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Making Meaning of Parental Influence among *Pinays* in College

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Since the 1960s, Filipinos have constituted the second largest immigrant population in the country, and they are the largest Asian-origin immigrant group in California and in the nation (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). The number of Filipino immigrants in the United States tripled between 1980 and 2006, from 501,440 to 1.6 million, exceeding the Chinese, Indian, and Vietnamese foreign-born count (Terrazas, 2008). Almost half (45.8%) of Filipino immigrants resided in California in 2006, while the other 54.2% primarily populated Hawaii, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey (Terrazas, 2008). This flocking of Philippine-born immigrants to America was a result of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, federal legislation that abolished the national-origin quotas in immigration. While these statistics might imply that Filipinos are a very visible group in the U.S., the truth is that they remain invisible in educational institutions and in mainstream America (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009). The U.S. colonization of the Philippines for half a century has largely shaped the image of Filipinos in America. They were treated as “nationals,” meaning, they were neither aliens nor citizens (Ignacio, de la Cruz, Emmanuel, & Toribio, 2004). Ever since the Philippines was granted independence in the late 1940s, Filipinos became “alien” and regarded simply as “Asian” (Buenavista et al., 2009). Today, the invisibility of Filipinos and Filipino Americans remains and they are further categorized as honorary whites and model racial minorities (Root, 1997). This lack of public attention is especially salient in institutions of higher education.

Researchers have found that automatically treating Filipino American students as “model minorities” is unjustifiable (Maramba, 2008; Mau, 1990; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Posadas, 1999). Because of the monolithic racialization of Asian Americans, colleges and universities frequently overlook the disparity in Asian American immigrant backgrounds when designing student services programs (Chang & Kiang, 2002). Disaggregating Asian American data is crucial to providing a more accurate portrayal of their lives and circumstances in postsecondary education and in the broader society (Chang & Kiang, 2002). The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of an Asian American ethnic subgroup—Filipino and Filipino Americans—in higher education. It is imperative for practitioners to become multiculturally competent when working with this group (Nadal, 2009).

This study focuses on the college-aged children of the second largest immigrant group in the United States—Filipino Americans. For the purposes of this project, *Pinays*, the daughters of Filipino immigrants, were studied. *Pinays*, a Tagalog term used to describe Filipina and Filipina American women, are a group of concern because gender expectations arise when Filipino Americans articulate their plans to pursue higher education after high school (Espiritu, 2003). Espiritu (2001) alludes to the existence of gendered parenting among Filipino immigrants such that “immigrant parents tend to restrict the autonomy, mobility, and personal

decision making of their daughters more than that of their sons” (p. 431). Proportionally more females than males argued about their conflicting goals with their parents, and many second-generation Filipinos resent the gender inequities in their families (Espiritu, 2001).

Growing up *Pinay* was full of its contradictions. I was raised in a culture where I am expected to be both strong and vulnerable. I was raised in a culture where women want to be taken care of, yet given our freedom. I was raised in a culture where I needed to strive for success, while remaining humble and putting family first. (Burgos, 2010, p. 76)

This quotation typifies the intergenerational conflicts that are socially recognized occurrences in Filipino communities, and this study aims to explore how these conflicts play out in *Pinays'* college lives. This research project investigates how Filipina American children of immigrants adjust, cope, and juggle familial pressures simultaneously with collegiate responsibilities. This exploratory undertaking takes the initial step of investigating the influence of parental expectations on the various decisions that Filipina American students make in postsecondary education.

The findings of this study are intended to serve as a guide for professionals in institutions of higher education who serve Filipinas and Filipina American students. Topics of interest include *Pinays'* choice of major, involvement in extracurricular activities, and post-graduate plans. Through interviews, the study aims to capture how immigrant parental expectations are manifested in the various academic and social decisions of *Pinays*. Given that parents play a major role in forming the subjectivities of *Pinay* college students, I ask the following research questions:

- How do *Pinays* interpret the expectations of their parents regarding their undergraduate careers?
- How are these parental expectations communicated to *Pinay* college students?
- In what areas do *Pinays* use these interpretations in making various decisions in college?

## **Review of Related Literature**

While there is a small body of literature that deals with the tensions that female Filipino children experience with their immigrant parents, few scholars have examined how these strains may or may not affect the schooling of college-aged *Pinays*. A couple of studies have uncovered the immense pressures that *Pinays* endure (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001; Maramba, 2008). Maramba (2008) sought to investigate the influences that affect Filipina American students' experience

while in college and found that family played a very influential role in their undergraduate lives. However, no study has endeavored to dissect the specific aspects of college that are truly affected by Filipino parents. Students' college experiences comprise various facets such as institutional selection, place of residence, extracurricular activities, college major choice, and postbaccalaureate plans. The intricacies of how family and parents affect any or all of these aspects remain unexamined. The following section discusses what is currently known about children of Filipino immigrants.

