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Filipinx/a/o-American College Students and Mental Health

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Abstract

Filipinx/a/o-Americans are the second largest Asian American population yet are often underrepresented in research studies and media, while predominantly East Asians remain the center focus. Issues and experiences of subpopulations within minority groups are often overshadowed by the dominant group and essentially erased. Therefore, disaggregating data persists as an important way to understand the differences between subgroups and to ultimately create effective strategies to remediate these inequities. This current study looks to further examine the research question: What experiences shape Filipinx/a/o-American college students' mental health? Specifically how does family, religion, immigration, racial stereotypes (e.g., model minority myth), and acculturation at a PWI (predominantly white institution) contribute to their mental health? Due to the limited amount of research on the topic of Filipinx/a/o-Americans and mental health, this research aims to fill the gap of disaggregated data as well as incorporate more methods of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

Key Words: Filipinx/a/o-American, Students, Mental Health, Community, Sense of

Belonging

Filipinx/a/o-American College Students and Mental Health

Introduction

Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority population in the US (Eligon, 2020). However, most research leaves out Asian Americans, which ultimately results in this racial group being misunderstood and excluded. In addition, the vast diverse cultural backgrounds, histories, and experiences among the different sub ethnic groups of the Asian American racial category warrant further examination of the realities of those specific groups (Maramba, 2008b; Museus, 2009; Teranishi et al., 2004, as cited in Museus & Maramba, 2011, p. 233). There exists a great importance to disaggregate research and data so the true nuances of minority groups can be revealed. For example, the stereotype of the Model Minority *Myth* (MMM) is often supported by higher median income and higher rates of attaining degrees for Asian-Americans when compared to other racial populations. Asian Americans were first described as the model minority in the 1960's during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in an article by *The New York Times* titled, "Success story: Japanese 1960s. New York: Cambridge University American style". The term was used to diminish Black Americans and for the social issues they were speaking up about. In recent years, there has been more discourse critically unpacking the way the term model minority is used and the negative consequences of it and have since labeled it the Model Minority Myth.

However, disaggregated census data shows that the Asian racial category is not as homogenous or successful as they are often portrayed (Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007; College Board, 2008; Hune, 2002; Museus, 2009; Teranishi et al., 2004, as cited in Museus & Maramba, 2011, p. 233). In fact, some ethnic groups, such as Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao populations hold baccalaureate degrees at rates far lower than their Black, Latino, and

White peers (Museus, 2009, as cited in Museus & Maramba, 2011, p. 233). Filipinx/a/o-

Americans[1] are the second largest Asian American population yet are often not represented since

predominantly East Asians remain centered both in research studies and media. For example,

second-generation Filipinx/a/o-Americans have higher rates of high school dropout and lower

rates of college admission and retention than East Asians (Nadal, 2011; Okamura, 1998, as cited

in Hufana & Consoli, 2020 p. 4). Issues and experiences of subpopulations within minority

groups are often overshadowed by the dominant group and essentially erased. Therefore,

disaggregating data is important to understand the differences between subgroups and to

ultimately create effective strategies to remediate these inequities.

Literature Review

The Model Minority Myth

The Model Minority Myth typecasts Asian-Americans as hardworking, well-adjusted,

highly intelligent, academically and professionally successful despite their status as racial-ethnic

minorities and experiences of discrimination in the US (Lee, 2009; Nadal, Pituc, Johnston, &

Esparrago, 2010; Okazaki & Lim, 2011, as cited in Rodriguez-Operana, Mistry, & Chen, 2017,

p. 57). These model minority stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in the media as well as in

research that aggregates individuals from varying Asian ethnic groups into one Asian pan-ethnic

category (Yoshikawa et al., 2016, as cited in Rodriguez-Operana, Mistry, & Chen, 2017, p. 57).

