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# Embodying the Oppressed and the Oppressor: Critical Mixed Race Studies for Liberation and Social Justice Education

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University of San Francisco

**Embodying the Oppressed and the Oppressor:  
Critical Mixed Race Studies for Liberation and Social Justice Education**

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

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

By  
Gwendlyn Snider

April 2017

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

Approved:

Monisha Bajaj

April 17, 2017

Instructor/Chairperson

Date

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## ABSTRACT

This study will focus on the educational and social experiences of mixed race Filipinx PEP (Pin@y Educational Partnerships) instructors in the San Francisco/Bay Area and the connection of these various, lived experiences to their teaching pedagogy and praxis in Ethnic Studies curriculum. The main purpose of this research is to create additional evidence for the need of critical mixed race studies and acknowledgement of mixed race students' unique experiences to be valued and included in Ethnic Studies curriculum. In addition, the research will also serve as reaffirmation of not only the efficacy of Ethnic Studies curriculum but also the need for Ethnic Studies at a national and global level for every student regardless of race or cultural background. This research will also examine the ways in which knowing ourselves in connection to our personal histories, ethnicities, and traditions can not only create a stronger sense of identity but also provide the transformation needed for social justice education and activism. When an individual is able to self-actualize and evolve through education, decolonization, and identity formation, they are potentially in a space where they can utilize this knowledge through education and social justice initiatives to teach youth along with connecting and contributing to their local communities.

By conducting detailed qualitative interviews with mixed race PEP teachers, I aim to further reconcile what it means to be a mixed race Filipinx individual specifically teaching Filipinx history and culture in connection to the larger conceptualization of mixed race identity being integrated into Ethnic Studies curriculum. Through the various experiences of PEP instructors, what does it mean to be a mixed race PEP teacher, teaching Filipinx history while grappling with their own identify formation, and how does that play a role into how they teach? Because of the complex nature of mixed race individual experiences, research suggests that mixed race experiences are not yet fully captured by the existing critical theories because a majority of these theories cater to monoracial identities and realities. This study aims to disrupt and dispel stereotypical notions of race, recognize the lived experiences of mixed race individuals, and push forward Ethnic Studies curriculum for all students at all levels.



## PROLOGUE

In class, I was carefully practicing how to fill in the bubbles on scantrons. It was my first standardized test, and I was either 7 or 8 years old at my elementary school in San Diego, California. We filled out our name, grade, and birthday. We got to the gender section. I bubbled in “female.” Next, we came to a section titled “race.” There were a variety of different categories, and only one choice could be made. I remember looking around the room to see what my peers were doing. My fellow classmates had their heads down, fastidiously bubbling as instructed, and waiting for the next set of instructions. I felt stuck. I could only pick one? I saw the “White” category and thought of my dad, but then I thought of my mom. Everyone said that I was my mother’s daughter, her spitting image, which was something that I always took great pride in. I knew that my mom was from the Philippines, but there was no box for that. There was, however, a box for “Asian-American.” Was my mother Asian American? I felt confused. I decided to skip that section and waited until the end of the test to ask my teacher. I explained the situation, and asked her what to do. Could I bubble in two choices for the race section? What did Asian American mean? Did that include Filipinos? My teacher suggested that I ask my parents, and I could fill out that section the next day.

I walked home in the baking San Diego heat. The sun shone high and starkly white in the sky. My skin gleamed golden brown as it always did during the summer. When I arrived home, my mom was waiting with snacks. “How was school?” I told her about the test and asked her about the race section. “Of course, you choose White,” was her quick response. There was no hesitation. “You’re an American. You’re not Asian. What’s wrong with you?” She was clearly agitated that I even asked. I agreed with her, but I felt even more confused. So, I’m White? I went into the bathroom, closed the door, and looked in the mirror. My eyes were brown like my

mother's. My dad's eyes were a pale, blue-gray. My hair was sleek, long, and a very dark brown. The thing that I remember most vividly was my skin. Golden brown. Kissed by the San Diego sun and the arrival of summer. I'd spent many afternoons in the pool, so my tan was fresh. Even then, at such a young age, I couldn't reconcile what my mother had told me. So, I was White. White like my father? I looked nothing like him. White like the girls at school with blonde hair and blue eyes? I stared in the mirror for what seemed like an hour. I turned around and around looking at my body and examining myself for some kind of clue, for something that would make what my mom had told me feel and seem more true. All I could see in the mirror was my mother. We had the same moles on our faces. Even at that age, I had her smile. I certainly had her skin color, if not darker. I went back to school the next day and filled in the "White" bubble. Almost 30 years later, I can't remember how I did on the test, but I'll never forget that moment. I'll never forget the little girl looking in the mirror and wanting to cry. I'll never forget my mother's quick reprimand, rebuttal, and declaration that I was "white."

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction & Background Significance

As I reflect back on my memories of elementary through high school formal education, the concept of race and the complex ways it created a foundation for my identity, still haunt me today. As a mixed race woman with a white father and Filipina mother, I am constantly being confronted with the question of where I came from and what race I am at school, work, and in almost every social situation. Having to constantly explain my racial identity as a part of my daily life is something that I have become accustomed to. However, while I have always verbally expressed that I am a half Filipina, half white woman, or *mestiza*<sup>1</sup>, I have undoubtedly felt othered. I have never felt Filipina enough with my lack of understanding of the language, culture, or experience, and with my brown skin color and darker features, I never felt that “white” or American was a proper explanation either.

Through middle school and high school as more and more of my peers began to socialize according to racial categories and cliques, I found it difficult to find a community where I felt like I truly belonged. My Filipino peers were explicit in the fact that I was not Filipino enough or that I seemed “whitewashed.” In fact, one of my first adolescent romances in middle school ended, because my Filipino boyfriend couldn’t tolerate the teasing amongst his Filipino friends that he was dating a half Filipina girl. When I tried to join the Pan Asian Club on campus or get involved in other Filipino cultural activities, I felt unwelcomed and deterred because, again, I was only half Filipina.

At home, my parents even further confused me by only providing narratives of the American Dream: working hard in school in order to attend college, getting married, attaining a

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<sup>1</sup> Mestiza is a Spanish and Tagalog word which indicates a woman of mixed race.

reputable job, and celebrating my white American upbringing. Both of my parents, especially my mother, did not seem to understand my hunger and curiosity along with the frustration that I was experiencing in order to truly know myself, my mother's Filipino history and heritage, and how I fit into my school's social landscape and the larger scope of my life.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Through the reflection of my childhood and adolescent memories, it is with my own personal testimony and life experience along with my observations through over a decade of professionally working in education through various avenues, that I feel it is critical to explore and research other mixed race Filipinx<sup>2</sup> educators, investigate their motivation and passion for teaching Filipinx history, and discover the ways in which being mixed race and teaching Filipinx history informs their identity, pedagogy, and lives as a whole. Therefore, in my research I address the following question: Through the various experiences of Pin@y Educational Partnerships<sup>3</sup> (PEP) instructors, what does it mean to be a mixed race PEP instructor, teaching Filipinx history while grappling with their own identify formation, and how does that play a role in how they teach?

By conducting detailed qualitative interviews with mixed race PEP instructors, I aim to further reconcile what it means to be a mixed race Filipinx individual specifically teaching Filipinx history and culture in connection to the larger conceptualization of mixed race identity being integrated into Ethnic Studies curriculum. In order to critically analyze mixed race identity within the field of Ethnic Studies along with the motivations of mixed race teachers in PEP as a

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<sup>2</sup> Filipinx will be utilized in this paper to represent all persons, regardless of sexual identity, and non-binary gender, with lineage from the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup> Pin@y Educational Partnerships or PEP is a San Francisco based organization which promotes relationships within the community, university, and youth to provide Filipinx history and cultural education to all ages throughout the elementary, middle and high school, and university levels. More detailed information will be provided in Chapter II.

case study, I also synthesize these topics through the lenses of U.S. and Philippine Relations and Ethnic Studies in Chapter II: Literature Review.

### **Background and Need for Study**

For many mixed race students, their lives and educational experiences have been punctuated by a dominant monoracial narrative that is rarely inclusive, which leaves mixed race students feeling othered, unaccounted for, and invalidated. Because current racial structures in the United States are monoracial in nature, mixed race individuals and students pose an important disruption in the ways in which society views traditional notions of race. Current views contend that race exists in neatly packaged categories such as: white, Asian, Black, Latinx<sup>4</sup>, etc., with an emphasis on physical characteristics and little else. However, the complex intersections of race in regards to mixed race students along with the connection to colonialism complicate and disrupt these definitions. In fact, mixed race students have very unique racialized experiences, and in some instances, experience more discrimination than their monoracial peers.

Because of the complex nature of mixed race individual experiences, research suggests that mixed race experiences are not yet fully captured by the existing critical theories because a majority of these theories only cater to monoracial identities and realities. It was not until I discovered critical multiracial theory (MultiCrit) through a critical race theory (CRT) lens, that I was able to locate one theory to specifically address mixed race student experiences. Through exploration of MultiCrit was also a call from the author to expand upon this research, especially if scholars and educational institutions aim to better serve mixed race students.

In addition to the monoracial beliefs of contemporary society, MultiCrit also counters the master narrative that the US has allegedly entered a post-racial society and mixed race

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<sup>4</sup> Latinx will be utilized in this paper to represent all persons, regardless of sexual identity, and non-binary gender, with lineage from Latin America (Dominican, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture).

individuals experience a form of gratitude or are able to pass through society differently than their monoracial peers because of it, which is completely unfounded. In fact, “MultiCrit allows for a critique of the role that white supremacist structures play in the (re)construction of multiraciality, thus uncovering far more profound effects of racism for multicultural and monoracial people of color than ‘a lack of place’” (Harris, 2016, p.3). Therefore, looking critically into the experiences of mixed race individuals and establishing MultiCrit as a theoretical framework further reveals the depths of oppression, racism, and white supremacy that are ongoing in the US. Forcing mixed race individuals and students to racially identify one way or another based on optics or alleged biological traits is just another form of white supremacy and oppression.

By researching mixed race PEP instructors and providing the space and platform for them to tell their stories, especially in regards to their upbringing and educational experiences, I reaffirm the need for MultiCrit and contribute Filipinx Bay Area voices. In addition, this research will concurrently expose the deep-rooted racism, white supremacy, and oppression that is intricately woven into our society and educational system.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study will focus on the experiences of mixed race Filipinx PEP instructors in the San Francisco/Bay Area. The main purpose of this paper is to create additional evidence for the addition of critical mixed race studies and acknowledgement of mixed race students’ unique experiences to be valued and included in Ethnic Studies curriculum. In addition, the research will also serve as reaffirmation of not only the efficacy of Ethnic Studies curriculum but also the need for Ethnic Studies at a national and global level for every student regardless of race or cultural background.