### *Children of Filipino Immigrants*

The American-born, second-generation Filipino youth shares several of the challenges that offspring of other Asian immigrants face: a lack of social acceptance, low income, negative self-image (Kitano & Daniels, 2001). Those who want to go to college often find the financial burdens a hindrance. Moreover, they know little about the origins of their culture and yet cannot gain acceptance into the mainstream. Therefore, their level of assimilation is perceived to be ambiguous (Kitano & Daniels, 2001).

There is a troubling paradox in Filipino American educational attainment: although immigrants arrive with relatively high levels of postsecondary education, their children are unable to replicate these same high levels (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). Society perceives the high educational attainment of the parents of this group as an indicator of positive outcomes for their children. However, their education is equivalent to a degree in an American technical school. This means that Filipino parents run into challenges when relating to the college experiences of their children who attend American universities (Nadal, 2009).

### *Gendered Expectations and Aspirations*

Leong, Kao, and Lee (2004) proposed that the role of family must be accounted for when investigating Asian Americans' decision-making process. Family is a central part of the lives of the children of Filipino immigrants. Filipino American girls experience intense parental pressure to succeed, but are unable to articulate their distress with their family due to fear of sanctions. In Maramba's (2008) qualitative exploration of the ways Filipina American students negotiated their home environment with their college lives, three themes emerged: family/parent influence, home obligations/gender differences, and importance of negotiating their Filipina American identity within the home and university. The gender differences cited by Maramba's college student participants mainly existed in the home front (e.g., daughters were not allowed to go out as much as sons). It is not clear how the differences in treatment are manifested in college.

Gender expectations arise when Filipino Americans articulate their plans to pursue higher education after high school (Kao, 1995). The trend varies between females and males such that the former have higher educational achievements and aspirations than the latter (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001). Filipino parents also tend to have higher educational expectations of their daughters than of their sons. Similarly, the differentiation between boys and girls is also apparent within the fields that Filipino parents expect their children to pursue—engineering for boys and medical practice for girls (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001). Although female Filipino American high school students aspire to attend more competitive colleges compared to males, their plans are curtailed by the importance of gender roles within their families. Espiritu and Wolf (2001) note that “Filipino parents pursued contradictory tactics with their daughters’ education by pushing them to excel in high school but then ‘pulling the emergency brake’ when they contemplated college by expecting them to stay at home, even if it meant going to a less competitive college” (p. 168).

Rumbaut (1999) coined the term “achievement paradox” to describe a phenomenon in which discussing problems outside of the Filipino family would inevitably bring shame on family members. Filipino immigrant parents have been characterized as keeping to traditions of respecting parental authority and downplaying individual autonomy for the sake of family cohesion and solidarity (Fuligni, 1998). When Maramba (2008) studied the perspectives of Filipina Americans on their college experience, she advocated for further research on “unpacking” categorical concepts such as culture, ethnicity, gender, and family, while recognizing that Asian American students are a heterogeneous group. The study’s implications address the need for education practitioners to continue to explore their understanding of Filipina American college women to create a more inclusive university environment and meaningful college experience for these students.

The aforementioned findings warrant a study to investigate the ways of thinking that *Pinays* go through as they carry on with their undergraduate careers. The existing research about daughters of Filipino immigrants only scratches the surface in that scholars look largely at academic and psychological outcomes in K-12 levels. Many studies incorporate Filipino American students in the Asian American bracket—a technique that might not work because of the distinct immigration history of Filipinos in the United States. In what specific ways do Filipino families help create a different experience for *Pinay* college students? What arenas of college life are particularly affected by parental pressures? These questions are rarely broached by researchers interested in Filipino American children. The literature cited above points to conflicts that may not be helpful to individuals who work with the Filipino community in colleges and universities. A plethora of statistics describe the demographics of this Asian American subgroup,

but qualitative investigations that tell their narratives are lacking. The framework for my study provides a further rationale for why college-aged *Pinays* must be studied separately.

### **Framework**

When investigating how Filipina American college students make sense of their parental expectations, it is crucial to employ a lens that considers the uniqueness of *Pinay* experiences that are distinct from the stories of other women of color. A *peminist* framework (de Jesus, 2005) is therefore an appropriate lens to use for this study. *Peminism* depicts Filipina American consciousness, theory, and culture, with the *p* specifically connoting *Pinay* or *Pilipina*, words used to refer to American-born, female Filipinos (de Jesus, 2005). Also called *Pinayism* or *Pinay studies*, the framework depicts Filipina American struggles against racism, sexism, imperialism, and homophobia and struggles for decolonization, consciousness, and liberation. Unlike other Asian countries' colonial history, the Philippines was occupied by Spain for over three hundred years—an event that significantly shaped the customs, names, cuisine, and religion of the Filipino people (Nadal, 2009). In addition, the American and Japanese occupations of the Philippines in the 20<sup>th</sup> century also vastly contributed to the country's educational institutions where English was the main language of instruction (Nadal, 2009). Thus, *Peminism* is a distinctive framework to employ in this study due to the unique influences that *Pinays* bring to the discourse on Asian Americans. Melinda de Jesus (2005) articulated the need for this philosophical framework in her book *Pinay Power: Peminist Critical Theory* by acknowledging that prevalent Asian American studies' models today have limited society's full comprehension of the ramifications of the neocolonial relationships between the Philippines and the United States.