The MMM was first used in the 1960's at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and was

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[1] Throughout this paper I will interchange between the terms Filipino-American and Filipinx/a/o-American. The term Filipinx/a/o-American is a gender-neutral term used most typically for those from Philippine descent in the Diaspora, specifically Filipino-Americans. I recognize that although Filipinx/a/o-American was created and intended to decolonize our language and to be more gender inclusive, it is most often used in privileged academic spaces and in the United States. There continues to be discourse on this topic and in this paper I will be substituting both terms interchangeably with respect to those who identify with any and all genders.

strategically disseminated to diminish African-Americans and their fight for liberation. The

MMM continues to be used today to separate racial minority groups and can sometimes be seen

as a positive label. However, the MMM can be harmful for many Asian Americans as they aspire

towards something they can truly never achieve and have extra pressures towards perfection. In

the article, *Disentangling the Myth: Social Relationships and Filipino American Adolescents'*

Experiences of the Model Minority Stereotype from the Asian American Journal of Psychology,

researchers explain how examining the experiences of Filipinx/a/o-American adolescents and

internalization of the model minority stereotype can provide insight into how the narrative of the

Asian model minority impacts the well-being of a particular subgroup of Asian American youth

(Rodriguez-Operana, Mistry, & Chen, 2017, p. 57).

Sociohistorical Factors: Family, Religion, & Immigration

The Philippines has a unique history compared to other Asian countries because of its

history of colonization and imperialism. Spain colonized the Philippines for over 300 years and

subsequently the Philippines was colonized by the United States for almost 50 years afterwards.

The lasting effects of Spanish colonization are still seen throughout Filipinx/a/o culture, such as

food, language, religion, political and economic structure, colorism, and more. In the United

States, Filipinx/a/os and Filipinx/a/o-Americans experience marginalization, exclusion, and

oppression. Historically, Filipinx/a/os and Filipinx/a/o-Americans have endured forms of

exploitation and discrimination through the immigration of Filipinx/a/os into the United States as

students or laborers in Hawaii, California, and Alaska (David, 2013; Nadal, 2011, as cited in

Hufana & Consoli, 2020, p. 4).

This research paper will further examine the research question: What experiences shape

Filipinx/a/o-American college students' experiences with mental health? Specifically how does

family, religion, immigration, racial stereotypes (e.g., model minority myth), and acculturation at

a PWI (predominantly white institution) contribute to their mental health? This research aims to

fill the gap of disaggregated data as well as incorporate more methods of Community Based

Participatory Research (CBPR). There exists a limited amount of research on the topic of

Filipinx/a/o-Americans and mental health. Of the minimal research that has been done, the

majority of the studies used surveys with close-ended questions to quantify their data rather than

anecdotal evidence. This research project looks to center community members' voices and add to

previous research as well as document the lived experiences of Filipinx/a/o-American college

students.

Acculturation and Psychological Adjustment

Filipinx/a/o-American college students are in the prime stage of their lives where they are

continuing to form their sense of identity. This period of time remains quite difficult for many

young adults but especially for students of color at predominantly white institutions. Numerous

empirical research indicates that campus racial climates shape the experiences of students in

postsecondary education, including their sense of belonging in college (Maramba & Museus,

2012, p. 499). A study that examined ethnic identity and psychological adjustment (ego and self-

esteem) in multiethnic regions found that healthy psychological adjustment is achieved through

both strong ethnic identity and a positive attitude toward other groups. The study also found that

an integration process which emphasizes a strong acceptance with one's traditional ethnic culture

and openness to other groups helps individuals maintain their mental health (Yuh, 2005, p.

1126). This particular study was conducted at a university in Hawaii and surveyed Hawaiian-

Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Filipinx/a/o-Americans. Although the racial and cultural

demographics of Hawaii are different from Santa Clara University, the findings of this study

implicate the importance of ethnic identity, acceptance of other groups, and individual mental health.

There are increasingly more studies interested in understanding racial and ethnic identity and its relation to overall mental wellbeing. A study conducted at San Diego State University created and used the Scale of Ethnic Experience to expand and develop a reliable validation instrument that could assess multiple ethnicity-related cognitive constructs for individuals of any ethnic group within the US. This instrument allows further deconstructing of acculturation to have a deeper understanding of ethnicity's relationship with mental health issues (Malcarne, Chavira, Fernandez, & Liu, 2006, p. 151). There have been several measurement tools created to look further into issues affecting Filipinx/a/o populations. The Inventory of Attitudes Towards Seeking Mental Help Services (IASMHS) is another instrument of measurement that has been utilized to research mental help seeking attitudes in Filipinx/a/os. A study from the Asia Pacific Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy looked at the differences between translated versions of the IASMHS in both English and Tagalog. There have been documented low rates of mental health service (MHS) utilization among Filipinx/a/os living in the Philippines and in other countries (Tuliao, 2014, as cited in Tuliao, Hechanova, & Velasquez, 2019, p.21). The study, *Psychometric properties of the English and Filipino version of the Inventory of Attitudes Towards Seeking Mental Help services*, found that Filipinx/a/os had a higher propensity to seek help from friends and family and perceived their lay social networks could fill the role of a mental health professional (Hechanova, Tuliao, & Ang, 2011, as cited in Tuliao, Hechanova, & Velasquez, 2019, p.35) These findings also suggest reasons why Filipinx/a/os are less likely to seek professional mental help.

