

JCSCORE

Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity

The Journal of the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education

AM I REALLY FILIPINO?: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF FILIPINO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE COURSES IN HAWAI'I

Daniel B. Eisen
Pacific University

Kara Takasaki
University of Texas at Austin

Arlie Tagayuna
Lee University

Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity
Volume 1, Issue 2 | 2015

Copyright © 2015 Board of Regents of The University of Oklahoma on behalf of the Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies.

Permission of the Publisher is required for resale or distribution and for all derivative works, including compilations and translations. Quoting small sections of text is allowed as long as there is appropriate attribution.

Am I Really Filipino?: The Unintended Consequences of Filipino Language and Culture Courses in Hawai'i

Daniel B. Eisen
Pacific University

Kara Takasaki
University of Texas at Austin

Arlie Tagayuna
Lee University

The colonial mentality, a perception of Filipino cultural inferiority, results in many Filipinos distancing themselves from their Filipino heritage. In Hawai'i, the colonial history of the Philippines is reinforced by the history of Hawai'i's plantation era and the creation of a "local" identity, which marginalizes the Filipino community and strengthens the colonial mentality. A content analysis of 105 essays written by Filipino students enrolled in college level Filipino language and culture classes in Hawai'i was conducted to critically examine whether and how educational curriculum is used to challenge the colonial mentality. Data analysis shows students often entered classrooms with a colonial mentality that they learned through familial socialization and experiences of ethnic discrimination outside of the family. Although these language and culture courses helped students to reconnect with their Filipino heritage, many students developed a positive and essentialist construction of a Filipino identity, which reduced the individual's agency in constructing an identity and facilitated processes of othering.

Developing an identity is facilitated through one's ability to identify, understand, and navigate the symbolic and social boundaries that define the various "kinds of people" that exist in a society (Appiah, 2005; Hacking, 1999; Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

Through social interaction, individuals learn which groups society will allow them to associate with, the boundaries of these groups, and the prestige, resources, and advantages each group is afforded (Appiah, 2005; Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1959).

These group boundaries often define social identities, limit the available categories one can identify with, and facilitate the creation of stereotypes applied to individuals for

being a certain type of person. Ultimately, one's personal identity is intimately defined by larger social identities (Appiah, 2005; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Cornell & Hartmann, 1997).

This process of identity formation is problematic, as the process of boundary creation stigmatizes some social identities and creates a system of stratification that privileges some people over others (Goffman, 1963). The stigmatization of social categories is created and maintained through the media (Klein & Naccarato, 2008; Lewis & Jhally, 2008; Lichter & Amundson 2008), humor (Labrador, 2004; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2006; Okada, 2007), and other subtle cues that are projected in social interactions (Steele, 2010; Sue, 2010; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). It is common for people who are characterized as belonging to unfavorable social categories to alter their behavior or appearance to distance themselves from such categories (Goffman, 1959; Steele, 2010). After all, Allport (1958) notes, "one's reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered into one's head without doing something to one's character" (p. 42). The constant bombardment of negative depictions of one's social category strengthens the associated stigma and leads many individuals to internalize the negative depictions of and discrimination toward their associated group (David, 2011; Pyke, 2010).

Racial and ethnic identities become stigmatized through processes of racialization (Omi & Winant, 1994) that have enabled the creation and maintenance of racial and ethnic stereotypes. The insidious nature of racism in the United States fosters self-hatred in many individuals (Pyke, 2010), who employ tactics of defensive othering (Schwalbe et al., 2000) to improve feelings of self-worth and to avoid

experiences with racism. Individuals who engage in defensive othering often become labeled as “whitewashed” or “selling out” (Pyke & Dang 2003) because they attempt to align themselves with the dominant racial or ethnic group by presenting themselves as exceptions to the existing stereotypes (Schwalbe *et al.* 2000). While defensive othering may increase an individual’s status, it does not challenge stereotypes or stigmas that encourage individuals to engage in social distancing; rather, it strengthens and affirms stereotypes, while maintaining a hierarchy of kinds of people.