The *peminist* framework serves as a looking-glass through which I view the world of Filipinas and Filipina Americans. As a Filipina myself, I have become aware of the internalized oppression that Linda Pierce (2005) refers to in her piece: “the stronghold of colonial ideologies [on Filipinos and Filipino Americans]...consistently present[ed] messages that [they] are backward, inferior, barbaric, and uncivilized and then promised that there is an alternative” (pp. 43, 35). The alternative is to assimilate into a normative ideal—that is, whiteness or American-ness—which promises economic opportunity, equal treatment under the law, and each individual's right to pursue happiness (Pierce, 2005). Pierce further asserts that being Filipina American, or *Pinay*, means being colonized—first by Spain and then by the United States—regardless of whether the individual was alive or present in the process of colonization. The denial of this internalized oppression helps sustain the colonial complex. Hence, I sought to interview

children of immigrants to find out how their parents' colonial history might have manifested in these students' lives.

Tintiangco-Cubales (2005) argues that *Peminism* is unique in that it addresses the interconnectedness of Filipinos across the diaspora, or the scattered settlements of *Pin@ys*<sup>1</sup> in and outside the United States. More specifically, the treatment of *Pinays* in foreign lands has been affected by the stereotypical statements that describe them as submissive, mail-order brides, prostitutes, and maids or domestic workers. Tintiangco-Cubales (2005) advocates for *Pinays* to become more critical of these issues and stereotypes and to make connections with how classism, neocolonialism, and sexism have pushed many of these women to such degrading positions. I find Tintiangco-Cubales' analysis relevant to this research project because I aimed to investigate how these *Pinay* stereotypes may or may not be internalized by the study's participants, not by way of prostitution or domestic work, but through the college decisions they make. These stereotypes may originate from the larger society, but as Pierce (2005) points out, "[*Pinays*'] parents and grandparents, having inhaled the air in the Philippines, with slow deep breaths, raise children with certain 'givens'—known variables that are less of a conscious understanding and more of a subtle awareness—like the act of breathing itself" (p. 32). A goal of this project was to find out what these "givens" are—the factors that make *Pinays* a unique group of children of immigrants. The research questions intended to uncover the specific "givens" within *Pinays*' collegiate lives vis-à-vis their parental expectations.

*Peminism* is a relatively young framework and its origins are rooted in debunking the image of the Filipina as a submissive mail-order bride, maid, or prostitute. Applying the conceptual framework to this study was a novel undertaking in that the project gauged the effects of colonization on the decisions that daughters of Filipino immigrants make in their undergraduate careers. This study contributed to the construction of *Peminism* because it expanded the range of *Pinays* who were subjected to the aftereffects of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. This project endeavored to include college students who are children of Filipino immigrants in the conversation regarding the implications of the American colonization of the Philippines. The indirect outcome of the study was for these undergraduate *Pinays* to become more critical of the challenges they might face. The achievement of a healthy Filipina American identity means having an acute and constant awareness of the systems of colonial imperialism and awareness of the obstacles that they and their family have had and continue to face (Pierce, 2005).

## Design and Methodology

### *Paradigm and Research Tradition*

I adopted a constructivist paradigm in my study of college students who are 1.5- and second-generation *Pinays*. The 1.5 generation consists of foreign-born *Pinays* who arrived in the U.S. prior to age 13 (Nadal, 2009). I use the term “second-generation” to describe individuals who were born in the U.S. but whose one or both parents were born in the Philippines (Nadal, 2009). I relied on the participants’ view of their situation by inductively developing a pattern of meaning within their undergraduate experiences (Creswell, 2007). My focus was on the specific contexts (i.e., familial, immigrant, educational) in which the participants lived to comprehend their cultural and historical settings (Creswell, 2007). My own background as a *Pinay* also shaped the interpretation of my findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the participants (the respondents) and I (the knower) co-created understandings of the topic in question. I also selected the constructivist paradigm because it went hand-in-hand with the methodology I employed—grounded theory.