Mental Help Seeking Attitudes in Filipinx/a/os

Another reason for lower mental help seeking attitudes may be due to the idea of Filipino resilience. The article "*I push through and stick with it": Exploring resilience among Filipino American adults*, examines further into how Filipinx/a/o-Americans view resilience and the effects on their mental health. Throughout Philippine history, there has been documented rebellion, revolution, and resilience as a survival mechanism from nearly 400 years of colonization (Hufana & Consoli, 2020, p. 4). It is important to note that the study found differences in how Western society views resilience as a personal character trait versus how Filipinx/a/o participants conceptualized their experienced form of resilience from the context of cultural perspective (Hufana & Consoli, 2020, p.10). A particular study done in the Philippines found that optimism and resilience are significant predictors of subjective well-being (Miranda & Cruz, 2020). Therefore, studies around Filipinx/a/o resilience are important to consider when discussing mental health. Many Filipinx/a/o-Americans may carry the pressures and feelings of needing to be resilient rather than seek the mental help they may truly need. This research question will build upon these collective research of Filipinx/a/o-Americans college students and their journeys with mental health. Of the limited research on Filipinx/a/os both in the Philippines, United States, and throughout the diaspora, few focus on the experiences of college students. This research will elaborate on various topics affecting Filipinx/a/o-American college students and their mental well-being, such as; family, religion, immigration, racial stereotypes (e.g., model minority myth), and acculturation at a PWI (predominantly white institution). The findings of this research will be essential for health and mental health providers to consider the cultural backgrounds of Filipinx/a/o-American young adults as it pertains to cultural and religious values, ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and framework of resilience.

Community Context

This project worked with members of Barkada of SCU, a cultural club at Santa Clara University that celebrates Filipinx/a/o-American culture and history. I have been an active member of Barkada since my first year at SCU and this year (senior year) I am on the executive board as the Community Development Chair. Due to the pandemic and virtual online schooling, Barkada has been connecting through weekly virtual meetings, online social events, and virtual social activism campaigns. For this project, I reached out to several members of Barkada who I have been in community with and who have been actively involved with the club at SCU.

Participants and Research Method

The primary method for data collection was through four separate focus group sessions, roughly lasting two hours each. This research was an expansion of my previous research conducted in ETHN 165: Community-Based Research Methods. My Final ETHN 165 paper discussed the results from one focus group with a total of five individuals. All participants of the first group identify as women and were either recent alumni from the SCU class of 2020 or second-years (class of 2022). Further expanding upon my research, I wanted to be able to hear from the voices of a more diverse demographic within the Filipinx/a/o-American community at SCU. Expanding the project allowed more grade levels of Filipinx/a/o-American men and non-binary students who were not represented in the original paper to participate and share their experiences of mental health.

This current research project had a total of seventeen Barkada members who opted to participate in this study. I reached out to members of Barkada through our weekly newsletters, shared an interest form during our online weekly general meetings, and shared flyers and infographics on Barkada's social media. I also reached out individually to people to talk about

my project and recruited for participation. Of the seventeen participants, three graduated with the

class of 2020, two in June of 2021, four were third-years (class of 2022), five were second-years

(2023), and three were first-years (2024). Participants ranged in identifying from first-generation

Filipinx/a/o-American to fifth-generation Filipinx/a/o-American. The focus groups occurred via

zoom where guided interview questions were presented and conversations were free to flow

candidly. This specific method was chosen because it allowed participants to share their

experiences and testimonies while also being in community with others. This also meant that

focus groups had control over topics they wanted to discuss more about and we may not have

covered certain topics as much. I prefer this method because it allows participants to speak on

subjects they want to or connected with most. The participants in each focus group had prior

relationships and a sense of community through Barkada of SCU.