This thesis will also examine the ways in which knowing ourselves in connection to our personal histories, ethnicities, and traditions can not only create a stronger sense of identity but also provide the transformation needed for social justice education and activism. When an individual is able to self-actualize and evolve through education, decolonization, and identity formation, they are potentially in a space where they can utilize this knowledge through education and social justice initiatives to teach youth along with connecting and contributing to their local communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To provide a theoretical basis for my research, I will utilize the frameworks of CRT and MultiCrit. Since my research is focused on the evolution of racial identity and the intricacies of how this identity plays out in society and our collective history, CRT provides the necessary lens to examine race especially in relation to systems of oppression. MultiCrit further expands CRT by specifically exploring the ways in which mixed race individuals experience race, especially in the educational system, and experience their own unique struggles in identity formation.

#### *Critical Race Theory*

The historical backdrop in which CRT emerged is important in understanding its significance, legal implications, and cultural impact. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* and its legal breakthrough in abolishing racial segregation in public schools unleashed a 15-year period of unprecedented political activity focusing on economy, education, and cultural awareness in hopes of dismantling racism and oppression, which was rampant in the United States. As increasing numbers of legal cases with an emphasis on race emerged, scholars and left leaning intellectuals began openly questioning and challenging the notion that legal reasoning was neutral or free from consideration of personal values, social or economic factors, and

cultural implications. A majority of these scholars had participated in Critical Legal Studies (CLS) conferences and took strides to demonstrate that "...the law tends to enforce, reflect, constitute, and legitimize the dominant social and power relations through social actors who generally believe that they are neutral and arrive at their decisions through an objective process of legal reasoning" (Brown and Jackson, 2013, p.13,). Therefore, CLS scholars firmly held that US law and all the institutions that abide by it, serve as the foundation to legitimize and uphold oppression and white supremacy in all its forms.

To further uncover the continued discrimination and racial oppression occurring throughout the United States, 1989's *City of Richmond v. Croson* served as another turning point in the push towards CRT scholarship. In this decision, the court struck down a set-aside program established in Richmond, Virginia specifically created for minority contractors. At that time, African Americans made up almost half of the population of Richmond. Prior to the establishment of this specific set-aside program, the city was only awarding business to 0.67 percent of the dollar volume of its prime construction contracts to local minority businesses. The Supreme Court concluded that the set-aside program was discriminatory against the rights of non-minority contractors under the equal protection clause. In addition, the court ruled that use of racial classifications by state or local governments would be scrutinized regardless of which race benefits. "By depriving governmental entities of the ability to institute policies and programs that took account of race as a means to dismantle the continuing efforts of racial oppression and the ability to order private parties to do the same, the Court was freezing into place the status quo of prior discrimination" (Brown and Jackson, 2013, p.13). In essence, *City of Richmond v. Croson* was yet another example that legal structures were a means to maintain racist and oppressive structures rather than take the necessary steps to abolish them.



Due to the nature of *City of Richmond*, the legal grounds for consideration of race in hiring processes for many CLS scholars was called into question. In addition, many affirmative action admissions programs that were successful in bringing students of color into the law schools of CLS scholars were being further scrutinized. At this point, in a time of crisis, CLS scholars met along with a community of like-minded individuals who were motivated and devastated by the blatant subordination of people of color. Their collective goal was the desire to understand the principals of white supremacy and how they could dismantle them. It was in this first meeting that CRT was born. From this point of departure, with a country in crisis, and any semblance of progress disintegrating, CRT scholars began developing criticism around original civil rights and legal discourse seeking to find the holes and problems which brought people of color to their current day struggles.

Currently, CRT scholars not only examine the ways in which law oppresses people of color but also continue their work by investigating how CRT can be applied to the educational and economic system, explorations of racial/culturally specific applications like Latinx Critical race Theory (LatCrit), Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), etc., and race oriented manifestations within our mainstream culture. Because the notion and exploration of race can be vast and complex, not all scholars who research or write about race can be considered critical race theorists. CRT scholars, Delgado and Stefancic (2001), created tenets and/or hallmarks of CRT in order to create a more concrete framework:

- 1) Racism is Normal in US Society
- 2) Interest Convergence
- 3) Race as a Social Construction
- 4) Intersectionality

### 5) Voice or Counter narratives

First, CRT contends that racism is a normal occurrence in US society and is not the result of isolated events of individuals acting out. Instead, CRT insists that racism is embedded in the US and is an everyday experience for people of color. Secondly, interest convergence occurs when the dominant culture or white people only seek racial justice when it will ultimately benefit them. In other words, racial justice for benevolence is never in the best interests of the dominant group. Third, throughout history scholars agree that race cannot be scientifically proven. Human beings are indeed all biologically similar. Notions that humans can be categorized or socially constructed through arbitrary differences such as hair color or texture, skin color, eye shape, or lip size are a mechanism for creating otherness or hierarchy and further justifying white supremacy. Fourth, intersectionality explores the different ways in which the intersections of race, class, sex, origin, sexual orientation, etc. converge in different social settings complicating and challenging traditional cultural boundaries and stereotypes. Lastly, CRT puts an emphasis on counter narratives or storytelling as a powerful tool for people of color to express their life stories, perspectives, and histories, which disrupt Eurocentric versions of sanitized history and creates a more expansive worldview.

#### *Mixed Race Identity/MultiCrit*

For my specific research, CRT has created the foundation for critical studies like MultiCrit, which addresses the need for a framework for mixed race individuals, especially in regards to the educational system. Mixed Race Identity and the introduction of MultiCrit are critical aspects of Ethnic Studies that have the potential for further research and scholarship within the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). MultiCrit or multiracial theory in education, introduced by Dr. Jessica C. Harris from the University of Kansas, utilizes the

framework of CRT but expands CRT with additional tenets to account for the racial realities of mixed race students in the educational system. Traditionally, CRT addresses the needs of monoracial groups in relation to oppressive structures and systems of power. By focusing on monoracial groups, CRT inadvertently normalizes a paradigm of monoracial identity in society with an emphasis on the black, Latinx, Asian, or indigenous populations. Through these conceptualizations of CRT theory, it would appear that race can be simplified and categorized into individual racial groups. In turn, scholars have created more refined theories within CRT to support these groups, such as: LatCrit, AsianCrit, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), etc. It is within this framework, that a large gap for students and people of multiracial ethnicities are apparent and in need of further research and scholarship.

With the introduction of MultiCrit, multiracial students have the opportunity to be fully accounted for and validated within CRT theory. By utilizing the addition of MultiCrit, traditional and socially constructed understandings of race can be interrupted and expanded. In addition, it is within this space that more profound effects of racism of both multiracial and monoracial people can be explored rather than simply focusing on a lack of belonging. Harris goes deeper into the complexities of multiracial identity realities by connecting existing CRT to MultiCrit through the following concepts: ahistoricism or an approach that does not acknowledge inequities of the past; interest convergence whereby racial equity is only advanced when white people are benefited; the importance of experiential knowledge or stories, testimony, and narratives; and lastly, challenging the dominant ideology which asserts that multiracial people do not experience racism.

In addition, Harris (2016) proposes four additional tenets to CRT with the complement of MultiCrit by reintroducing: monoracial paradigms of race whereby society and structures only

recognize multiracial people as one singular race; monoracism which can be perpetuated by both communities of color and white communities; colorism which maintains skin color hierarchy; and micro-differential racialization with intersectionality which highlights the ways in which different groups have been racialized throughout history in various ways according to the needs of the majority group and the intersections that exist when these histories connect to one's identity. By connecting mixed race identity scholarship and MultiCrit to the experiences of mixed race teachers and their motivations to teach Filipinx American History, I hope to provide the appropriate framework in which I can synthesize and further analyze their experiences.

### **Methodology**

Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) was selected as the site for my case study for this research due to its grassroots emergence at San Francisco State University, community service learning model, access to a variety of Filipinx instructors actively working within an Ethnic Studies curriculum, and larger social justice vision in which PEP's students are encouraged to transform and empower themselves through knowledge of their culture, continue the tradition of teaching to the next generation, and service to their local communities. In addition, through my studies at the University of San Francisco, I was able to take courses with both Drs. Arlene Daus-Magbual and Roderick Daus-Magbual, who are founding directors of the program. Therefore, my accessibility to the program and its instructors will not only be vetted through my Professors but also encouraged. Lastly, I hope that this research is only the beginning of my work with PEP. I have a personal and intimate connection with the nature of the work and hope to contribute my research and teaching to PEP in the future.

The methodology for this study utilizes qualitative methods through performance of in-depth semi-structured interviews and personal testimony with PEP instructors. In addition, I also

observed two PEP classes at the elementary school level while utilizing descriptive observation procedures through my immersion in the community by recording all interactions and observations in a journal. By journaling my observations along with my thoughts, feelings, and reflections, I contribute my own personal growth and transformation through this research process as testimony. Because the nature of this study is to discover the unique perspectives of mixed race teachers in PEP and observe delivery and praxis of PEP curriculum, a qualitative approach to this study is the most appropriate fit.

Through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with mixed race PEP instructors, I delve deeper into their own personal motivations for teaching PEP courses. By using a semi-structured approach to my interviewing style, I created a more organic and free flowing conversation in which I captured the experiences of the participants in a way that is meaningful, reflective, and transformative. In addition, this approach assisted me in learning more of their personal stories specifically about their educational experiences and how being of mixed race ethnicity has affected them. I interviewed 3 PEP instructors total during the Spring 2017 semester. Since there is the potential for some memories from the instructors' educational experiences to be traumatic, I provided space for the participants to speak freely and provide additional information without my insistence, questioning, prodding, or interjection.

By utilizing an empathetic approach to my interviews, it is critical that I represent and advocate for my participants by transforming this research into further justification for mixed race theory to be included in Ethnic Studies curriculum going forward. In addition, I shared my own story with my participants before and during the interview (when appropriate), to provide clarity on my own intentions and personal stake within this research. By opening up about my

own story and motivation, I created and built a foundation for relationships that go beyond my research project in addition to becoming more involved with the PEP community for the future.

### **Research Questions**

To fully explore the educational and life experiences of mixed race PEP instructors, the following interview questions guided the project. My objective was to unearth the lived educational and social experiences of PEP teachers, their motivation to be involved in PEP, and discover how these experiences inform their teaching pedagogy and praxis. My interview questions are as follows:

1. What inspired you to teach for PEP?
2. To what extent did you feel connected to Filipinx culture in your formative years? If so, how did you learn about Filipinx culture and traditions?
3. In school settings, especially during elementary, middle, or high school, did you feel pressure to identify with one ethnic group versus another? How did that play out for you?
4. How did your parents discuss your mixed race ethnicity with you, if at all?
5. In any social settings (work/school/social gatherings, etc.), do you get asked about your ethnicity and how do you respond?
6. Based on your experiences in education as a mixed race individual, what advice would you give your students?
7. Do you feel that more curriculum addressing mixed race identity is needed either in PEP or in Ethnic Studies as a whole? If so, in what ways?
8. How has being a mixed race person shaped some of your educational experiences?
9. What do you feel your PEP students are the most eager or hungry for in the curriculum?