A constructivist approach means more than looking at how individuals view their situations. It not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation. The theory *depends* on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130)

I employed Charmaz’s take on grounded theory because I recognized that although I was on the receiving end of the interviewees’ responses, I used my own sensibilities and experiences as a female immigrant to create a picture of how Filipina Americans made sense of their parents’ expectations. The way I interpreted the respondents’ answers to my questions was influenced by how I viewed the world and the literature I had gathered regarding the issue.

In this project, I was partial to the constructivist grounded theory route because of its flexible guidelines and its emphasis on the researcher’s view, embedded experiences, hidden situations, and relationships (Creswell, 2007). I speculated that hierarchies of power and opportunity would emerge from my data. I listened to the voices of the participants and their views of how familial factors shaped their college experience. Having gone through the decision-making process myself, I brought my personal experiences to the study. My assumptions were complemented best by a research tradition that acknowledged the researcher’s personal values and experiences.

Another reason why I selected grounded theory was because published literature on Filipina Americans does not investigate their perceptions and barely scratches the surface of *Pinays’* narratives. Filipino Americans were also



commonly lumped with Asian Americans, a racial group touted to have minimal educational problems. I surmised that Filipino Americans, especially 1.5- and second-generation *Pinays*, encountered strong familial influences that swayed them to make specific decisions. Their family's socioeconomic status, opportunities for mobility and legalization, or combinations of other factors were likely to impact a significant part of the students' postsecondary plans, thereby disregarding their own personal dreams and desires. In addition, Filipina American students might also be socialized to pursue a professional route, likely ignoring the humanities and social sciences. Such choice processes were potentially a result of parental urging and role modeling. A grounded theory approach assisted me in determining common threads that ran through the participants' responses.

### *Sample Selection*

The sample consisted of twelve 1.5- and second-generation Filipina American college students. The literature on children of Filipino immigrants commonly speaks about both types of generations and the vast similarities they possess (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Because of the preponderance of post-1965 immigrants from the Philippines, these two types of immigrant generations deserved to be studied due to their increasing presence in U.S. educational institutions. All of the participants were enrolled full-time at a public research university on the west coast. All 12 participants came from different year levels in college, except for freshman year. I excluded students in their first year because they may not be as reflective of their experiences in college as second-year students and above.

Due to the low representation of Filipino and Filipina students in the undergraduate population, the selection of the participants was purposeful (Patton, 2001). The various avenues of recruitment included multiple classroom visits in Asian American Studies courses, announcements in student organization meetings, dissemination of information through student listservs, and referrals from colleagues. The breakdown of year in school of the participants is as follows: sophomores (n = 3), juniors (n = 5), and seniors (n = 4). With regard to immigration status, nine participants were born in the U.S., two were born in the Philippines, and one was born in Japan. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants were used in place of their actual names.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

In my investigation of *Pinay* college students, I used a data collection method common to the constructivist grounded theory tradition: intensive semi-structured interviews. The interviews averaged 80 minutes each (see Appendix A

for the demographic information sheet and Appendix B for the interview protocol). The interviews were semi-structured to focus on the specific aspects of *Pinays'* collegiate experience. Intensive interviewing elicits participants' interpretation of their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). I maintained flexibility when asking questions to allow for the emergence of themes in my data. A constructivist approach emphasized eliciting the participants' definition of terms, situations, and events, and attempting to extract their assumptions. I gave movie passes to the participants as an incentive for participating in the study.

### *Data Analysis*

By employing a grounded theory approach to my study, I was already involved in analyzing data even during my data collection period. I employed what Creswell (2007) calls the "data analysis spiral." My initial step was to organize my data into computer files, replacing my participants' names with the pseudonyms they selected. I read my transcripts several times to familiarize and immerse myself in the data. I wrote notes on the margins of my transcripts to identify key concepts that occurred to me and developed a long list of open codes. Coding refers to categorizing segments of data with a short name that summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2006). This technique was consistent with grounded theory because the codes arose from the data instead of being imposed early on by the questions asked.

My initial coding allowed me to study fragments of data closely and to see where I was missing pertinent information. In this stage, I kept my codes short, simple, and open to change. I also adopted my participants' terms (in vivo codes) to understand my data. For instance, the words "job stability," "personal interest," and "economic prosperity" were words that emerged within my transcripts. I also used the memoing technique to analyze the most predominant categories in my data and to summarize the properties of each category. The last few steps in my data analysis spiral involved interrelating my categories to develop a story (Creswell, 2007).

### *Limitations*

The interview data showcased the perspectives of undergraduate students enrolled in a highly competitive public research university. Therefore, their responses might not reflect the experiences and sentiments of Filipina/Filipina American college students in other U.S. institutions of higher education. Similarly, many participants who volunteered came from an undergraduate student organization known for its progressive and critical philosophies. Membership in the organization might have shaped these participants' ways of thinking. In addition, the data gathered presented a one-sided perspective of the

parent-child dynamic. This research study would therefore be complemented by a project that investigated Filipino parents' points-of-view.