I myself have been an active Barkada member for four years and have also been in

community with all the participants prior to the data collection for this research. With my

positionality as a second-generation Filipinx/a/o-American myself, I was open to conducting

one-on-one interviews to connect with the participants. However, I ultimately felt that being in a

focus group and in a community setting would allow for more comfortable and honest

conversations. In addition, since we were discussing personal topics like mental health, our

relationships with mental health, I wanted there to be a greater sense of community care with the

focus group session. All participants have had relationships and friendships throughout the years

in Barkada. This close connection between all of the participants allowed for open and honest

dialogue about the specific topic of mental health. All of the participants were directly involved

within the data collection process because they actively shared their experiences at SCU, with

their family and friends, with spirituality and religion, and how each related to their mental health.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began throughout the focus group with notetaking of recurring patterns from the answers and discussion. From there, through a thematic analysis approach, I identified and narrowed down the patterns and themes found throughout comments in the focus group. I used the process detailed in the Thematic Data Analysis lecture by Dr. Jesica S. Fernandez, which was formulated from Braune and Clarke 2008. Thematic Analysis utilizes a six step process that starts from a close reading of the data collected to the ultimate research report. I first combined my notes and transcriptions from the four separate focus groups and started question by question to find various discussion topics that were brought up. Through the thematic analysis I found three major themes in the data; Critical Cultural Community Connections, Nuances of Religion & Spirituality, and Cultivating Agency for Sustained Wellbeing, Self and Collective, Through Strategic Practices. These subtopics were formulated from the multiple discussion points shared by participants. In the results section I will go into more detail by sharing testimonies, direct quotes, and anecdotes in order to illustrate my findings.

Results

Critical Cultural Community Connections

The most prominent theme throughout all four focus groups highlights the critical aspect of cultural connections through community. The majority of participants stated that their reasons for joining Barkada and ultimately their reason for staying active members in Barkada was because of the sense of community and connection to Filipinx/a/o culture. Barkada of SCU was

one of the original cultural clubs within SCU's Multicultural Center (MCC), and remains a

valuable and significant space for students of color within SCU's predominantly White student

population.

Filipinx/a/o students at SCU come from diverse backgrounds ranging from various

socioeconomic statuses, racial demographics, and even nationality. Barkada of SCU welcomes

all and any students regardless of their background and/or how they self-identify. Though there

are active members who are international students with Philippine nationality, the majority of

Barkada members are Filipinx/a/o-American ranging from First to Fifth generation. I began with

a multipart question which allowed participants to self-identify, share their personal connections

and understandings of being Filipinx/a/o-American, as well as their community connections at

SCU and the role of Barkada on their identity. The question asked was the following:

> *What generation Filipinx/a/o-American are you?*
>
> *What does being Filipinx/a/o-American mean to you?*
>
> *What aspects of your identity have shaped your experiences at SCU? -- and has your*
> *experience at SCU affected your understanding of your identity?*
>
> *What role does Barkada have in your overall sense of community at SCU?*

The responses to the first part asking participants to share what generation Filipinx/a/o-

American they were and a little about their family immigration story showed a diverse

distribution ranging from 1.5 generation (Born in the Philippines and moved to United States as a

minor) all the way to 5th generation. The majority of participants were 1.5 and 2nd generation,

having grown up in the United States and spent a greater part of their schooling and upbringing

within American[2] culture. This aspect of the participants immigration generation remains a

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[2] I recognize American can be used within the context of the greater Americas including North
America and South America. However, within this paper I use American to refer to the United

relevant aspect because within the American context, there exists a process of acculturation to

the hegemonic society. As mentioned in the literature review, one of the studies of college

students in Hawaii found that healthy psychological adjustment (ego and self-esteem) is achieved

through strong ethnic identity. Filipinx/a/o-American youth are navigating the dominant White

American society that pushes for assimilation and often erasure of their ethnic culture and

heritage.

Therefore, these socio historical factors of forced acculturation to the hegemonic society

help to explain Filipinx/a/o-American college students' desire and efforts to connect. Connect

can often be used and understood in a broad sense, however I use it in this case because it

culminates the multiple and various interrelations my participants described in the focus groups.