10. What is the most impactful way that Critical Mixed Race studies can positively influence mixed race students in education?

Addressing all of the aforementioned questions in one interview was a lengthy and daunting task. The questions were points of departure and were not all addressed in every interview.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the few limitations to my research is the small sample size for my interviews. With my desire for qualitative interviews to be open-ended, organic in nature, and semi-structured, interviews could be quite lengthy in a qualitative sense but not necessarily representative in quantity. However, due to the time frame and scope of my research, a smaller number of interviewees may be limited but is appropriate. I also only focus on PEP instructors in the San Francisco/Bay Area. Since the Bay Area and California are highly concentrated areas of Filipinx populations, this study does not provide a larger scope of mixed race Filipinx people throughout the United States.

As a mixed race individual, my passions and interests lie heavily within this research. At the same time, this unique perspective can also be seen as a limitation or bias since my own educational experiences and perspectives are deeply rooted by my experiences as a mixed race, Filipinx-American woman.

### **Significance of the Study**

Ethnic Studies is currently a politically charged and controversial topic within the field of education. While some states like Arizona have rejected Ethnic Studies curriculum in their own schools, other states, like California are creating successful Ethnic Studies curriculum with positive statistics showing that students are benefitting academically with increased grade performance along with greater engagement and attendance in school. Even public universities

like San Francisco State University, with the first College of Ethnic Studies in the country, struggles for funding and support. Therefore, more research and findings must be conducted to complete a more holistic approach and exploration on the topic of Ethnic Studies in education. Along with the push for Ethnic Studies curriculum, my research contributes to a mixed race lens, which will make Ethnic Studies more relevant and inclusive for all students. With a more diverse curriculum that is inclusive of mixed race students, the experience of exclusion, confusion, and frustration when looking for additional outlets or resources for learning one's personal ethnic background, history, traditions, and heritage has the opportunity to end.

It was also critical that my research had the opportunity to breathe and grow along with my own personal testimony and transformation through the research process. I endeavored to contribute my voice, experiences, and background to this work in hopes of teaching it in the future or having the opportunity to train others to do this very critical and reflective work. It is with dedication and truth that this work is dedicated to other mixed race students, which can provide them with the opportunities to not only discover their family history, heritage, and cultural traditions but also create a space for mixed race students who are undergoing their own unique experiences, are not in any way exempt from racial prejudices or discourses, and can contribute to cultural practices, organizations and groups. By creating educational frameworks through critical mixed race studies, mixed race students will have a safe place for discovery, knowledge, empowerment, and growth with the goal of the Philippines and Filipinx culture as a source of pride and activism in the United States.



## CHAPTER II: Literature Review

### Introduction

The history of the United States' imperial and colonial impact on the Philippines is a critical framework for mixed race identities, Ethnic Studies, and potentially the underlying motivation for mixed race instructors who are inspired to explore and teach the subject. In my research, I explore the impact and/or lack of knowledge in Philippine history, culture, and traditions, which are currently taught and experienced by PEP teachers, as they grew up or through their formal educations. In my own experiences, I was exposed to very little Philippine history and learned traditions through the food my mother prepared at family gatherings. However, an emphasis on being American and adopting American traditions was paramount in my home.

Through the process of learning one's history, family, and traditions during childhood and adolescence or at a later age through proactive education, a thorough background of both US and Philippine Relations along with an Ethnic Studies framework is important in order to understand the motivations of PEP instructors who teach PEP curriculum and how/if the actual teaching and praxis of this material has transformed their identities as teachers and members of the Filipinx culture.

#### *U.S. and Philippine Relations*

The Philippines is an archipelago made up of more than 7,000 islands with hundreds of dialects, subcultures, and religions. Located in the western portion of the Pacific Ocean, south of China and north of Taiwan, the Philippines is a country known for its tropical beauty with many beaches, rice paddies, jungles, and mineral rich land (See Figure 1 and 2 on next page). Tagalog

and English are the official languages spoken throughout urban centers, government offices, and schools all over the country. In addition, 80% of Filipinx people claim Catholicism as their religion. Considering the aspects of language and religion alone, one can already surmise the indelible affects that colonization has had on the Philippines, its people, and culture.

Figure 1: Map of the Philippines in relation to other continents

Figure 2: Detailed map of the Philippines



Beginning in the 1560s, and for the duration of three centuries, the Philippines was colonized by the Spanish Empire. The Philippines rebelled and held their own revolution against the Spanish at the end of the twentieth century. However, their efforts towards independence failed when the Americans invaded the Philippines through warfare. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Philippines was under the rule of a new colonial regime of the United States until the 1940s. The Philippines was finally able to become a sovereign nation in 1946

(Ocampo, 2016, p.16). However, the United States and its neocolonial influence were ever present through military bases along with economic and cultural footholds, which greatly impacted the Filipinx people. According to Dr. Anthony Ocampo (2016):

With respect to Filipinos in the United States, both historically and in present day, colonial legacies have influenced both their immigration and their adaptation to their adopted country in ways that are unlike many other Asian immigrant groups. Spanish and American colonialism in the Philippines have influenced the economic, cultural, and social experiences of Filipinos in the United States – all of which in turn shape the way Filipinos experience race in this country. (p.16)

Due to the lack of solidarity between the islands prior to colonization, the Philippines was vulnerable to colonial rule when the Spanish began exploring the country in order to increase their economic presence via trade routes through Asia (Ocampo, 2016, p.15). This state of vulnerability continued as the United States followed Spain's lead creating a permanent imprint on the Philippines and its people that is still visible today in all aspects of Filipinx culture. From the importance of English being taught in Filipino schools at a young age, the popularity and current practice of Catholicism throughout the country, a penchant for American music, a love for American clothing designers and brands, and lastly, a preference for lighter skin tones, the remnants of Spanish culture through Catholic ideology and the nostalgia for an idealized vision of America that many Filipinos will never experience is alive and present in the Philippines and with Filipinos who have immigrated to the United States in present day. Colonization has created a culture in which the colonizers of the Philippines have more of an impact on current traditions and practices than indigenous Filipino culture.

With the colonization of the Philippines creating a foundation for understanding Philippine and US Relations, Filipinos immigration to the United States plays a substantial role in understanding its relationship with the US as well. The history of Filipino Immigration to the United States begins with the Luzon Indians who arrived with Unamuno with the Spanish galleon, *Nuestra Senora de Buena Esperanza*, on the central coast of California near Morro Bay in 1587 (Strobel, 1997, p.3) and continues with the Manilamen who arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1763 (Strobel, 1997, p.2) to the *pensionados*<sup>5</sup> or government scholars who arrived in the early 1900s. Immigration continued into the mid-1900s with the *manongs*<sup>6</sup> (an Ilocano word for ‘older brother’) who were predominantly male and worked as laborers, military families, students, miscellaneous professionals and scholars to those that are still arriving currently in the twenty first century (Strobel, 1997, p.4).

The US Military had a major influence in not only the colonization of the Philippines but also the entry of cheap Filipino labor for the sugar and pineapple plantations of Hawaii and California. From 1909 to 1946, over 127,000 farm laborers were recruited to work in the sugar cane and pineapple fields of Hawaii and some continued on to the US mainland (Okamura, Agbayani & Kerkvliet, 1991, p.37). An additional 11,400 laborers were employed on the mainland with various jobs in the service industry as: janitors, valets, dishwashers, etc. Another 4,200 Filipino laborers were utilized in Alaskan salmon fisheries and made up about fifteen percent of the total fishery workforce.

Unfortunately, because the predominantly male Filipino laborer population were mostly single, they were quickly labeled as “immoral and a threat to society” due to their involvement

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<sup>5</sup> Pensionados refers to the Pensionado Act, which refers to a law, which allowed qualified Filipinx students to study in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Manong is an Ilocano term given to the first-born son in a Filipinx nuclear family. It can also be used for older brother, older male cousin, etc.

and relationships with white women (Takaki, 1989, p.430). This view of Filipino males is not representative of all of the laborers as some *manongs* created organizations for solidarity and to disrupt these perceptions of Filipinx men. These organizations aimed to showcase moral and spiritual character within the Filipinx community. Because of these perceptions from the white community, the Supreme Court amended anti-miscegenation laws in 1934 to make marriages between Filipinx men and white women illegal.

During the period of the 1930s, Filipinos were considered nationals in the United States. Therefore, many of the laws that applied to and discriminated against other Asian ethnicities like the Chinese and Japanese could not be utilized with Filipinos. Various rights for citizenship; participation in local, state, and national elections; the right to own property, etc. aided in the discrimination and subjugation of many people of color. There was an increasing resentment of the growing numbers of Filipinos in the United States, which was the catalyst for the Tydings McDuffie Act in 1934. The Tydings McDuffie Act, also called the Philippine Independence Act, changed the status of Filipinos from “nationals” to “aliens.” In addition, the immigration quota was drastically reduced to only fifty Filipinos per year. In the wake of this change in legislation and shift in immigration allowances, Filipinos were offered free passage to return to the Philippines. Of the 45,000 eligible Filipinos, only 2,000 accepted this offer to go back to their home country (Strobel, 1997, p.4).

Thirty years later, in an effort to alter the perception of the US being implicitly racist in its immigration laws, the Immigration Naturalization Services (INS) raised their quotas for entry into the US to 20,000 people annually for Asian countries. Due to this change in immigration legislation, another wave of Filipino immigration from 1966-1976 entered the US. During this decade, 276,000 Filipinos immigrated to the United States. A majority of these Filipinos were

trained professionals in education, medicine, and engineering. This period is also referenced to as the “brain drain” of the Philippines, since this large number of professionals leaving the Philippines was unprecedented. However, Filipinos were eagerly immigrating to the United States due to an expansion of labor demands in a growing, thriving American economy. In addition, due to the US embedded influence on the Philippine educational system and popularity of American culture, status, and opportunity, Filipinos were more than willing to endure leaving their families and crossing an ocean into the unknown for an opportunity to pursue the American Dream.

In connection to the indelible effects of colonialism and the US’s dramatic imprint on the educational system, immigration to the US was not only a welcome option but rather a lifetime goal for many Filipinos. My mother has since told me stories of watching classic American movies starring Shirley Temple<sup>7</sup> or *Gone with the Wind*<sup>8</sup> and dreaming of roads paved in gold while saving her *pesos*<sup>9</sup> to purchase a bar of Irish Spring<sup>10</sup> soap at the local *sari-sari*<sup>11</sup> store. In essence, the history of Filipinos in the United States is interwoven with the uprising and development of the United States as a modern nation. One is inextricably bound to the other.

Even with the blatant manipulation and exploitation of Filipinos as laborers and its ever-changing laws in order to maintain control of Filipino immigrants in the United States, Filipinx immigrants are still immigrating and dreaming of the United States today. Many of my aunties gained entry to the US through marriages to American men in hopes of a better life. My cousin is currently in the United States through a working visa with the Hilton Hotels where she works as

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<sup>7</sup> Shirley Temple is an American actress also known as “America’s Little Darling,” acclaimed for her success in a variety of short films, feature films, and storybook movies with a career that spanned from 1931 – 1961.