## **Findings**

The interview protocol aimed to explore various aspects in the participants' undergraduate lives (e.g., extracurricular activities, place of residence, college choice) and how Filipino parents played a role in shaping these areas. The participants mostly discussed their college major and post-graduate plans. Two issues emerged in the participants' stories regarding their majors and career aspirations: (a) parents' nonverbal expression of expectations, and (b) the children's unconscious desire to compromise.

### *Parents' Nonverbal Expression of Expectations*

*Pinay* students in this study generally spoke about the indirect communication styles that their parents employed when articulating expectations of their children. The participants' stories of why and how their mothers and fathers immigrated to the U.S. appeared to be instrumental in conveying the parents' dreams for their children—to be comfortable and financially secure. Many Filipino immigrant parents came to the U.S. in the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, a time when a dictatorship governed the Philippines and the country's economy was volatile. Hence, these families' view of pursuing a college degree revealed a somewhat utilitarian vein in that a baccalaureate degree was a means for facilitating an economically better place in society. All the participants expressed matter-of-factly that their parents were seeking more prosperous lives when they came to America. For instance, Noelle shared, "I think it's pretty similar to why a lot of people immigrated to the United States, to pursue better economic opportunities, start fresh." Similarly, Leilani candidly purported, "Money is always the answer." The financial awareness that these women exhibited suggested that their mothers and fathers have spoken about their immigrant stories.

Filipino parents also demonstrated a work ethic fostered by diligence and perseverance. The *Pinay* respondents spoke about growing up in a household where at least one parent was working over 40 hours a week and where one or both parents were employed in more than one job. A common immigration pattern that these Filipino families exhibited was one where a parent (usually the husband) first sojourned to the U.S. and the other parent followed a few years later. Due to the employment commitments of their fathers and mothers, the children of Filipino immigrants were typically left in the care of grandparents,

uncles, aunts, and sometimes nannies. Lolita described how she viewed her mother as the one who brought home the money:

My mom finally came here with my dad...that's all I've known her for, sacrifice—self-sacrifice. She's the breadwinner in the family. Since I was born, she's had two or three jobs seven days a week so I don't see her. I grew up with my grandparents. She just wasn't able to attend a lot of my things at school, and I used to feel bad about that when I saw all my friends had their family there to support.

On a similar note, Veronica shares:

My mom was more like—in the beginning she was a nurse, but she quit and got into real estate and businesses. So she was usually like—pretty much busy or doing something else while my *yaya* [nanny] was pretty much the one raising us.

The interviews revealed that often the mother was the parent who spent significant hours at work. This set-up of having an absent mother was typically found in families where the women were in the healthcare profession, mostly nurses holding one or more positions. Feelings of resentment characterized the unintended effect of these circumstances on their daughters. Lolita confessed:

I would internalize that and feel bad about it and I was—I remember feeling angry, I remember feeling frustrated, feeling sorry for my family and just wondering where my mom was and I remember worrying about her when I didn't hear from her for two days because she never got a chance to call because she was always on her feet working and I think now, I understand it, but it's sad that—it's something we need to understand and that self-sacrifice, like that dream of coming here can be destructive. It can be a hurtful process.

Veronica admitted:

What kind of mom would do that? What mentality—I mean, her philosophy is, I guess to always be I don't know. I really don't know because I would expect her to like give us some real morals, raise us, take care of us, love us, be there for us, be there when it's our birthdays, but she's always like not there for us.

While these *Pinay* students understood the pressing reasons for their mothers' absence (i.e., for sacrifice), their responses evoked feelings of disappointment and pain from not experiencing the care of a female parent.

The overarching message that the participants deduced from these stories of struggle was that they, children of Filipino immigrants, ought to obtain a minimum of a bachelor's degree. A narrative that conveyed the reasons why the participants' parents made the decision to come to the United States typically prefaced this expectation. Most of these Filipino parents came with undergraduate degrees or some college, and the demand for their labor existed in the U.S. These parents were what Portes and Rumbaut (2006) described as people who undertake

the journey to a new country “to attain the dream of a new lifestyle that has reached their country but that is impossible to fulfill in them” (p. 19).

### *Finding a Happy Medium*

Consistent with the intent to rise within the socioeconomic ladder was the message that *Pinay* students ought to make educational choices that would help facilitate the goal of mobility. In a developing country such as the Philippines, college major selection and postsecondary opportunities were inextricably linked—one’s field of study would likely determine one’s job after graduation. Consequently, it became no surprise that this kind of awareness that Filipino immigrant parents realized and lived in their home countries would be transmitted to their children. When I asked the participants if their parents had a say or influence in any of their college major decisions, a general sense of acceptance and support characterized the initial responses. As the interviews progressed, indicators of having to compromise or reach a happy medium emerged.