First participants described a personal desire to connect with Filipinx/a/o culture and their ethnic

identity. Secondly, participants described wanting to connect through community, specifically

through a community that had similar understandings of their culture and identity of being

Filipinx/a/o-American. These connections highlight that Filipinx/a/o college students are actively

looking for connections at both the internal and interpersonal levels.

This finding of critical connections was seen between both individuals who grew up in

predominantly White populations and predominantly Asian demographics. For example, these

statements from two participants are as followed:

"Yes, my experience has affected my identity. I grew up in a predominantly

White neighborhood, where the only Filipinx/a/os I knew and saw was through

family and two other kids in the high school. I felt disconnected with my culture a

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States of America and the experiences Filipinx/a/o-Americans have within the U.S. context of
White supremacy and racial capitalism.

lot. Coming to SCU I knew I wanted to join Barkada, and since joining I've been

able to connect with my Filipinx/a/o-American culture and feel closer to my

identity and my community."

"Coming from a PWI high school, I didn't really stress my culture there. It was all

with my family, and school didn't feel like a place where I would stress my

culture. Finding Barkada opened up the world in terms of where I practice my

culture, because before I would keep it in my family or within my house. Barkada

was nice to find people who find interest in Filipinx/a/o culture and build a great

sense of community within SCU."

These previous statements by participants are clear examples of the individual aspiration to

connect with their ethnic identity as well as to connect with a greater community of others

holding those similar aspirations.

In addition, these findings were similar for participants whose hometowns were not

predominantly White. There were several participants who came from Asian-American majority

hometowns, however, and still sought out a Filipinx/a/o-American community when they came

to SCU. This finding reemphasizes the diversity within the Asian American community as well

as the cultural adjustment to a PWI. The most common statements from participants who came

from predominantly Asian communities shared they experienced a culture shock navigating a

PWI and got involved in Barkada to seek community. Here are some personal statements:

"Big culture shock from predominantly Asian to mostly White, it was really

shocking, I realized I *am* the minority."

"My high school was majority Filipin and Latinx, so it was a big culture shock
coming to SCU. Barkada and the MCC helped the fact that I'm a minority but I'm
not alone."

Whether students came from predominantly White or Asian neighborhoods, the
aspirations for cultural community connections were similar. The main difference was
that for Filipinx/a/o-American students navigating the transition from a majority
hometown to a PWI, sought out a cultural community to help adjust to the culture shock.

The next two anecdotes are shared by two First-Year participants and help to highlight
this specific cultural adjustment to SCU's community. These students began their first year at
SCU in the Fall of 2020 during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The entire 2020-2021 school year was
moved onto an online and virtual learning format and no students moved into on-campus housing
(until Spring 2021), with the exception of emergency housing.

"Being online has skewed my perception of the demographic of SCU. In most of
my classes there's a lot of White students and POC students and I never
understood we were PWI until I was in Barkada. Barkada brought me around
more POC and Filipinx/a/os, and I never got the sense that I was an outsider.
Until I visited campus recently and saw how many White students there are. I'm
thinking how when I come in the fall it might be a culture shock."

"What was interesting was that as a freshman I went into SCU in an online
environment, I went to Barkada first rather than going to school first. So I was
more immersed in I guess the BIPOC community and the MCC first. And then
this quarter (March 2021) I moved in.. Yeah there's a lot of White people. Yeah

that was definitely surprising because the first two quarters the people I mostly

interacted with were BIPOC and mostly Filipinx/a/o. And being on campus

quarter, it's like.. Oh… that's not… SCU has a lot more White people than that.

Barkada has helped with my sense of community because it was the first group I

felt welcomed in at SCU."

I found these two testimonies to be particularly interesting and important. They demonstrate that

even before knowing or understanding the racial demographics of SCU there's a desire to

connect with Filipinx/a/os and Filipinx/a/o culture. And ultimately after attending SCU and

being immersed in the greater community, there's a continued want for community with other

students of color within the PWI.

These last two anecdotes came from first year students, however, students from all grade

years held similar sentiments of longing for cultural communities. Another aspect that remains

imperative, is that these participants are of undergraduate college age, ranging from 18-22 years

old. This particular age as well as this space of a University setting are an essential time for

young individuals to develop their self-identity, self-esteem, and self-worth. In addition to self-

exploration and development, College also lends itself to a vital time of socialization and

community. Both the internal and external connections to culture are strongly linked to multiple

factors that can have positive effects on Mental Health for these Filipinx/a/o-American young

adults. These findings highlight the importance of cultural community connections for

Filipinx/a/o-American college students, especially in predominantly White spaces.