<sup>8</sup> *Gone With the Wind* is an American epic historical romance based on the book of the same title by Margaret Mitchell set in American Civil War and Reconstruction era.

<sup>9</sup> Pesos are the official currency of the Philippines.

<sup>10</sup> Irish Spring Soap is a popular American brand of soap with a signature green bar and fresh scent.

<sup>11</sup> A sari-sari store is a variety or convenience store in the Philippines.

a front desk receptionist in hopes of becoming a citizen or getting a green card. My mother has advised her to marry a white American man, so she can become naturalized, continue her work at Hilton hotels, and make a better life for herself than she would have in the Philippines. While I have tried to posit my own influence with my mother and cousin that she gains citizenship through education or work, it is through my newfound knowledge of the complex web of US and Philippine relations that I understand my mother's motivation and advice to my cousin. The US has positioned itself for the Philippines and many other countries with a mask of opportunity and freedom. However, it has done so by its influence in the educational system and recruitment of hundreds of thousands of Filipinx laborers since the 1500s.

### *Ethnic Studies*

When considering Ethnic Studies in education, the origins of the discipline are rooted deeply in the ongoing problem of mainstream curriculum being dominated by Euro-American Studies or an Eurocentric lens as the standard in most US schools. Therefore, many students of color have the potential to be disengaged in subject matter that does not capture any nuances of their personal realities, especially in regards to oppression or racism. According to Sleeter (2011):

Whites continue to receive the most attention and appear in the widest variety of roles, dominating story lines and lists of accomplishments...Asian Americans and Latinos appear mainly as figures on the landscape with virtually no history or contemporary ethnic experience...Texts say little to nothing about contemporary race relations, racism, or racial issues, usually sanitizing greatly what they mention. (p.2)

Not only do white storylines and narratives dominate curriculum for students in the US, but students of color are portrayed without a history or ethnic background that is representative or acknowledged. Therefore, any remnants of racism or experiences that relate to race are glossed over, which can create a disconnect or devaluing for students who do have those experiences.

Sleeter goes on to argue that creating Ethnic Studies scholarship not only presents multifaceted narratives for students, but also most importantly, highlights the history of systems of oppression, intellectual and cultural traditions of multiple ethnicities, which inspires students holistically through their academic performance as evidenced by grades, test results, attendance, and graduation rates. “Studies using different research methodologies, investigating students at middle school through university levels, in different regions of the U.S. consistently find a relationship between academic achievement, high level of awareness of race and racism, and positive identification with one’s own racial group” (Sleeter, 2011, p.8). While many teachers are hesitant to acknowledge race or create a platform for discussions about students’ experiences with racism, research shows that students benefit the most when these issues can not only be discussed in the classroom but are also reflected in the curriculum.

Once these doors are open to students, and they feel that they can connect to the curriculum in ways that relate to their everyday realities, academic achievement is likely to follow. According to a recent study in 2016 by the Stanford Graduate School of Education, “The researchers found that students not only made gains in attendance and grades, they also increased the number of course credits they earned to graduate” (Donald, 2016). Stanford researched students enrolled in Ethnic Studies classes in San Francisco high schools, which were created as pilot programs and contrasted their findings with students who did not take these courses. The data was gathered over the course of four years from 2010 through 2014. Eighth grade students



who had a grade point average (GPA) below 2.0 were automatically enrolled in the Ethnic Studies course while enrollment was voluntary for students with a GPA above 2.0. Stanford scholars focused on 1,405 ninth grade students and compared attendance records and GPA's for those students on either side of the 2.0 threshold. For those students that were encouraged to enroll in the course, attendance increased by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 points, and credit earned by 23 (Donald, 2016). While these findings were extremely positive across the board for male, female, Asian, and Latinx groups of students, a specific concentration of success was found for males and Latinx students. In addition, the study also showed an increase in GPA for math and science courses overall.

The study also illuminates its effectiveness on at-risk students. According to Emily Penner, a postdoctoral researcher at Stanford, "Schools have tried a number of approaches to support struggling students, and few have been this effective. It's a novel approach that suggests that making school relevant and engaging to struggling students can really pay off" (Donald, 2016). Students are eager to learn course material that is not only engaging but is relevant to their lives, families, and communities. The sanitized history punctuated with whiteness presented in many school history books and incorporated throughout most of school curriculums emphasizes a white narrative, which can isolate and possibly intimidate students of color. It is potentially difficult to learn and be engaged by school curriculum, which only highlights historical figures and events that students can't connect to their own lives. By creating a curriculum, even if it is one class in their daily schedules, that is relevant, identifiable, and inspiring to students of color, academic success can follow. In addition, students have a broader perspective of the world, the systems in which we live, and where their culture and traditions fit in a larger, global framework. The opportunity for students to learn about their own culture in a

school setting is also a powerful tool in itself, because it provides an academic platform for their culture and traditions to be validated and celebrated as critical to the larger global dialogue in education, which can result in a greater sense of pride in their culture, family, and ultimately, themselves.

While these findings through Stanford among others, demonstrate excellent evidence to push Ethnic Studies forward on a national scale, there is currently a debate on either adding or eliminating these types of classes and curriculums in other states. Scholars and educators in favor of Ethnic Studies argue that these educational opportunities can effectively address racial disparities by engaging students in ways that are relevant, exciting, and liberating. However, opponents argue that these courses are, "...anti-American, teach divisiveness and may displace opportunities for students to take electives of their choice" (Donald, 2016). In 2015, both California and Arizona vetoed legislation, which proposed that Ethnic Studies courses would be available statewide. As these debates continue on a state and national level, areas of California persist and lead a more liberatory front with cities like Los Angeles, Pico Rivera, Oakland, and San Francisco continuing to move in the direction of making Ethnic Studies a requirement. Stanford's study and overwhelmingly positive findings was justification enough for San Francisco to expand its current Ethnic Studies program to include all 19 public high schools within its city limits.

Along with the background and justification for an Ethnic Studies framework in education, interdisciplinarity as a vehicle and method for developing curriculum is also an important consideration. Butler (2000) poses the complex problem that no specific, identifying methodology is utilized within the discipline of Ethnic Studies. Butler argues that based on the individual scholar that utilizes Ethnic Studies, a methodology related to the discipline of study of

that particular scholar is then employed. For example, a Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholar will utilize a CRT lens when examining Ethnic Studies. In addition, Butler posits that racial identity is a main point of departure for Ethnic Studies scholarship as it closely relates to racism and ethnocentrism. Ethnic Studies scholarship is a constant negotiation between the investigation of multiple identities and the exploration of pervasive racism in our culture.

With a variety of scholars, disciplines, and approaches applying Ethnic Studies in their scholarship, Butler suggests that interdisciplinarity is a logical methodology and practice. “...Interdisciplinarity should become the hallmark of ethnic studies. Ethnic studies scholars and teachers are drawn to interdisciplinarity because identity is multiple and interconnected, as is life” (Butler, 2008, p. 244). Due to the multiple approaches, practitioners, and ways in which different disciplines connect to Ethnic Studies, interdisciplinarity is an all-inclusive lens for analysis. “Interdisciplinarity as a methodology for ethnic studies does not eradicate the necessity for other related discipline-based or multidisciplinary or cross-disciplinary methodologies. It does, however, seem to me to be the methodology that can give cohesiveness to the field and connect it most productively with other disciplines” (Butler, 2008, p. 244). With the many lived experiences, intersections, and disciplines in which to employ Ethnic Studies, interdisciplinarity is the all-encompassing methodology to bring a multitude of scholarship together in celebration and cohesion.

Butler provides the example of African American literature, which consists of slave narratives, biography and autobiography, poetry, historical fiction, etc. In order to critically understand this genre of literature, one must understand multiplicity, double or multiple consciousnesses, and have the ability to situate these narratives within African American

identity. This kind of knowledge can only occur with the utilization of interdisciplinarity through history, race, and literature as they collide, mesh, and weave together.

For application of the concept of interdisciplinarity within an Ethnic Studies framework, I suggest that this is not only relevant for my research but also absolutely necessary as I investigate the ways in which Ethnic Studies is utilized for Filipinx Americans in San Francisco and their identity formation. Within my own experience as a mixed race Filipinx American woman living in the United States, my own birth is predicated upon the colonial nature of my father's military deployment in the Philippines. With the extreme colonization of the Philippines throughout the country's history, it is impossible not to also examine capitalism and American culture as a part of my mother's potential motivation to move to the United States with my father. As I bring my own experiences into my research of mixed race Filipinx Americans, it would be impossible to not consider other disciplines and concepts like: colonialism, capitalism, ethnocentrism, hegemony, critical race theory, etc. to produce the most rich, critical, and thorough research.

To focus more specifically on a successful Ethnic Studies program in San Francisco that is effective and promoting transformational growth for students of Filipinx heritage, I am utilizing Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) as my case study for my research. PEP was founded in 2001 at San Francisco State University. Due to the high rates of Filipinx populations dropping out of high school, teen pregnancy, involvement in gangs, and mental health issues, Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales from the College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU and her students, created a forum or *sala*<sup>12</sup> in order to discuss these issues adversely affecting their community. From these conversations, many common themes emerged such as: conflicting identities, lack of Filipinx representation in teachers and curriculum, and a fragmented community. In order to

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<sup>12</sup> Sala is the Tagalog word for living room, receiving room, or parlor.

address these issues and begin cultivation of solidarity in the Filipinx community, lunchtime workshops at San Francisco State University were created on Filipinx culture, Hip Hop, spoken word, and theater. As more and more students became involved in these workshops, a growing desire for a formal Filipinx curriculum in Ethnic Studies, not only at the university level but also for high school and elementary students, was apparent. PEP was the result of petitions for formal curriculum, a greater awareness and desire to learn more about Filipinx culture, and the implementation and training of formal curriculum at all levels (Pin@y Educational Partnerships, 2016).

PEP's goals and vision for its students begins with the development of a curriculum that will liberate and empower students with the overall goal of more successful retention in school. Along with retention, PEP also actively recruits high school students to attend college and pursue education as a career to continue the work. PEP's curriculum is focused on historical and contemporary narratives along with the most current experiences of Filipinx Americans. Lastly, PEP also strives to create a partnership triangle within the community and its schools to further promote success of its students along with service learning opportunities (Pin@y Educational Partnerships, 2016).

Along with the goals and vision for the PEP program, its main objectives for success are as follows: directly addressing the lack of Filipinx Americans in current schools through curriculum and current teachers, continuing to build and maintain partnerships with the university and community, promoting service learning, providing training for social justice educators, providing resources for students to attain their potential goals, utilizing participatory action research (PAR) to think and look critically at community issues, and lastly, developing

and implementing a critical pedagogy with a specialized curriculum that focuses on Filipinx American Studies and Ethnic Studies (Pin@y Educational Partnerships, 2016).

