healing in communities. The idea of babaylan is represented in how Pinays practice a version of activism and leadership, a celebration and affirmation that "joy, support, and creativity are *our* tools" from which to resist

the powers of oppression" (Valderde & Dariotis, 2020, p. 424). The care and emotional labor they expend in support of students can be seen as radical, resistant, and necessary. May this research inspire others throughout the Filipino/a diaspora to invoke inner babaylan to guide our activist-oriented work in building community and human capacity.

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APPENDIX A:

RECRUITING MATERIALS (SAMPLE EMAIL)

Hello Michelle,

I trust that this email finds you well. I am a doctoral candidate in my 3rd year at Northern Arizona University, Doctor of Education - Educational Leadership program, and seeking study participants for my research on Pinay activist–practitioners working in higher education here in Arizona. Tentatively, my dissertation title is "Modern Babaylan Embodied: Portraits of Pinay Activist–Practitioners in Higher Education."

I am reaching out to critically engaged Pinays working with student populations to better understand how they ground their practice, informed by their intersectional realities considering gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexual identity.

I am seeking four participants for this study, where I will employ the methodology of portraiture. Data collection will take place during the Spring 2023 semester. Should you agree to participate in this study, this would entail a short series of semistructured interviews over a 2- to 3-month period. Each interview should take about an hour to an hour and half. I would ask you a series of questions to prompt responses regarding the following topics (you and your family's immigration story, formative educational experiences, community engagement, career path and future goals). I would also ask to observe you teaching and/or working with the students you serve, as I am particularly interested in how you impact minoritized student groups, including students of color. I will also ask to speak to a few students at your recommendation and approval with a questionnaire to determine how you impact their collegiate experience and inspire them towards service and activism.

If you are available to meet to discuss my study, I can be available to meet in-person at a location and time which works best for your schedule, alternatively we can also meet via Zoom.

Kindly reply directly to this email to indicate whether you have the interest, and the availability, to participate in my dissertation research. You can reach me directly on my mobile number at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you in advance for considering my request - I look forward to hearing from you, and hopefully working together to highlight stories of Pinays in higher education.

Sincerely,

MaryAnne Riodique
Doctoral Student
Department of Educational Leadership | College of Education
Northern Arizona University
XXXXX@XXXXX.edu | (XXX) XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX B:

PHONE SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Candidates interested in participating in the study will receive a preliminary phone call from the researcher. The purpose of this call is to (a) Provide a background and the intent behind the study, (b) provide an opportunity for the researcher to pre-qualify the candidate to determine they meet all the criteria for the study, and (c) provide the candidate an opportunity to ask additional questions before confirming their participation.

This preliminary phone call should last approximately 15–20 minutes.

1. Full name
2. Job title
3. Employer
4. Do you identify as a Filipino-American woman (Pinay)?
5. Describe your role within your organization.
    a. To what extent do you work with minoritized student groups/students of color?
6. How do you engage with the community outside of the workplace?
    a. What type of organizations or causes do you work/volunteer with?

In this study, I seek to learn about the ways Pinays in higher education ground their practice from their ethnic identity and roles as activist-practitioners. I define activist-practitioner as someone who grounds their work with a vested interest in human rights, social change, and collective societal well-being. In your own words, please describe how you define your work and how you practice within that context.

APPENDIX C:

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Modern Babaylan Embodied:
Portraits of Pinay Activist–Practitioners in Higher Education

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to understand how Filipina American (Pinay) activist–practitioners working in higher ed, draw from their lived experiences and identities to inspire change with minority student groups that they serve.

The researcher, MaryAnne Riodique, is a doctoral student at Northern Arizona University conducting research for a Doctor in Education.

You are being asked to participate in this study because:

- You identify as a (Pinay) Filipina American.
- You work in a student-facing role at an institution of higher education in the state of Arizona, in the United States.
- You are driven to serve students from a social justice lens and embrace your role as both activist and advocate for human rights and collective community well-being.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be interviewed for 30 to 90 minutes at a time, over the course of approximately 4 months (December 2022–March 2023).
- The interviews will take place with a preference for in-person format, and will take place at a time and (quiet) location most convenient for you.
- Accommodations to conduct interviews via Zoom will be available. Zoom interviews will be recorded.
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers via email.
- The researcher will observe you at 1–3 events where you are actively engaged in the community or working with student groups. These field observations will not be recorded, but the researcher will keep field notes and reflective memos to analyze and process the data.
- All interviews will be recorded via digital media and transcribed. You will be provided a chance to review transcriptions or recordings for accuracy prior to the researcher's submission of the dissertation

C. RISKS

There is a risk of loss of privacy, as your true name, job title, and work affiliation will be used in any published reports of this oral history project. There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of interview questions regarding your relationship to others or your work: you may answer only those questions you choose to answer, and can stop participation in the research at any time.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no guarantee of confidentiality.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefits to participants in this study.

F. COSTS
The only cost associated with participation of this study would include the cost of transportation to interview meeting times of your choosing.

G. COMPENSATION
As part of your voluntary participation, the researcher will pay for meals, snacks, or drinks at the time of interviews, as appropriate.

If the meeting place requires payment of parking fees, the researcher will compensate the participant for those fees based on location and interview duration.

H. ALTERNATIVES
The alternative is not to participate in this research study.

I. QUESTIONS
You have spoken with MaryAnne Riodique about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at XXXXX@XXXXX.edu or phone, (XXX) XXX-XXXX. You may also contact the researcher's dissertation committee chair: Dr. Frances Riemer XXXXX@XXXXX.edu or (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

J. CONSENT
You agree that you meet the criteria listed in Section A of this consent form. You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at Northern Arizona University.

Signature _____ Date: _____
Research Participant
Signature _____ Date: _____
Researcher

APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Occupation

- Please describe your role within your organization.
- What are your areas of responsibility?
- How long have you been working with this organization?. In higher education?
- Please describe your career path and what led you to work in higher education.
- What makes your work meaningful?
- What level of engagement/interaction do you have with students from minoritized student groups/students of color?
- How would you describe your relationship with these student populations?
- Describe the ways your role serves as a type of activism?
- How do you elicit or inspire your students towards service and/or activism?

Identity

- Can you describe/locate your Filipino American identity?
- How did you and/or your family emigrate to the U.S. (When/How?)
- Where does the majority of your family reside?
- What formative memories stand out to you as an immigrant, or child/grandchild of Filipino immigrants that help to inform your work today?
- What does your Filipina American ethnic identity mean to you?
- How does this help shape and/or inform your philosophy when working with student groups or your community?
- How do you remain connected to your Filipino identity?
- What activities do you engage in to replenish your connection with your Filipino identity?
- What types of community organizations are you currently engaged with/working with?
- Please describe the organizations which you are most engaged with, and describe why those organizations are significant to you?

Significance of Experiences

- Can you tell me how transformative experiences in your life (through childhood/or educational experiences) have shaped or informed your work with students?
- What are some challenges you face as a woman of color/Pinay
- Please describe your professional or life goals?