Nuances of Religion and Spirituality

When formulating the questions I was going to ask during the focus groups, I knew I

wanted to delve into the topic of religion and spirituality. As discussed in the literature review on

socio historical factors, the Philippines survived a violent 333 years of Spanish colonization but there continue to be long lasting effects of that colonization to this day. One aspect in particular is the legacy of Catholicism and the institution of religion within the nation. A grand 86 percent of Filipinx/a/os are Catholic with an estimated greater 92 percent who are overall Christian. Though Catholicism is the most popular religion in the Philippines, I brought forth the question *What role do spiritual practices and/or religion have in your lives? How might these be associated with mental health?*, for participants of all spiritualities to touch on how their practices affect their mental health.

Of the seventeen participants, all of them shared they were brought up and/or raised Catholic. As older young adults, some participants continue to practice Catholicism, some still consider themselves religious but proclaim they are not practicing as much, and some have explored other forms of spiritual practices. I was ultimately interested in learning more about the ways in which religion or spiritual practices play a role in Filipinx/a/o-Americans' mental health and/or access to mental healthcare. Through the thematic analysis, I found that the results are more nuanced and there is not a clear cut answer.

The most common theme on this particular topic was how religion, specifically Catholicism and Christianity, was used as a way to push resilience but unfortunately also presented itself as a barrier for Filipinx/a/o-American college students to discuss their mental health or receive necessary care. Common quotes from family in response to conversations of mental health that participants shared were:

"Just pray about it."

"It'll get fixed."

"Just pray on it."

"Just pray to god."

"You're one of God's strongest Angels."

These quotes were shared by multiple people from separate focus groups. I point that out to highlight that these responses are not an anomaly or uncommon. A few participants even opened up about personal experiences with reaching out to parents and family about mental health. One individual shared that their mother was against antidepressants (prescribed by a psychiatrist) and believed in prayer and attending church as a solution. This individual expressed their personal frustration and shared how a lot of the responses felt like their feelings and mental health were being dismissed and ignored.

However in order to understand the deeper nuances of religion and spirituality, it is imperative to look at the role it has on people's lives. For many people, religion exists as a way to find meaning in their existence, process situations and feelings, and of course many other reasons. One participant in this study shared, "[Catholicism] has shaped how I cope and come to understand the world and life, death and hope". They shared, along with a few other participants, that they have actively attended masses as SCU while they were on campus. This demonstrates the important role religion has in these individuals' lives and the positive effects religion can have on their mental health. In addition, participants shared anecdotes of their families and parents and the ways religion influences their lives. Another participant shared, "I'm practicing less, but for my mom it's a mental health thing for her. She's going through a lot right now and she's found peace in prayer and religion". This quote in particular showcases that religion may not be the way they personally choose to cope but they recognize the importance and benefits of religion in terms of mental health. Their parents or family members may offer religion as a tool for healing because that may be the method that has worked for them personally.

This particular section and these findings are not meant to state a stance that religion is bad or good for one's mental health. Rather, it is pointing out the ways Filipinx/a/o-American college students are navigating mental health within various cultures and innovating practices and strategies that work for them. This idea will be further discussed in *Cultivating Agency for Sustained Wellbeing, self and collective, Through Strategic Practices*. The nuances of religion and spirituality are important to understand unexpected barriers to mental health and to ultimately integrate this knowledge into policies and interventions.

Cultivating Agency for Sustained Wellbeing, Self and Collective, Through Strategic Practices

Through the thematic analysis approach, it remained clear that Filipinx/a/o-American college students had a deep desire to discuss topics of mental health as well as find ways to maintain and improve their own personal wellbeing. There are often misconceptions about the Asian-American community, perpetuated by the model minority myth, that we do not "believe" in mental health or that we do not wish to improve or help our mental wellbeing. The results from this study demonstrate the opposite and showcase that Filipinx/a/o-Americans have not only a desire to maintain positive mental health but are navigating ways in which they can exercise agency towards healing and health.