Through critical race theory's concept of intersectionality, PEP actively explores the intersections of race (with Filipinx people) and class, history, identity, sexuality, education, etc. through its curriculum. It also critically analyzes the intersections between Filipinx students and institutional structures like universities, communities, government, and the educational system at large. In fact, it could be argued that one of PEP's greatest strengths as a program is the multitude of intersections it explores with its students creating an all-inclusive learning environment that encourages even further exploration, participation, and expansion.

Most importantly, a large part of PEP's curriculum is to explore the historical impact of the Philippines and the effect on Filipinx Americans. "Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them" (Crenshaw, 2015). In essence, intersectionality is not just about identities but also about the institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege individuals in our society. PEP is openly concerned about the lack of the Filipinx presence in schools and historical curriculum. It strives to disrupt this lack of representation by teaching their students an unsanitized version of their history. In turn, a significant part of PEP's vision and goal for its students is to encourage college-level aspirations in education in hopes of spreading this knowledge to other youth and community members. By utilization of intersectionality in PEP's teaching, curriculum, and eventual goals for its young people, their students gain greater understanding of how Filipinx people function within American society in relation to systems of power and oppression, in the education system,

through current Filipinx experiences in the local community, and are also given access to their history, traditions, and heritage.

Along with providing Filipinx students with the foundation of intersectionality in order to locate themselves within the structures of society and their own personal histories, counter narratives and storytelling are also a crucial part of PEP pedagogy and praxis. As referenced earlier, PEP was born out of a *sala* or forum of students that were concerned about their community, felt the need to voice these concerns, and take action. PEP represents a true example of a grass roots movement since it was rooted in the stories and voices of its people and students at its very core. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2013), a critical race theory scholar, reflects on the importance of stories in connection with power as follows:

Stories reflect a perspective or point of view and underscore what the teller, audience, society, and/or those in power believe to be important, significant, and many times valorizing and ethnocentric...When one group describes its worldview or story as 'real history,' 'truth,' or 'objective science' and others' worldviews as myth, legend, and lore we validate one narrative while simultaneously invalidating the other. (p.41-42).

Since PEP recognizes students' voices and stories first and foremost, the organization is active in creating its own collective voice, advocating for its own history, and empowering students through their authentic truth and narratives. Rather than having students continue to believe in the notions of sanitized history that they may learn in formal education, students are exposed to alternative resources and narratives while learning to validate their own experiences.

Every year, a talent show is performed by PEP students from all of the different schools they partner with in the Bay Area with a wide age range of participants, to showcase their self-expression, voice, and celebration of being proudly Filipinx through song, hip hop, dance,

spoken word, or skits/plays (Bisquera, 2014). By providing students with a platform to express themselves and share with their fellow classmates, teachers, and the community, counter narratives and storytelling are effectively utilized. PEP students are disrupting notions of identity, race, sexuality, history, stereotypes, etc. while validating and advocating for their own personal narratives.

Not only are students expressing themselves through art, but they are also connecting PEP pedagogy and praxis by utilizing social justice themes and activism. Students advocate on their social justice beliefs by performing art pieces on resistance, advocating for community solidarity, and questioning institutional structures. As one student reflects in her performance, “What do you kids know about being critical and conscious? All you know how to do is take selfies” (Bisquera, 2014). This performance piece mocks and disrupts common beliefs about youth and alleged notions of their non-participation or lack of interest in social justice and activism by denigrating and simplifying youth as self-involved or obsessed with technology. In actuality, PEP students are directly involved in PEP pedagogy since PEP utilizes youth participatory action research (YPAR), which includes the youth’s research and observation, collective and individual voices, and direct input for what the next generation of PEP students will learn in the future through the program. PEP opens up a safe space for these students to truly know themselves, be curious and critical about the world, and express their ideas and frustrations in ways that are not necessarily possible or accepted within the current structures of formal education. PEP pedagogy stresses honesty and authenticity in their students voices and work, which makes the end of year performances pivotal, revolutionary, and the essence of counter narratives and storytelling reflecting critical race theory and embodying more self-actualized individuals engaged in social justice education.



### **Conclusion**

The complexities of US and Philippine Relations in conjunction with Ethnic Studies create distinct pillars of knowledge, which serve as the foundation for my research of mixed race identities for Filipinx people. These bodies of knowledge provide insight into my own experiences in knowing very little about my mother's culture growing up and also provide background for the experiences and class observations which will be discussed at length in Chapter III. More than any other country in Asia, the Philippines has a unique relationship with the United States in that both countries are bound together through colonial ties and multiple waves of immigration since the 1500s. As the United States grounded a foothold in the Philippines, its influence greatly impacted the Philippine educational system and cultural notions of the American Dream through music, movies, fashion, and capitalism. As a result of the US colonial influence on the Philippines, the country is forever changed and will always have a strong link and admiration for the United States.

With waves of immigrants entering the US, Filipinos and the generations following have created their own unique cultural impact in the United States. It can be argued that the multiple periods of colonization that have occurred in the Philippines have made a greater impression on the education and culture of Philippine people rather than pre-colonial history, traditions, and language. Some Filipinos, like my mother, entered the US grateful for the opportunity to attain the American Dream and didn't feel the need to look back. However, for the children of those immigrants and the generations that follow, there is a hunger for the knowledge lost. There is a desire to learn the identities of ancestors, discover traditions, and learn to speak the language of one's culture. Through Ethnic Studies, students have this key to cultural knowledge that may not have been passed down to them but also access into other various cultures expanding their

worldview. Ethnic Studies provides a platform for a variety of cultures and ethnicities to be recognized on an academic level, which disrupts mainstream Eurocentric narratives that dominate US school systems leaving much to be desired and improved. This research shows the power that can come from the knowledge of the United States' contentious relationship with the Philippines and the ways in which Ethnic Studies provides the opportunity to study this relationship along with Philippine history, traditions, and language, which liberates students and provides them with an opportunity to further know themselves and pass that knowledge to future generations through community and social justice education.

### CHAPTER III: METHODS & FINDINGS

*KAIBIGAN- We are friends who love each other*

*KASAMA- We learn and teach together*

*KAPWA- I am you and you are me*

*BARANGAY- We are community*

- ATING BARANGAY POEM recited in all PEP classes

#### Introduction

The research for this project was conducted in two parts through qualitative interviews and classroom observations. I strategically chose these methodologies to gain a thorough understanding of each interviewee's personal experiences, mixed race narratives, educational pathways, and memories from childhood, which can be best expressed in an interview format. I also wanted to ensure that my interviewees felt that the experience was mutual and beneficial for them as I was very candid and open about my objectives with this research and forthcoming with my own personal story. In essence, I wanted to share as much of myself as pertained to the conversation while supporting and validating my interviewees when possible.

As a complement to the qualitative interviews from PEP instructors, the next logical aspect of my research was to observe the classes they teach and uncover any connections between their histories, experiences, and motivations to teach PEP in action through their teaching pedagogy and praxis in the classroom. In my classroom observations, I observed the students, teachers, and also participated in activities when appropriate. Throughout both parts of my research, I've discovered four common themes that emerge from the data: (1) The American Dream & Whiteness, (2) Optics of the Other, (3) The Conflict of Identities, and (4) Self-Actualization and Community through Knowledge of Philippine History & Traditions. In this

Chapter, I will highlight and further explore my findings in both the interviews and classroom observations as categorized by these themes.

Table 1: Summary of Interviewee Information

Name	Alam	Mayari	Makata
Age	23	22	24
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Filipinx/Tongan	Filipinx/White	Filipinx/White
Parents Country of Birth *	Philippines (M) Tonga (F)	USA (M) Philippines (F)	Philippines (M) USA (F)
Current Location/Origin	Belmont, CA; born in San Francisco, CA	San Francisco, CA; born in Orange County, CA	San Francisco, CA; born in Mountain View, CA

* (M) - Mother (F) - Father
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For the qualitative interview portion of my research, I interviewed a total of three PEP instructors who are of mixed race backgrounds (See Table 1 above). These PEP instructors were chosen by Dr. Arlene Daus-Magbual through her direction of the PEP program and her training, rapport, and knowledge of which PEP instructors would be open and interested in participating in my research. This sampling model is referred to as both criterion sampling (through the focus on mixed race teachers) and purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth... [which] will illuminate the questions under the study.” Within the qualitative realm of purposeful sampling, criterion sampling is even more specific to my research as it “is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, p.176, 1990).

Because my research is specialized and very specific, my interviewees were chosen with predetermined traits, which would allow me to further investigate mixed race experiences of mixed race teachers teaching a very specialized curriculum on Filipinx culture, history, and traditions (PEP). Therefore, PEP as a local, Bay Area organization that teaches Filipinx curriculum is accessible through my professors at my university and the interviewees were handpicked via criterion sampling due to their mixed race heritage and involvement in PEP as instructors.

Along with being fellow PEP teachers, my interviewees had more in common as their timelines and pathways to PEP are very similar. The three interviewees ranged in age from 22 – 24 years old and all recently graduated from San Francisco State University, which is how they learned about and got involved in PEP. All of the PEP instructors were either exposed to Asian American Studies courses in the College of Ethnic Studies or involved in Filipinx student organizations, which led them to PEP.

The first interview was held one-on-one for approximately one hour at the San Francisco State University campus. The second interview was a small group interview with the remaining two interviewees for convenience and efficiency of time and lasted approximately 1.5 hours at a local café near the elementary school where they both teach the PEP program. While I referenced the ten questions outlined in Chapter I, I also facilitated an organic flow of conversation to ensure the comfort of my interviewees. However, all ten questions were covered in content for each interviewee in the interviews. Both interviews were voice recorded via mobile phone with the permission of the interviewees. For the sake of privacy and protection of my interviewee's identities, pseudonyms will be utilized throughout this paper.

The classroom observations took place over the course of two weeks in two different sessions at Longfellow Elementary School located in Daly City, California. Longfellow serves students in levels kindergarten through fifth grade and consists predominantly of students of color ranging from Filipinx, Latinx, and African American populations. At Longfellow specifically, PEP operates as an afterschool program. Parents have a choice of a variety of afterschool programs in which their children can participate depending on their needs for after school supervision and learning objectives for their child. PEP's afterschool program at Longfellow runs twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays.

PEP classes are organized by grade level with at least 10-15 students in each class. PEP instructors are trained to teach in the *barangay* style or in small groups of two instructors per class at minimum in order to provide students with different perspectives, maintain small groups of different student activities occurring simultaneously, and to also disrupt the traditional notion of one teacher instructing and providing classroom management for an entire class. Each PEP class at Longfellow lasts approximately one hour and fifteen minutes focusing on a different lesson each day, which highlights different topics of Filipinx history, culture, tradition, or practices. Each lesson strives to breakdown dense historical events or cultural phenomenon, especially for the younger students, in ways that they can understand and relate in their own daily lives. In addition, a range of activities highlighting student expression through art, performance, writing, etc. encourage students to not only have fun but also reinforce the lesson they learned and share with their peers, PEP instructors, and families.