This research examines the process of Filipino ethnic identity development in Hawai‘i. Specifically, this research focuses on the consequences of Filipino language and culture courses at a four-year university in Hawai‘i, which attempt to reconstruct the boundaries that define what it means to be Filipino. These courses attempt to redefine the cultural narrative about being Filipino by highlighting “core Filipino values” and transforming a negative framing of Filipino into a positive one. Overall, this research demonstrates the importance of carefully and critically examining the ways that we use education to teach about ethnic identity in culture courses. Even in courses that present “positive” representations of ethnic and cultural heritage, boundary-making around ethnic identities continues to create divisions between immigrant Filipinos and Filipino-Americans.

Filipino Identity Construction

Over 400 years of colonization in the Philippines has consistently denigrated indigenous Filipino culture, promoted Western culture as superior, and led many Filipinos to develop a colonial mentality (David 2011; David & Nadal, 2013; David & Okazaki, 2006a). The colonial mentality is characterized by (a) adherence to the

ideology that Filipino culture is inferior to Western culture, (b) an attempt to distance oneself from the inferior status of Filipino by adopting Western values, attitudes, and beliefs, and (c) a belief that colonization was necessary for the Philippines to become a civilized progressive nation (David, 2011; David & Okazaki, 2006a; Nadal, 2004). The colonial mentality is essentially internalized racism (Pyke 2011), operates on a subconscious level (David & Okazaki, 2010), and presents itself in the form of individuals denying their Filipino heritage in attempts to become what Bonilla-Silva (2004) calls “honorary whites.”

Distancing oneself from one’s Filipino heritage can affect the process of ethnic identity development. This occurs because the main components of ethnic identity, *exploration* of one’s ethnic background and *commitment* to an ethnicity, are stifled (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, and Barmaca-Gomez (2004) recognize this and include *affirmation* as a third vital component to ethnic identity development. They use the following example of two Filipino women to illustrate this:

two Filipino women...have both explored their ethnicity by attending cultural events, reading books about the history of the Philippines, and talking to their families about Filipino culture (i.e. exploration). In addition, they both feel confident about what being Filipino means to them (i.e. resolution [commitment]). However, one of the women feels very positively about her Filipino background, while the other woman feels negatively because of the history of colonization of the Philippines by multiple countries, which she feels has resulted in a lack of Filipino culture (i.e. affirmation (Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Barmaca-Gomez, 2004, p. 14).

Here, both individuals have explored their ethnic background and have a commitment to their ethnicity, but the colonial mentality and negative collective representations of

Filipinos discourages one of the individuals from developing positive affect towards being Filipino and prevents that individual from asserting a Filipino ethnic identity.

Nadal (2004) outlines a six-stage Filipino American identity development model that accounts for the historical and sociocultural factors that influence the development of a Filipino ethnic identity. The model includes the following stages: ethnic awareness, assimilation to the dominant culture, social political awakening, panethnic Asian American consciousness, ethnocentric realization, and incorporation. These stages are not linear, and not every individual will experience every stage. For example, “if [an individual] lives in a predominantly white community, he or she may dwell in the Assimilation stage for his or her whole life” (Nadal, 2004, p. 60). Like Umana-Taylor *et al.* (2004), Nadal (2004) emphasizes the importance of situating the process of ethnic identity development within a specific racial and social context. Nadal’s (2004) argument suggests that in environments where Filipinos are marginalized, the colonial mentality will be strengthened and individuals will attempt to assimilate to the dominant white culture; whereas, in environments where positive constructions of Filipino are fostered, individuals will be more likely to move into the integration stage, where they take pride in being Filipino while respecting other racial and ethnic groups.

Filipinos in Hawai‘i

Although it has been demonstrated that Filipinos, in general, suffer from a colonial mentality (Bergano & Bergano, 1997; David, 2011; David & Okazaki, 2006a, 2006b; Eisen, 2011; Nadal, 2004; Revilla, 1997), one could argue that the colonial mentality is especially salient in Hawai‘i, where the plantation era and the establishment of a local identity has created an ethnic hierarchy that continues to marginalize Filipinos

(Labrador, 2004; Okada, 2007; Okamura, 1990, 1998, 2008, 2010; Takaki, 1998). After Western foreigners acquired large tracts of Hawaiian land and transformed them into lucrative plantations, they imported low-wage laborers from Japan, China, Korea, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. To reduce the likelihood of co-ethnic labor uprisings, the imported workers were housed in ethnically segregated camps with Filipinos, one of the last recruited groups, experiencing the harshest living conditions (Okamura, 2008; Takaki, 1998). Racist ideology depicting Filipinos as obedient, docile, “stoop workers,” whose dark skin and short stature made the grueling work of the plantation easy, led to further marginalization and poor treatment of Filipinos.