The participants in this research project are perfect examples of this finding that Filipinx/a/o-American college students aspire towards agency for sustained wellbeing. Participants were open, vulnerable, and willing to talk about mental health and were eager to help continue difficult taboo dialogues. This courage to participate in and of itself shows the desire for agency. This following anecdote is an example of that, the want to cultivate self-agency over their wellbeing exists even though it may be challenging to know how that process

goes. As mentioned in the Participants and Research Method section, I reached out to individuals

to recruit for participation in this research project. When communicating with peers about the

project they mentioned they were hesitant because they did not think they would be helpful for

the project and did not think they would have anything to contribute. However in their focus

group, I noticed they were active in discussions and had several valuable points to share. In

particular, they shared the following:

> "[Mental health] is so taboo to the point where we don't know how to deal with
>
> things. It's hard to even go about it or what's available. Coming from the
>
> perspective of a guy, our emotions are not supposed to be expressed at all, gender
>
> norms are prevalent, man up, set expectations of how you're supposed to act, so
>
> you can't really be dealing with these things."

He covered multiple relevant and paramount topics within this quote including, the overall

stigma around mental health as well as the challenges with masculinity and mental health. The

specific line where he states that he doesn't know how to go about it or what's available

showcases the want for resources and guidance with regards to mental health but recognizes the

difficulties and obstacles surrounding it.

At the end of each focus group I asked, *What are your hopes and dreams for the*

Filipinx/a/o-American communities? For yourself and/or your family? The same

participant who felt they did not have anything to contribute but stated multiple valuable

points during the discussion ended by saying, "I'm hopeful that there are a lot of

resources available, that it becomes more normalized to get help and to continue having

these conversations about mental health". After the focus groups and as I went through

my data analysis, this anecdote resonated with me because it perfectly illustrated what other participants also shared in their aspirations towards agency for sustained wellbeing.

Filipinx/a/o-American college students navigate through multiple cultures and formulate strategies that work for their personal wellbeing. This mixed collective of various strategies further expands the notion that Filipinx/a/o-American students have a desire for positive wellbeing and better mental health. These strategies can be seen in the previous section *Nuances of Religion & Spirituality* in that participants find value and benefits in religion for mental health but may not personally think it is the best method for them. Each individual expressed different strategies and methods but they were all similar in the fact that they were creating methods that worked for them and were pulling from multiple cultures. In addition, it's imperative to note that these cultivated strategies are not to be compared or diminished when compared to methodologies used by the White majority. Most often, discourse around mental health is led by White people and White voices.

This research is important because it highlights Filipinx/a/o-American voices and narratives. Filipinx/a/o-American college students are looking at practices and strategies they already have to innovatively create health and wellness that works for them. They are implementing practices and traditions that have been passed down to them and shared by their family and culture but also adding in from resources they have from other outside sources. These hybrid methods must be culturally, historically, and contextually situated and not be viewed in a deficit perspective but rather with meaningful implication. This remains vital in changing the narrative that Filipinx/a/o-Americans are lacking or less than but rather navigating the various cultures they are a part of.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research truly highlights the significance and value of community and culture as it relates to mental health. This research started by trying to find more unconventional barriers to mental healthcare access, but the end results share so much more. Filipinx/a/o-American college students are active and eager for agency with their own mental wellbeing. They are navigating challenging spaces by cultivating hybrid strategies and practices that work for them. Filipinx/a/o-American college students continue to foster community amongst themselves to grow deeper connections with their culture and heritage but also to critically engage with the community.

This research remains important for silent majorities like Filipinx/a/o-Americans to have important documentation of their experiences with mental health and their Filipinx/a/o culture. Filipinx/a/o-Americans are a silent majority in that they are the second largest Asian group but are often not represented in media or research. This research is especially important for healthcare professionals in areas with large Filipinx/a/o populations such as the greater San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego regions. There are a multitude of barriers to access to mental healthcare and this research begins to document unconventional barriers. This research also highlights the importance of community and support, especially within this White supremacist nation. The discrimination, marginalization, and othering experienced by Filipinx/a/o-Americans puts them in a position to turn to what they know for survival. Filipinx/a/os and their resilience have allowed them to survive hundreds of years of colonial violence. Healing from mental health issues also means healing from the colonial mentality many Filipinx/a/os have. This research to me is only just the beginning. However, there must be continued conversations about mental health within the Filipinx/a/o-American community as well as with mental health professionals so they may provide the best and proper care.

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