Prior to Longfellow ending for the day, PEP instructors congregate outside of the cafeteria to organize their materials, meet with their *barangay* or team teaching partners, and also support one another. As an outsider entering this

environment, I was immediately welcomed with open arms, invited to join the conversation, and share my own research objectives. The PEP instructors were given a brief introduction that I would be observing two classes from Dr. Daus-Magbual, and I felt a sense of support and belonging almost immediately.

Once class ends for students at Longfellow, PEP instructors enter the cafeteria and situate themselves at tables while they wait for their students to arrive. Sign-in sheets for each grade level are ready as each student signs themselves in upon arrival and sits at the table to wait for PEP to start. As students began to congregate in the cafeteria, they ran to their instructors, excitedly hugged them or showed them classwork they had completed for the day, and relayed their latest news. It was genuinely heartwarming, especially as I reflect upon my own elementary school experiences devoid of an afterschool program and relying solely on my teachers and parents for mentorship or adult support. It was clear that these students not only felt comfortable with their PEP instructors, but a strong community had been established for these students where they felt safe and validated. In addition, I would go farther by stating that PEP instructors do not only cultivate community with their students but also rather create a supportive second family environment. The student's smiles, squeals of delight, and curiosity for the activities that lie ahead displayed a trust and an openness to learn. The cafeteria is the meeting place for other afterschool programs as well, and it was noticeable that this degree of community, family, and connection was very specific to PEP's culture. (PEP Afterschool Program Observation Notes – 3/8/17 & 3/15/17).

The combination of interviews and class observations created a thorough and enriching experience for my research, which highlighted three unique lived mixed race experiences and the ways in which these experiences along with the knowledge of Philippine culture, traditions, and history in PEP curriculum are utilized in the classroom. In this chapter, *The American Dream & Whiteness*, *Optics of the Other*, *The Conflict of Identities*, and *Self-Actualization and Community through Knowledge of Philippine History & Traditions*, uncover the ways in which being American and whiteness complicates mixed race identity, how optics and society's perception can impact the formation of mixed race identity, the concept of having to choose between identities while not belonging to either, and the ways in which social justice education in a grassroots organizations like PEP can liberate mixed race individuals into a better understanding of their families, communities, and themselves.

### **The American Dream & Whiteness**

The concept of whiteness and popular notion of the American Dream are some of the main catalysts for my research. As I mentioned in the prologue and Chapter I, my childhood memories of being told that I am an American and white by my parents, are ideas that I'm still wrestling with today. While I've carried this resentment with me throughout my formative and adult years, the opportunity to study the contributing factors of colonialism, hegemony, and the historical roots of immigration, have helped me better understand that my parents simply wanted a better a life for me. Colonialism and an exaggerated vision of the American Dream punctuated my mother's formative education when she was in the Philippines. As I recounted my story and experiences to all of my interviewees, they surprisingly had very similar experiences in school and with their families as whiteness and the American Dream served as a backdrop for many



conversations surrounding mixed race identity, what it means to be an American, white, or Filipinx.

US formal education teaches narratives that support, validate, and celebrate whiteness, which can make it difficult to find pride in one's own unique mixed race culture, especially when one parent is from a different culture or country. In my interview with Mayari, she discusses an instance when her elementary school hosted multicultural events when students had the opportunity to share food from their family's culture with the class. Mayari's father would cook Filipino dishes for these kinds of events, but she would insist that her mom would come to the school to deliver it:

Because my Mom could speak English better than my Dad or she looks like everyone at the school... That's actually a really painful part of my identity and my relationship with my Dad that I haven't actually really addressed. I feel really bad about [that]. There was a point in my life where I was ashamed of my Dad. That is an awful feeling to have.

Mayari (Interview, March 8, 2017).

With such an emphasis on whiteness impacting students in the U.S. Education system, mixed race students must negotiate what they represent in public spheres and may feel some shame about family members who do not fit into the whiteness narrative. Because Mayari's father didn't look white or didn't speak perfect English, she didn't want that part of her family and life exposed to her classmates for possible fear of rejection or judgment. The idea of whiteness and the American Dream as the backdrop to all institutions in the US, especially in the school system, can have a very repressive affect for people of color, especially those who are of mixed race identity, because there is an underlying factor of having to choose. One must potentially

choose between their parents, which boxes to check, and ultimately, what identity to choose especially in the face of others.

To further delve into mixed race experiences at school, Makada discusses his love for history throughout high school and college but commented that all of history learned in school is Eurocentric. “It always confused me that the Philippines and other countries weren’t in there...” Makada goes on to explain his memorization of specific dates in history but that the emphasis was always on the Greek or Roman Empire. He searched for anything on the Philippines in his textbooks, and the Philippines only got a small paragraph in the entirety of a history book. Again, the repression of other cultures in school curriculum is apparent, especially at the high school level. When a culture, like the Philippines, only gets a brief mention or paragraph in a history textbook, the assumption can be made that the culture doesn’t have an impact or contribution on a global scale. Makada goes on to explain that it wasn’t until he began his college career at SFSU that he had the opportunities to delve into Philippine history and culture. “With pre-colonialism...you realize that we had all of this... it doesn’t make you feel inferior and stupid anymore.” Makada is referencing his knowledge of Philippine language, arts, history, and traditions. When whiteness and the American Dream are disrupted with the knowledge of other cultures, especially one that a student can identify with, it adds value and validation to their upbringing, sheds light on family history, and provides greater insight into the power of systems of oppression.

PEP disrupts Eurocentric narratives by emphasizing Philippine history to all levels of students. For my second class observation, I observed as Makada and Mayari taught a PEP class of second graders on the historical significance of the *sakadas*<sup>13</sup>, who are Filipino farmers

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<sup>13</sup> Sakada is a Tagalog word for laborers who are generally hired from the outside and paid lower wages than the local community.

recruited by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association to work in the booming sugar and pineapple plantation industry between the 1900s and 1950s. To begin the lesson, images were shown on a large screen of the *sakadas* working the fields in Hawaii picking pineapples. Makada emphasized that these Filipinx farmers were male, separated from their families, and were performing arduous work in hopes of making money to send back to the Philippines and afford their families with a better quality of life. To further illustrate the historical significance of the *sakadas* and also create an engaging activity for the kids, colorful origami pineapples were spread throughout the classroom. Some pineapples had a piece of paper sticking out of the top indicating that they were “ripe” while others did not. Students were encouraged to go “harvest” pineapples around the classroom that were ripe and come back together to share what they had found. The students ran around excitedly gathering pineapples.

As the class came back together, each student was asked to read the piece of paper that they found in their pineapples. All of the pieces of paper contained engaging historical facts on the life of the *sakadas*. By the mid-1930s, Filipinos made up 70% of the plantation workforce and worked some of the most labor-intensive jobs in Hawaii. Even though their jobs were exhaustive and dangerous, Filipinos were paid much lower wages than other immigrant laborers like the Japanese. Regardless of the conditions, Filipinos were extremely resourceful, lived modestly, and discovered ways to live off the land and hunt for their own food. Again, their ultimate goal was to send money back home to their families with the American Dream as a backdrop to these hopes and aspirations.

After each student read their historical fact to the class, Makada and Mayari laid a large piece of butcher paper out in the middle of the floor along with various markers and crayons in order to write a letter to the third grade PEP class about they learned for that day. Students could

write words, draw pictures or symbols, etc. In addition to the letter writing activity, Makada also helped students decorate and make their own pineapples with colorful pipe cleaners and beads. The *barangay* teaching style was well executed since students could have a choice of activities or do both. Makada and Mayari circulated throughout the room encouraging students to participate and supporting students when needed. It was interesting to watch students gravitate from one activity to another. Regardless of what they chose, they learned something new about Filipinx culture and were also able to express themselves through artwork in various forms.

### Optics of the Other

Optics are a common factor amongst mixed race people of color, because it is difficult for others to distinguish, place, or categorize race by relying on appearances alone. As I mentioned in Chapter I, in social situations, being asked: “What are you?” or “Where are you from?” are common questions that I encounter on an everyday basis. Again, this idea of having to define oneself and pick and choose the ways in which one identifies becomes second nature. All three of my interviews reflected these experiences as well. However, while optics are purely aesthetic in nature, the emotional experience of being different, othered, and excluded was universally experienced by all of my interviewees.

Figure 1: Map of Tonga



While being othered is an experience that is commonly felt in the school environment, in Alam's interview, he discussed being othered in his own family as well. Alam is both of Filipinx and Tongan heritage. His mother originates from Queson City near Manila in the Philippines, and his father is from Tonga<sup>14</sup> (See Figure 1 above). Both parents immigrated to the US in their later teenage years. As Alam grew up, he struggled to decipher what it meant to be either Filipinx or Tongan. Currently, he is wrestling with the idea of what it means to be both: How do we bring two cultures together? Alam never knew his place in his family or within his school. He describes celebrating Thanksgiving with the Tongan side of his family. He recollects one year in particular when one of his Aunts, who'd he hadn't met previously, asked his cousins who their Indian friend was, referring to Alam. He felt confused and hurt that a fellow family member had singled him out via optics alone, as not belonging. "Where do I fit in? I go to my Tongan side, and I'm not tall enough. I go to my Filipino side, and I'm too tall. I'm trying to find a balance between the two..." Alam's experience echoes those of the other interviewees along with my own, of not identifying with one culture or the other, which therefore can leave an individual feeling as if they don't belong at all. Being mixed race is a complex identity in that the mixed race individual embodies all cultures and ethnicities inherited from their families creating a very unique identity, which doesn't necessarily fit in one or the other of their parents' ethnic backgrounds. In addition, optics can provide an additional barrier to belonging in a community simply because the individual doesn't look like members of that given community.

Alam describes in depth this feeling of not belonging and being othered, especially during his high school years. As a result, Alam felt lost in school and was incredibly introverted.

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<sup>14</sup> Tonga is a Polynesian sovereign state and archipelago made up of 169 islands located in the southern Pacific Ocean.

As high school ended, Alam recollects a life-changing event as he began his freshmen year in college:

There was an event that happened...My friend committed suicide. At the time, I was contemplating the same thing. My senior year of high school and freshmen year [of college] I attempted [it], [and] just never followed through with it. When it happened to my friend... It was so easy. Over. I was really close to doing it... I ended up joining Rod's<sup>15</sup> class... Wow, it's only been two weeks, and I'm already learning about... colonial mentality and micro-aggressions and systems of oppression and how that affected me as a person and not only me and my community in general and my family and how they see themselves as less because they're not white growing up in America... Having Rod be there and guide me through everything...He literally saved my life with Ethnic Studies.

Alam (Interview, March 4, 2017).