While racist stereotyping of Filipinos in Hawai‘i originated in the plantation era, it continues in the present. In 1926, Porteus and Babcock described Filipinos as “a race in an adolescent stage of development...whose departure from the normal balance of maturity are to be seen in their egocentric attitude, in their rather obtrusive habits and desire for personal recognition, in their super-sensitiveness, love of display, and noisy self-expression” (p. 67). Cariaga (1974) notes that in 1934 a survey at the University of Hawai‘i found that Filipinos were viewed as emotional, temperamental, primitive, child-like individuals, who had a low standard of living and consumed unpalatable food. Hawai‘i’s continued practice of ethnic humor perpetuates these stereotypes and reveals the legacy of social and racial hierarchies from the plantation era, as ethnic jokes currently depict Filipinos as violent, uneducated, child-like individuals, who are employed as janitors and other low-wage service sector workers who are incapable of speaking English without an accent (Labrador, 2004; Okada, 2007; Okamura, 2010).

Although Hawai'i's plantation era ended in 1950, many Filipinos were funneled from the plantations into low-wage positions in the service and tourism sectors that lack opportunities for upward social mobility (Okamura, 2008). U.S. Census Bureau data show that Filipinos are overrepresented in the service sector; from 1970 to 2000, 31.4% of Filipino males and 30.3% of Filipino females were employed in service-oriented occupations. Filipinos are less likely to obtain college degrees and earn significantly less income than other groups in Hawai'i. The structural position of Filipinos in Hawai'i's social hierarchy and the racist depictions and stereotypes of Filipinos in Hawai'i create a social environment that denigrates the social category of Filipino and encourages Filipinos to distance themselves from their ethnic and cultural heritage in order to gain more social status (Eisen, 2011; Revilla, 1997).

Filipinos in Hawai'i often respond to stigmatization and marginalization by asserting a "local Filipino" identity, which creates a boundary between Filipino-Americans and Filipino immigrants. This practice of ethnic identity development is a form of defensive othering, which affirms that negative ethnic stereotypes accurately depict Filipino immigrants, but not Filipino-Americans, who gain more prestige by adopting a local identity (Labrador, 2004; Okamura, 2008; Schwalbe *et al.*, 2000). By claiming a local Filipino identity, these individuals construct a narrative that draws upon the central frames of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000); local individuals become viewed as a single group, which effectively minimizes experiences with racism and the importance of race in organizing social relations. This process of defensive othering maintains Filipino as a stigma, strengthens the colonial mentality, and leads many Filipinos to distance themselves from their ethnic heritage.

Challenging the Colonial Mentality with Education

Many scholars suggest that a decolonizing educational experience, which provides students with a space to question the ideology of “cultural inferiority based on master narratives that portray Filipinos as either having a damaged culture or none at all” (Strobel, 1996, p. 40), can challenge the colonial mentality (David, 2011; David & Okazaki, 2006a; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2010; Nadal, 2004; San Juan, 2006; Strobel, 1996; Tuason, Taylor, Rollings, Harris & Martin, 2006). While there has been significant growth in Filipino centered programs and curricula, Halagao, Tintiangco-Cubales, and Cordova (2009) argue that critical pedagogy, critical content, and critical instruction are necessary for these programs to be effective. Therefore, classes need to include “content and resources that challenge historical and cultural hegemony through the centralization of Filipina/o American resistance and counterhegemonic narratives” and instruction that goes beyond the superficial approach that simply teaches students about “traditional” songs, dances, and foods of the Philippines (Halagao *et al.*, 2009, p. 5-8).