### *College Major Selection*

Immigrant Filipino parents came from an educational system in the Philippines where their college major field usually determined their likelihood of landing a lucrative job. These parents’ immigrant statuses, more often than not, indicated that they came to the U.S. with valuable human capital that enabled them to secure white- and blue-collar positions.

When the participants first started to speak about their parents’ thoughts on their college majors, these *Pinay* students conveyed a positive reception from their parents. Tina cited that her parents were open about the major their daughter pursued, “In terms of my major my parents were like just do whatever you want, as long as you’re happy, as long as you can take care of us after, they were fine with it.” Similarly, Ailene revealed how her mom provided her with advice on how she should proceed with switching majors:

She always tells me, “Just as long as you do whatever makes you happy, do whatever you want.” You know what I mean? She was like, “Yeah, just do whatever makes you happy. Do whatever you want. And just make sure that you get your degree.” That’s always what she tells me, get a degree.

Nine out of twelve participants began their college career with a science major. As of the end of this research project, only two had not switched to the social sciences or the humanities. The participants cited a number of influences for opting to major in the sciences, such as proficiency in biology or chemistry, the love of numbers, the passion for helping people through medicine, and the desire to later help a family member who is chronically ill. In the course of their undergraduate studies, they encountered difficulties in science classes or

discovered other passions from participating in extracurricular activities. When asked what her parents thought about her college major choices, Isabel disclosed:

“You know, your cousin majored in English and now they can’t find a job.” So not only was it like going into college, but also picking a secure major and a secure career path, which is probably why I’m a science major. And they’re like, “you know, your cousin went to culinary school and now he’s having trouble finding a job” and they would sort of—kind of scoff at it, it was just like you know, they made this decision and that’s why they can’t find a job and they were like always, “Isabel, pick something smart. Pick something practical.” And so that definitely influenced me.

Isabel’s response showed the utilitarian and pragmatic point-of-view that Filipino parents adopted when advising their children about college. Kitty revealed a similar experience, “They [parents] sometimes ask me, ‘what are you going to do with psychology?’ Because my uncle, they told him, ‘Oh, my niece, like, oh, she majored in psychology and now she’s just a data entry person.’”

Despite the telling remarks about receiving pressure to pursue certain lucrative college majors, the *Pinays* in this study seemed to “see the light” and eventually took on majors that assured the satisfaction of their parents as well as their own personal interests. In the beginning of college, Tina was having second thoughts about pursuing social work because of monetary reasons, but later on realized she found the prospect feasible:

My family is like, “Oh you’re majoring in sociology, are you going to do social work? It makes a lot of money, you should do that, blah blah blah blah blah,” and so that’s why I kind of just brushed it off, but then I think about it and it’s like, that’s what I want to do.

### *Post-Graduation Plans*

An expectation that truly came out of the interview data was the idea of caring for Filipino parents when they retired and aged. Linked to this caretaking role was the notion of earning enough money to support *Pinays*’ future family together with their elderly parents. *Pinays* opted to take a more financially promising professional route so they can be capable of performing the responsibilities of a caring daughter. Tina revealed the expectation that her family has once she completes her B.A.:

Once I’m stable, I’m going to be giving them \$500.00 or once I’m stable, I’m going to be helping my younger sister-like she’s a sophomore, I’m going to be helping with her tuition in school. So a lot of it is very financial, like the one that they make very clear is that I’m going to take care of them financially.

Ailene expressed her plans of looking after her mother after graduation:

She just—for me, it's always what I hear from her is just she sees me as being successful like, business woman kind of type that does things. Obviously, it's ideal that I make a lot of money. (Laughs) But, like, you know, just—I think what she really wants is for me to have my own car, me to have my own house but never forget her. You know? You know nowadays, a lot of older people are like, in, you know, convalescent homes because their kids leave them alone. Like, I would never leave my mom alone, like, never ever, ever.

Similar to college major selection, the post-graduate plans of *Pinays* eventually came to a happy medium such that their parents' desires and their own interests were manifested in their prospects. In our interview, Ailene communicated her wishes to become a singer:

I mean, that's something that I want to look into, like, do it on the side, like maybe start going to café bars or something like that and just like singing. I'm not really into big on song writing but like, if I could find somebody to pair up with and something that I don't mind, I mean, obviously that's something that I want to do on the side. It's not something that I would want to like make my ultimate goal, like, you know, to be a singer 'coz I don't really want to do the whole music industry thing. I don't feel like I would really enjoy it as much as I should. But I don't know why I feel that way. I just do. I think 'coz I see the—there's always—you know the negative sides of the music industry...it can get pretty ugly.