By creating a platform through education with Ethnic Studies, Alam not only gained a better understanding of his family, community, and self, but this knowledge and the accessibility to a mentor saved his life. Understanding the relationship of whiteness and being American juxtaposed with immigrant narratives is critical, especially when exploring mixed race identity because it acknowledges colonialism, systems of oppression, and why immigrants may not necessarily feel like they belong or can ever be white enough because of the ways they look, speak, or act. When the normative narrative being presented is one of whiteness, other ethnicities have little room for error. However, Ethnic Studies can illuminate these complex relationships

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<sup>15</sup> Dr. Roderick Daus-Magbual teaches a variety of courses in education and Philippine culture and history throughout the Bay Area, but the class being referenced in this interview is Filipina/o Community Issues at Skyline College. He is also the partner of Dr. Arlene Daus-Magbual and one of the founding Directors of PEP.

and provide a gateway to understanding that can lead to liberation and the ability to locate communities where an individual can belong.

### **The Conflict of Identities**

The conflict of identities that I've experienced throughout my life and am still wrestling with is the catalyst for this research. I've sprinkled my own vignettes and memories throughout this work, which have highlighted being socially excluded in school and receiving conflicting information at home. This theme of uncertainty, shame, and negative external social influences was also a thread that weaved throughout the three interviews that I conducted. However, through this conflict that I along with my interviewees have felt, it was refreshing and heartwarming to see another perspective of mixed race identity that was an artistic expression and celebration of what it means to be mixed race through my class observation with Alam.

My first classroom observation experience for my research was in Alam's class. His class lesson for this particular day was on mixed race identities, which was not only perfect for my research but also a great introduction to PEP's classroom culture. Prior to observing the class, I was able to interview Alam. He provided a brief preview on his lesson and also his reasoning for emphasizing mixed identities rather than focusing solely on race. Because a majority of Longfellow's students who participate in PEP are considered "whole" Filipinos or both parents are of Filipinx decent, Alam felt that it was important to create and expand the definition of mixed race to mixed identities in order to provide the most inclusive and relevant lesson for all of the students. While some students might be of Filipinx heritage, other intersections within their identities like religion, family structure, or traditions should also be recognized. As students get older, differences in gender identification, sexual orientation, among others may emerge and

should be acknowledged regardless of race. Alam's emphasis on inclusivity and intersectionality pushed me to open up my own definitions and push boundaries within this research.

Alam opened up the class by introducing me to the students and laying out the plan for the day. Most importantly, he shared his own personal story of being of both Filipinx and Tongan ethnicities. Alam expressed that he didn't think it was fair to be seen as half one thing and half another, which can denote not being a whole person. Instead, students should view themselves as a whole, complete person with different identities. Alam asked the class if anyone was from multiple identities. One of the students raised his hand and shared that he was Filipinx, Latinx, and African American. I also shared that I was Filipinx and White. For a group of third graders, the concept was complex, but by Alam sharing his own story – the students not only learned something new about their teacher but hopefully saw their fellow classmates or anyone they may encounter in the future with multiple racial or mixed identities in a different light.

To reinforce the concept of mixed identities, Alam told the students that he would share his story with the use of color and light to better illustrate mixed identities. I sat on the floor with the students as the lights were turned off and Alam sat in a chair in front of us. He put on white gloves with a variety of colored bulbs connected to each finger inside the glove. As he turned each light on, multiple colors lit the room. The kids cried out in delight. Alam began with a pattern of blue and green on one hand and red and yellow on the other hand. As he gently created synchronous and mesmerizing patterns with his hands, he reminded the students of his story. One hand could be seen as his Filipinx side representing his family and all of the different characteristics that make him Filipinx. The other hand represented his Tongan family and the different ways in which those identities have shaped him. As the lights and colors transfixed all of us, Alam began to slide the fingers of both of his hands together, joining them and creating a



new rainbow of colors. The kids exclaimed in excitement again. Alam continued to explain the beauty of having multiple identities just like the beauty of different colors coming together to create a beautiful rainbow of identity.

After Alam's light show, the lights were turned on, and the kids were invited to create art to showcase their own unique identities. Paint was placed at each table along with large pieces of paper, and the students began to create finger paintings mixing the colors to create new colors or drawings. There was laughter, jokes, and camaraderie as I walked around with Alam to observe the students at work. They were excited to show us what they had made and explain their creations. The students finished their drawings, cleaned up, and their guardians began to arrive to pick them up.

In my attempt at reckoning with my own identity, the light show stirred multiple emotions. Not only did the light show reflect Alam's personal story, struggle, and celebration of his Filipinx and Tongan racial identities, but he also shared his love of art through lights by exposing the students to the gloves along with movement and synchronicity, which I'd never seen before and is currently popular in the dance community. His vulnerability encouraged me come to terms with own. For third graders, the concept of mixed identities is certainly complex, but Alam's demonstration of lights and art showcased that multiple identities can be beautiful, make one stronger and more unique, and most importantly, is nothing to be ashamed of. Regardless of what colors or identities a person is made up of – they are still a whole person, full of beauty. While it is difficult to gage how much each student absorbed, they certainly know something new about their teacher who they love and respect and that his multiple ethnicities are an important aspect of his own identity.

## **Self-Actualization and Community**

### **Through Knowledge of Philippine History & Traditions**

Through the interviews in connection with the classroom observations, it is clear that my interviewee's involvement in PEP along with the pathways through Ethnic Studies or Filipinx student or community organizations created a knowledge base and community environment where they were able to become more self-actualized individuals. While being mixed race and the daily negotiations that come along with it are a daily reminder and evolution of coming to terms with one's own identity, PEP serves as gateway of learning, reckoning, teaching, community, and self-awareness.

While two of my interviewee's mothers were born and raised in the Philippines (like my own), Mayari's family dynamic differed in that her father is Filipinx and her mother is white. Mayari grew up in Southern California in the Orange County area. Her father came to the US from the Philippines at age 17 in the pre-1965 wave of immigration by joining the US Coast Guard. He traveled throughout the US and worked in other industries before gaining employment at the Immigration Naturalization Services (INS). It was at INS training that he met Mayari's mother. Mayari's mother is white, born in Washington, and raised in Nebraska. After a long distance relationship and marriage, Mayari's parents settled in California.

When I asked Mayari how she identified herself then and now, she described the evolution of her identity and the ways in which she is still questioning and hoping that her work in PEP, especially with the kids, will provide some clarity. When I described my own experience in encountering standardized tests for the first time, back when only one box was permitted, Mayari responded by remembering that, "For the longest time I used to put white in those standardized boxes." She recalls that her father always told her that she was an American.

As Mayari advanced through school, she began to question more of her identity in high school. Many of her friends were mixed race as well. However, she never knew what it was to be Filipinx: “I only knew about lumpia<sup>16</sup>, adobo<sup>17</sup>, and Manny Pacquiao<sup>18</sup>.” While she briefly considered joining the Filipinx organization for students at school, it felt like more than she was ready for. Many of the Filipinos at her school were involved in Hip Hop culture and break dancing. Again, Mayari encountered a community where she didn’t feel that she fit in. Even though she knew she was of Filipinx heritage, she didn’t dance like the b-boys and b-girls at school.

While Mayari’s racial identity remained a point of negotiation and contention, her move from southern California to San Francisco State University radically changed the way she looked at herself and the Philippine culture. When considering her arrival to the Bay Area, Mayari recalls: “I didn’t know what it meant to be Filipino. I always identified as white until I got to San Francisco State.” Through new friends at SFSU, Mayari became involved in Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE). PACE is a student organization that provides student academic support, promotes critical consciousness, and self-determination along with education on Filipinx history and culture. As she went through the PACE program and internship, she learned Filipinx history (including pre-colonial), culture, traditions, and language. With this new knowledge, Mayari’s life quickly changed. She began to feel pride in herself, her father, and the Philippine culture. In addition, she wanted to learn more and had many resources through SFSU and the College of Ethnic Studies to uncover more about her Philippine heritage.

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<sup>16</sup> Lumpia is a common Filipinx appetizer consisting of a meat and vegetable filling, wrapped in a thin rice paper, and fried until crispy much like an eggroll.

<sup>17</sup> Adobo is a common Filipinx main dish, which is usually made with either pork or chicken and marinated with soy sauce, vinegar, bay leaf, ginger, and garlic. This is a very traditional dish for social gatherings and is served with rice.

<sup>18</sup> Manny Pacquiao or Emmanuel “Manny” Dapidran Pacquiao is most heralded as one of the most famous boxers of all time and was born, raised, and currently resides in the Philippines. He was named “Fighter of the Decade” for the 2000s. He’s also the first boxer to win championships in five different weight classes.

Through Mayari's involvement in PACE and enrollment in courses like Filipino American Literature with Dr. Allyson Tintiango-Cubales, she was provided with an introduction to PEP. Mayari immediately felt a strong connection to Dr. Tintiango-Cubales and noticed that all of her teaching assistants were PEP teachers. In addition, she also felt that Dr. Tintiango-Cubales could see the potential in her students and had a genuine hope and belief in them, which motivated Mayari even more. Through the course, Dr. Tintiango-Cubales included a project to create and teach curriculum for a PEP classroom. Mayari excelled and enjoyed the experience immensely. After serving on PACE's executive board and graduating from SFSU, she is now a PEP teacher and loving the work.

To Mayari, PEP is an environment where teachers can ground themselves and receive mentorship. While teaching is not what Mayari wants to do for the rest of her life, she is grateful for the plentiful resources that have been provided to her by her PEP mentors to assist in maneuvering her and fellow teachers to their future goals and dreams. "PEP for me now...has centered me and grounded me. Wherever I go I always want to keep PEP in mind and the ideals it's instilled in us. Wherever I go, I want to keep that with me." Mayari along with other PEP teachers now have the foundation they need to further understand their lineage and roots, the confidence to create and teach curriculum, and a community of mentors and fellow teachers that will support them throughout their lives.

While I attempted to join the "Pan-Asian Club" at both my middle school and high school, my experiences align with Mayari's in that both options just didn't feel like the right fit. When I entered the University of California, Berkeley, I became involved in *Maganda*<sup>19</sup>, a pro-feminist student run and led literary magazine. As I got older, the desire to learn more about

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<sup>19</sup> Maganda is a Tagalog word meaning beautiful.

Filipinx culture, gain a thorough understanding of its history and traditions, and have a connection to my ancestors increased. My mother and I began to have more conversations about her upbringing and lineage. However, it wasn't until my graduate education that I felt I was able to fully explore what being Filipinx and mixed race truly means to me.

When I reflect on the opportunities that PEP provides to its students and teachers, I feel some semblance or resentment for not having those opportunities afforded to me during my formative years. PEP in conjunction with Ethnic Studies creates an environment where students can proactively explore parts of their ethnic background that may not be available to them in their immediate communities or families. In addition, not only are students and teachers learning about their specific history and traditions but they are also able to make this knowledge come to life through teaching, learning, activities, and the community they form through this process.

### **Conclusion**

After completing my research consisting of both interviews and class observations, it is clear that mixed race identities are complex and varied experiences dependent primarily on the individual's educational experiences along with the messaging and social interactions from home. By discovering the common themes from the three interviews and two classroom observations, which I've identified as: The American Dream & Whiteness, Optics of the Other, The Conflict of Identities, and lastly, Self-Actualization and Community through Knowledge of Philippine History and Traditions, it is evident that there are more commonalities and complexities between mixed race people and their experiences than differences.