Instead, Halagao (2004) argues for an educational model where students can actively reflect on what being Filipino means to them and does not simply replace one master narrative with another. Engaging students in the process of decolonizing the mind must include processes of naming, reflection, and action (Strobel, 2001). The process of naming and recognizing internalized racism helps individuals critically reflect upon the colonial narratives that led them to develop a colonial mentality. This reflective process often helps one reframe how they understand their ethnic identity and facilitates

social activism towards improving the visibility and empowerment of the Filipino community.

Therefore, the process of decolonizing the mind provides individuals with the experiences essential to develop a secure ethnic identity: (a) exploration of one's culture, (b) commitment to one's ethnic group, and (c) positive affect towards one's ethnic background (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1990, 1993; Phinney and Ong, 2007; Umana-Taylor, Bhanot, and Shin, 2006). In this process the strengths of being Filipino are highlighted, which requires students to re-evaluate internalized racial stereotypes. Often, the discourse about the marginalized group shifts from a deficit perspective, which employs a white middle class standard to examine the types of capital communities of color lack, to an assets perspective that acknowledges the many forms of capital that are possessed by communities of color (Yosso, 2005). The shift from a deficit perspective to an assets perspective often helps individuals to develop a more positive view of their Filipino ethnic identity.

Methodology

The data for this study come from essays written by Filipino students enrolled in Filipino language and culture classes at a four-year university in Hawai'i that were published in *Katipunan Literary Journal*¹. These essays all examined the writer's experience of being Filipino in Hawai'i and/or the writer's process of negotiating a Filipino identity in Hawai'i. Although the essays were written in English, Tagalog, and

¹ Although the journal is publically available, the data analysis was conducted with deidentified data to protect the writers' identities. Therefore, quotes presented throughout this article are not cited in a manner that links the data to the authors. Since this article presents a critical analysis of the writers' ethnic identity development and learning in these courses, the researchers believe deidentifying the data helps to preserve the author's reputation and social connections they may have with the instructors of these courses.

Ilocano, the researchers' limited knowledge of Tagalog and Ilocano, along with financial constraints that did not allow for the hiring of a translator, limited analysis to essays written in English. Furthermore, essays used in the analysis needed to include a discussion of the student's experience of being Filipino in Hawai'i or reflections on developing a Filipino identity. The use of these two criteria resulted in 105 essays for the sample.

Modified grounded theory practices (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to identify themes in the data. Initial coding was completed through line-by-line coding, a coding technique that forces researchers to focus on small bits of data that are often not complete thoughts, as thoughts often span numerous lines in documents (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Upon completing line-by-line coding, each researcher completed focused coding by examining the initial codes and organizing them into broader thematic codes that emerged from the data. Employing grounded theory practices allowed the analysis to emerge out of the data and limited the insider knowledge that the researchers could have applied to analysis of the essays. This coding approach seemed the most appropriate for the analysis because two of the researchers are members of the Filipino community who have an interest in seeing the Filipino community and programs thrive in Hawai'i and also know many of the individuals who teach the Filipino language and culture classes in Hawai'i. Therefore, engaging in grounded theory practices helped address many of the issues that have been identified with conducting insider research (Acker, 2000; Asselin, 2003; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Kanuha, 2000).

It is important to note that the analyzed essays were written as part of the course requirements, which has the potential to influence the content of the essays. While the writers may have been less candid in their writing, as they may have been attempting to please their instructors, initial screenings of the data suggest that writers were quite candid in their pieces, expressing struggles with being Filipino, asserting a Filipino identity, and understanding what it meant to be Filipino. The grounded theory analysis also yielded an interesting critique of the classroom experience, suggesting that the educational experiences reproduced patterns of othering and were not always positive. As discussed below, the analysis found (a) students held beliefs consistent with a colonial mentality, (b) educational experiences enabled students to assert a Filipino identity, and (c) the assertion of a Filipino identity often reinforced the boundaries between local Filipinos and immigrant Filipinos.