Although Ailene appeared to be very passionate about singing, she convinced herself that it was just “common sense” to pursue other career tracks such as being a psychologist. Her concern for her mother's well-being seemed to trump the pursuit of her passions. However, like Tina, this coming to a compromise was an unconscious process such that the participants barely recognized that this movement toward the middle might have roots in their immigrant upbringing.

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the intricacies of parental influence and expectations on *Pinay* college student lives. The interview responses revealed that *Pinays* used interpretations of their parents' expectations instead of engaging in a straightforward conversation regarding their roles as children of Filipino immigrants. These interpretations were formed by listening to parents' histories of immigration and parents' current situations as workers in America. Likewise, the *Pinays'* accounts of how their parents communicated with them revealed that Filipino parents typically exemplified hard work and engaged in modeling to convey that their children ought to do the same. Filipino parents showed behaviors of diligence and sacrifice, which in turn portrayed a good work

ethic that their children tended to emulate. These dynamics were mainly infused in *Pinays'* college major selection and post-graduate planning.

Filipino parents' modeling served as a driving force for the *Pinay* participants to work hard and succeed. This finding is a corollary to Maramba's (2008) study showing that *Pinays'* understanding of parent struggles functioned as a tool for awareness and as a catalyst to help these women become successful. These students' definitions of success, manifested in attaining a bachelor's degree, were molded by the examples that their parents demonstrated. When the participants were asked whether actual parent-child conversations took place regarding expectations, most of them did not recall engaging in such discussions with their parents. This implies that conveying parent struggles via modeling was the medium by which Filipino parents communicated their expectations.

The interview data also showed that mothers became a strong figure in the family by taking on more than one job. This phenomenon was typical among mothers who were recruited and employed as nurses by U.S. hospitals. This employment pattern was a by-product of the relationship that the United States fostered with the Philippines in the early 1960s. A significant percentage of the post-1965 Filipino women immigrants, who outnumbered the men, belonged to the nursing profession and to a lesser degree, occupational therapists, and were trained in the Philippines (Kitano & Daniels, 2001). The Philippines has been a major source of foreign-trained nurses in the United States, with at least 25,000 Filipino nurses arriving between 1966 and 1985 (Espiritu, 1995). In 2000, 1 out of 10 immigrant Filipinos and 1 out of 6 to 7 immigrant Filipino women was a nurse, compared to just over 2% of all Filipino Americans born in the U.S. and 4% of Filipino American women born in the U.S. (Bankston, 2006). These statistics were reflected among the mothers of the twelve participants in this study. This finding embodies what Pierce (2005) described as the American promise of achieving economic opportunity among immigrants who assimilate into a normative ideal. These mothers took advantage of the opportunity to work in the U.S. by responding to the employment prospects advertised by American companies. The efforts exerted by Filipino parents came from their desire to fulfill the American Dream of attaining a moderate or high socioeconomic status.

The findings also revealed a strained relationship between mothers and daughters, similar to Maramba's (2008) results. The data in this study, however, specifically pointed to the resentment that *Pinays* felt as a result of their mothers' absence from home to earn a living. These findings speak to Pierce's (2005) idea of *Pinays* being more exposed to the consequences of colonial imperialism and developing awareness of the obstacles that their immigrant families constantly faced. The assimilation into a normative ideal (i.e., whiteness or American-ness), which promised financial prosperity, came through in Veronica's and Lolita's accounts. Their parents strove to belong to the American workforce and pull



themselves up by their bootstraps to provide for their families. However, the narratives of how *Pinay* students received their parents' messages are examples of instances that *Peminism* fails to cover.

All students in this study detailed how their parents have influenced their choices in college major and occupational paths. Their accounts demonstrated the immigrant propensity to achieve socioeconomic mobility by way of hard work and diligence. This sample of college-going daughters of Filipino immigrants manifested their parents' aspirations for social and economic mobility through education—a prominent feature of the contemporary immigrant experience (Tseng, 2006). Tseng (2006) pointed out this characteristic of college-going children of immigrants—they pursue occupational paths that will facilitate attainment of their parents' high socioeconomic aspirations. However, how they arrived at their choices and their search for a happy medium appeared to come through in a subconscious way. The overarching findings of wanting to please immigrant parents are parallel to previous research on 1.5- and second-generation children. Additionally, the findings illustrate that immigrant status continues to play a role in the educational experiences of students of color.

Maramba (2008) spoke about *Pinay* college students negotiating between their realities at home and in school. The interview data cited earlier showed that compromising or reaching a happy medium was how *Pinays* in this study managed to negotiate. The fresh perspective that this study brings to the table is that *Pinays* have a desire to fulfill one's own passion, while simultaneously aiming to make everybody else in the family happy and satisfied. Compromise, in an unspoken manner, was shown when participants pursued a major that their parents approved of and a minor that the students enjoyed. In terms of postsecondary plans, *Pinays* aimed to pursue a career that they could justify to their parents (e.g., International Development Studies, with plans of becoming involved with "Doctors Without Borders" after graduation). The interviews conveyed that *Pinays* endeavored to arrive at that middle ground. Their responses depicted a sense of certainty that what they chose to pursue is truly their calling and "it just so happens" that that calling also benefits the family. Therefore, all the cards have lined up perfectly.