These commonalities begin with the combination of having one or both parents from another country, which creates contrasting cultural backgrounds for a mixed race child to decipher. The notion of the American Dream and the desire to assimilate into American culture

and embrace whiteness was a theme that was common throughout all interviews including my own experience. Even with Alam's family, which consists of both immigrant parents, the importance of being American was emphasized along with the shame of never being white enough creating a feeling of isolation and despair.

Along with the pressure to be American, mixed race individuals must inevitably deal with optics and feeling othered simply because of the way they look. Our society tends to read individuals based on their physical traits in order to place them in a racial category. However, with mixed race people, it is challenging because their features do not necessarily reveal a clear-cut racial identity. This is problematic, especially during the formative years, when all kids and teens want to do is feel some semblance of belonging in their educational environments. The interviews confirmed that in high school, an emphasis on socializing according to race was prevalent in all experiences, including my own. When an individual doesn't look like the other members of that social group, they are more than likely not gained entry. As a mixed race person, it is also likely that they do not look like anyone else. If this is the case, where do they belong?

This issue of trying to figure out where one belongs leads to a conflict of identities that can be felt by a majority of mixed race people. This conflict of identities can be summarized in the relationship of the immigrant to American culture and whiteness. One of my favorite moments of Mayari's interview is when she illuminates: "We live that. That is our body. The oppressed and the oppressor. We carry that identity everywhere we go." The conflict of identities lies not only in social interactions at school or at home but also an internal struggle in embodying both an oppressed culture and the oppressor culture simultaneously. Mixed race individuals must always negotiate between these two identities and reconcile what this means for themselves.

The knowledge that can enlighten mixed race people about these societal structures and systems of oppression is through education in Philippine history and traditions with a social justice foundation. All three interviewees gained an incredible amount of knowledge that was not known previously through their families or communities through PEP and other programs available to them at SFSU. It is through this knowledge that all interviewees gained a better understanding of themselves and became more self-actualized people. In one instance, and the most poignant moment in all of the interviews, Alam discussed that taking Ethnic Studies classes, beginning with his first one, literally saved his life.

As I reflect upon these themes and the amazing individuals I was able to meet and interview in the process, the Ating Barangay poem that Mayari and Makata shared with me echoes in my brain and heart. Traditionally, in all PEP classes, this poem is recited in the beginning and end of class. This poem is the perfect crystallization of the PEP experience and also captures not only the power of the program but reflects the importance of knowledge and the community that can emanate from acknowledging one another, learning and teaching together, and creating a loving community as a result.

## **CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Discussion**

As referenced throughout this research and document (intentionally), my own reckoning, discovery, and healing has occurred throughout the production of this work. At the close of my research, my only regret is that I didn't do more. After each interview and class observation, there was an overwhelming feeling of healing, recognition, and understanding that I don't feel I could have received in any other way. Each of my interviewees made an impact on me and created a connection that only fellow Filipinx mixed race people could understand, and it was the healing that I have been seeking and needing since childhood. My interviewees conveyed a gratitude for having acknowledged, expressed, and internally wrestled with stories and feelings throughout their interview in a safe space that was not previously available to them, especially with an academic lens. This research has transformed my own understanding of myself, family, and opened up my eyes to the possibilities of grassroots community organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area and globally. My own self-actualization is very similar to the process of my interviewees with the desire to deepen my knowledge and attain a social justice based education through my graduate studies in order to put my experiences into a larger global context, and the ability to write, research, or teach as a result.

### **Recommendations**

It is my hope that this research on mixed race individuals will assist and provide further justification for future students and scholars to continue development of critical mixed race studies within an Ethnic Studies framework. However, in order for mixed race studies to have an academic place with context, is important for Ethnic Studies legislation to be pushed forward. As mentioned in Chapter II, Ethnic Studies is currently a controversial subject. Presently, there are



pockets of communities in California that are embracing this kind of curriculum and are aware of the benefits. However, other states must follow to create a national standard in curriculum.

In addition to the continued development of Ethnic Studies curriculum, there must also be an emphasis on quantitative and qualitative research performed by researchers and scholars on various factors of student achievement and experiential outcomes. Stanford Graduate School of Education has already provided overwhelming evidence of the success of Ethnic Studies programs in California, but more must be done to provide further evidence for other states to adopt Ethnic Studies curriculum as well. Research can go a step farther from the analysis of GPA, attendance, and course credit improvement. Qualitative data on students' experiences, self-actualization, socialization, and motivation to learn more or be involved in cultural community organizations, would also greatly benefit the success and expansion of Ethnic Studies.

To avoid further pushback with Ethnic Studies curriculum, scholars can also explore the effects of this type of curriculum on white students. Offering a broad choice of curriculum has the potential to expand students' worldview and perspective. In addition, in regards to social justice activism, more Ethnic Studies curriculum available to all students, especially white students, has the opportunity to also build a foundation for potential allies in the future for people of color. If traditional or stereotypical notions of different races and ethnicities are disrupted through education proactively at early stages of a student's education, there is more room for community building across races and ethnicities along with the potential for understanding, communication, and allyship.

The scholarship exploring mixed race identities within CRT or MultiCrit, outlined by Dr. Jessica C. Harris is an opening, beginning, or pathway, which begs for further development and criticism from other scholars. In Harris' article, she also requests that more scholars continue

developing the topic as very little theory has been created or written to date. This work can continue to be developed under a CRT lens, but it is evident that the possibilities of finding ways in which mixed race identities or critical mixed race studies can be applied in other academic fields is limitless.

While there are a few classes on mixed race theory in universities embedded in Ethnic Studies programs, additional intersections can be explored and applied to other disciplines like literature, education, philosophy, among others, but most importantly, history. One of the most overwhelming aspects of my research from all of the interviewees was the critical importance that education played in their formation of self and the motivation to become involved in Filipinx student and cultural organizations, which led them to teach for PEP. This knowledge becomes the foundation for which these PEP instructors are creating a life and career path. In addition, the importance placed upon their own personal development and the knowledge they will pass on to other Filipinx generations cannot be emphasized enough.

Bay Area Scholars can utilize my current research by delving deeper into PEP and synthesizing its success through quantitative and qualitative methods. According to my interviewees, there are a few students who have made it through the entire PEP program from elementary school through majoring in Ethnic Studies or Asian American Studies at the university level. It would be revealing to perform qualitative interviews on these students to discover the impact of having a significant and consistent Filipinx cultural impact in their lives and education. Some of the questions that could unearth further evidence of success of this program are as follows:

1. To what extent do these former students feel a pride in their Filipinx heritage?
2. To what extent and in what ways are they involved in the Filipinx community?

3. If they decide to have children, do they want their children involved in a similar program?
4. What Filipinx cultural traditions do they plan to practice and honor in their own homes?
5. What impact, if any, did PEP have on their educational and eventual career paths?

To go further, this research can explore the effects of PEP on their trajectory on a personal and academic level. Quantitative measures can also be performed on students' academic achievement in comparison to their peers as more and more PEP students go through different stages of the program.

Much of PEP's success is attributed to its partnerships within the community and schools creating a triad approach of support with multi-tiered learning available for students. While PEP is expanding to more schools in San Francisco, their success is evidence that more grassroots organizations from the local communities can benefit from fostering these types of relationships. With a majority of PEP's work being conducted in South San Francisco and Daly City where a significant population of the Filipinx community resides, the interest and audience for this program was ready, willing, and waiting. It was a matter of creating a forum in the community and allowing community members to voice their concerns and needs. Likewise, this could be done in other communities with different ethnic enclaves to address specific needs. With more closely tied partnerships between community organizations and local schools, different ethnic populations can utilize after school programs or other educational platforms to create unique and specific programming for their communities to deepen cultural understanding and traditions in future generations.

### **Conclusion**

When considering the case study of PEP and its instructors, discussing their personal testimonies through our interviews, and observing their teaching pedagogy and praxis in action, my conclusion is that being a mixed race individual, especially of Filipinx descent, creates an environment of confusion, resentment, curiosity, and a hunger for knowledge. These thoughts and feelings call into action and utilize education as the platform for liberation. Each interviewee, whether through Filipinx school organizations or classes at SFSU, discovered the history, traditions, language, and culture of the Philippines, which led them to a path of social justice education. By understanding their culture in a way that was not previously shared with them in early formal education or at home, my interviewees found liberation in understanding their families and dispelling shame while also acknowledging colonialism, systems of oppression, and white supremacy as major factors in why and how they may not have learned or had access to this type of education.

This study provides further evidence for the need of mixed race curriculum within Ethnic Studies in schools throughout the United States and globally. Although this study focused on the Filipinx community in the San Francisco Bay Area, the information and statistics provide an intersectional view for the possibilities of other ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds. With the addition and movement of more diverse ethnicities creating Ethnic Studies curriculum, school curriculums around the country have the potential to evolve and create the change needed in the educational system for counter narratives, un-sanitized history, reinvention of celebrated school holidays, and most importantly the creation of a curriculum that children all over the country will feel is relevant to their current lives.

Through my research with mixed race Filipinx instructors teaching Ethnic Studies curriculum in PEP, this work creates additional groundwork for critical mixed race curriculum that can greatly contribute to future PEP classes or other burgeoning Ethnic Studies programs in the US. This research also provides additional justification for the immediate need of Ethnic Studies curriculum nationwide covering a wide breadth of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Students are hungry for curriculum that they connect with that reflects their own personal realities and acknowledges systems of oppression and racism. These conversations and frameworks boost student academic achievement rather than stifle it.

The emphasis on Filipinx mixed race individuals is deeply personal, but it is also an excellent case study for the power of colonization and the strong hold it can have on its people, so much so that important elements of the culture are not passed down to future generations in hopes of embracing the American Dream and a better life. Colonization is a complex relationship of the oppressed and the oppressor, bound together, with indelible imprints that still have impact on Filipinx people in the US and Philippines today.

Navigating through the process of confusion, curiosity, and Ethnic Studies education, mixed race Filipinx individuals can liberate themselves and connect with their communities in a meaningful and transformative way by teaching youth through social justice education the history and traditions they never learned. While Filipinx mixed race people may embody the oppressor and the oppressed simultaneously in a complex web affecting their relationships with family, optics within their physical attributes, access to social groups, and lack of knowledge of their culture, social justice education through grassroots organizations like PEP provide an outlet for liberation, community, and self-actualization. In this process, peace and knowledge can be attained for better understanding the dynamics and tension of the oppressor and oppressed within

the minds and hearts of Filipinx mixed race individuals. In order to not perpetuate the circumstances that stifled our own understanding of our identities and culture, it is up to us to acknowledge, learn, build community, and teach others. With the power of individuals finding themselves in their communities and as a result building larger and stronger communities, a celebration of mixed race identities is possible.

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