This methodological approach, which allowed the researchers to address issues inherent in insider research, produced a robust analysis of the data that reflects students' experiences of being Filipino in Hawai'i. Overall, the research shows that students experienced familial socialization that encouraged them to reject their Filipino identity; a lesson that was reinforced by the students' experiences with race and ethnic based discrimination outside of their families. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the students' educational experiences helped them to assert a Filipino identity through an essentialized image of what it means to be Filipino. Emphasis on an essentialist image, albeit a positive depiction, reinforced the division between *local Filipinos* and *immigrant Filipinos* and decreased the importance of an ongoing and

intersectional (Collins 2001; Crenshaw 1991; Glenn 1992) negotiation of a dynamic and context-specific ethnic identity.

The Starting Point: A Colonial Mentality

The majority of the essays demonstrated that the students often entered the classroom with a colonial mentality that was fostered through familial socialization and experiences with marginalization and discrimination in the broader society. One student summarized his or her experiences with being Filipino as, “growing up all I knew was America—food, language, beliefs—and my Filipino heritage stayed dormant in blissful ignorance.” Another student expressed similar sentiments and wrote,

Being first generation Fil-Am, I was raised American style because my parents believed that was what was best for me to be able to fit in and become prosperous. Because of this, English was the one and only language I was taught to read and write in.

Both students described experiences of being shielded from exploring their Filipino identity. Filipino culture is contrasted against American culture, with American culture being privileged. One of the primary ways that students were socialized into a colonial mentality is through family members’ refusal to teach children Filipino languages. One student recounted, “All four of my grandparents were born in the Philippines [and] growing up I would hear them speaking the language, but they never spoke it to me. If you were to tell me something in Filipino, I can honestly say that I would not recognize a single word.” Ultimately, the students came from a background that taught them to view Filipino culture as something that was not valuable and should be left behind.

These messages were reinforced by students’ interactions with oppressive and marginalizing structures and stereotypes about Filipinos in their broader social environments. Many students had these marginalizing experiences in the educational

system. A 1.5 generation Filipino-American wrote, “[I had to] repeat kindergarten because the school administration deemed that the Philippine educational system was not up to par,” while another wrote about having to “take a special class” to help improve his or her English and felt “embarrassed to return to a classroom full of opinionated four year olds, who mocked my inability to pronounce p’s and f’s correctly.” Beyond the educational system many students realized that being Filipino in Hawai’i meant being “seen at the bottom rung of the social ladder” and being the target of “the Filipino stereotypes...that [others] assumed applied to all Filipinos.” One student lamented, “there [are] so many stereotypes about Filipinos and the culture that I have been alienated by all the stories I have heard.” Ultimately, students wrote that they felt alienated from their peers and community for being Filipino because they were disrespected and looked down upon.

This often led many students to exhibit behaviors characteristic of a colonial mentality, as one student wrote, “I began to feel hate towards my own culture and wished not to be Filipino at all.” In order to “fit in,” students often attempted to adopt American practices and distance themselves from their family’s practices. One student wrote, “The fear of not belonging...fueled my annoyance with Filipino food...I slowly began to stray away from Filipino dishes...[and] I asked my mom why we didn’t eat *normal* food (*emphasis added*),” while another wrote, “I never mentioned my Grandma’s kankanen [snacks] and lumpia [spring rolls] when everyone else was eating sushi, ramen, or mochi...I ignore[d] my own culture.” Marginalizing experiences related to being Filipino and failed attempts to “fit in” reinforced familial socialization of the colonial mentality and led many students to “wish [they] had no connection to a Filipino

background.” Ultimately, the inculcation of a colonial mentality seemed to help individuals to remain in Nadal’s (2004) assimilation stage, as they believed that rejecting being Filipino and adopting American culture was the way to be *normal* in society. One student demonstrated how powerful the colonial mentality was in his or her life and wrote, “My parents asked me what I thought I was. I didn’t even have to think about it. I told them, I’m White.”

Asserting Filipino and Processes of Othering

Although the essays demonstrated that the Filipino language and culture courses helped students assert a Filipino identity, students wrote about a Filipino identity as something to adopt rather than construct. Therefore, identity construction was a process of adopting the characteristics of being Filipino rather than exploring and incorporating knowledge to understand what being Filipino meant to each individual. The distance between the individual and a Filipino identity is evident in many of the students’ essay titles such as: Rediscovering my Filipino Culture, Discovering my Identity, Philippine Values and Me, and Filipino Values and I. These titles suggest that Filipino culture and identity were viewed as external to the individual and had to be discovered, which also suggests that students were not actively engaged in defining, creating, and understanding how their ethnic identity emerged through situated social interactions and specific social contexts.