*Peminism's* coverage of 1.5- and second-generation *Pinays'* struggles was shown to be limited based on the data gathered in this study. The framework used to guide this study specifically considered gender as a factor that shaped the experiences of *Pinays*. While the participants' own gender roles did not seem to be very salient in their responses, issues pertinent to gender expectations arose in the interviews. The findings appeared to portray the *Pinays'* mothers as breadwinners and as a consequence, they were largely absent from home. A number of the fathers were retired or unemployed. This switch in traditional gender roles between the two parents might be characteristic of a group of

Filipino immigrants whose mothers came to the U.S. first through the assistance of employers in the nursing and allied health fields.

As previously mentioned, this project aimed to uncover the specific “givens” within *Pinays*’ collegiate lives vis-à-vis their parental expectations. According to the interview responses, a “given” is when *Pinay* children base their decisions on what their parents exemplify as successful. A “given” is having an almost automatic response of espousing flexible college plans to make room for what is good for the family. At this moment, *Peminism*’s explanation of the origins of these “givens” is underdeveloped. This study showed that *Pinays*’ subjectivities were largely shaped by the experiences that their parents went through. The way in which these subjectivities played out was through accommodation and compromise. This behavioral approach is a key finding that makes the experiences of *Pinays* distinctive and unique.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study depicted what *Pinay* college students might be experiencing in institutions of higher education today. Colleges and universities ought to pay attention to these students as a group that has realities that may not be shared by other Asian American communities. More specifically, academic counselors can consider these findings as a guide for advising students who are selecting their majors and forming plans beyond their undergraduate degree. The representation of *Pinays* in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics may possibly be affected by the family dynamics that were portrayed in this study. Similarly, the pursuit of graduate degrees by Filipinas and Filipina Americans is also likely to be dependent on their familial expectations. Subject areas and disciplines that might not be perceived as lucrative, such as the humanities, might be overlooked by this group. Fostering artistic talents among underrepresented minorities, such as Filipinas, could be undermined. The acknowledgement and recognition of the distinct histories of college students of color in relation to their educational struggles can truly push academic advising to become more culturally sensitive.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The term *Pin@ys* is used in this statement to indicate the inclusion of both genders—*Pinoy*s and *Pinay*s.

### **Appendix A**

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I wanted to remind you about our scheduled interview on [Date of Interview]. When you get the opportunity before [Day of Interview], kindly answer the questions below to help me structure our conversation. Please bring your written answers to our appointment. I'll see you at [Time of Interview] in [Location of Interview]. Thank you very much!

1. Where were you born?
  - a. When did you move to the United States?
  - b. Who did you come with?
  - c. Where did you first live in the U.S.?
  
2. What is your current grade/year level?
  - a. Where did you attend high school?
  - b. What was your high school GPA?
  
3. What is the highest educational attainment of your father?
  - a. Where did he attend school?
  - b. If he went to college, what major did he pursue?
  - c. What is your father's current occupation?
  
4. What is the highest educational attainment of your mother?
  - a. Where did she attend school?
  - b. If she went to college, what major did she pursue?
  - c. What is your mother's current occupation?

Sincerely,  
Chiara Paz

### ***Appendix B***

Date & Time of Interview:

Place:

Name of Interviewee:

Year level:

College Major:

1. Kindly share with me why you (and/or your parents) immigrated to the United States.

2. Tell me how your family came to choose where you first resided in the U.S.

Probes:

- a. living arrangements
- b. first neighborhood
- c. socioeconomic status
- d. where you first attended school
- e. who made the decision about where you lived and went to school?

[If informant lived in more than one place, ask the same question.]

3. What was your relationship like with your parents while you were in K-12?

Probes:

- a. elementary school
- b. middle school
- c. high school

4. How did you choose to come to this university?

Probe: Did your parents play a role in this decision?

5. What's a typical day like in this university for you?

[Ask to describe weekday and weekend.]

How would you describe your experiences in your:

- a. courses
- b. extracurricular activities
- c. major
- d. where you live

6. What factors do you think about when you make decisions about the areas in Q#5?

Probe: Do your parents have a say or influence in any of these decisions?

Do they have specific expectations of you? If so, what are they?

7. What are you planning to do after graduation?

Probe: What do you envision yourself doing in five years?

What do your parents see you doing after graduation?

Do your parents' thoughts about your post-graduate plans play role in what you wish to do?

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