This externalization of Filipino identity was further evident in many of the students’ essays. One individual wrote,

The majority of topics we covered in this class are about the different values that Filipinos have. After covering some lessons I stopped and asked myself ‘are you really Filipino?’ because the Filipino values that were introduced seemed alien to me...I could relate more with the

American [values]...I was kind of disappointed with myself. How could I forget to be a Filipino?

Here the student's question about how one could forget to be Filipino, suggests that there are distinguishing characteristics, values, attitudes, and behaviors that one *must* adopt to *truly* be Filipino. Another student argued that adopting a positive Filipino identity was easy if one were to look back into history and adopt the main Filipino cultural values that allow one to understand what it meant to be Filipino. The student wrote, "A Filipino cultural background is who we are. This is our roots and they make the person we are. If we lose sight of who we are, then we are lost...when the answers were right in front of us all the time."

Another student made this point explicitly clear by writing that the only way one can understand the "importance of being Filipino [is by] accepting [his or her] native language and culture." Therefore, students did not believe that they could merge American culture with Filipino culture to cultivate a Filipino identity; instead, they needed to choose between the two and choosing Filipino culture was the only way to actually develop a Filipino identity.

It is arguable that this externalization and adoption of a Filipino identity stems from the way Filipino identity and culture were presented to the students. These essays suggest that these students were introduced to an essentialist argument about what it means to be Filipino. Therefore, they were taught that there are certain criteria that one must meet in order to be Filipino. If an individual did not meet these criteria, they did not fully understand what it meant to be Filipino and would always feel like Filipino values were "alien to them."

Filipinos Speak Filipino

For many of these students the essentialist argument about what it meant to be Filipino required them to speak a Filipino language. The students wrote, “language is an essential aspect of an individual’s culture,” “language expresses culture in many ways,” and “one cannot appreciate the traditions and customs if one does not know the language.” Students were taught that language “affects the fundamental beliefs and behavior patterns of a particular civilization” and, therefore, “language will always play a significant role in learning their culture and ultimately learning about one’s self.” While the important role of language in the transmission of culture should not be downplayed, many of the essays suggested that Filipino culture could not be passed down through generations through the English language. Therefore, it was essential that one speak a Filipino language to truly understand what it means to be Filipino.

Once one could speak a Filipino language, they could begin to understand and adopt many of the core Filipino values that were presented in this essentialized version being Filipino. One individual wrote, “the usage of both terms [*manong* [older brother] and *manang* [older sister]] shows how language expresses the Filipino value of close familial relations and respect.” Another individual stated, “the Tagalog term “*lolo*” is used whenever a younger generation talks to their grandfather. This particular behavior is reflective of the culture’s reverence and respect for the older generation.” Therefore, to be Filipino one must have close family ties, as represented by “Filipino parents [who] take care of their children as long as possible...[which] is an example of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude).” Many of the essays also included descriptions about multigenerational households, where “three generations [are] living in one house.” The students did not attribute the close familial ties and multigenerational households to the

structural concentration of Filipinos in low-wage jobs and the high cost of living in Hawai'i, which could have been an opportunity to discuss how ethnic identities also intersect with, for example, class identities, but instead these experiences of family and household structure were attributed to the cultural value of *utang na loob*. The students argued that an individual without close family ties could not understand what it means to be Filipino.

Furthermore, the students were taught to appreciate the value of *hiya* (shame) and how it maintains hierarchies. An individual wrote, "Filipinos speak in a soft and gentle manner...to seem very passive and sensitive. Filipinos speak in this manner to show respect towards their elders." Filipinos, therefore, are required to adopt characteristics such as "passivity" and "docility" as they have "something to do with Filipino values." Students learned that this value of respect, shame, and humility extends beyond the family and into society. An individual wrote, "Seniority has always been highly regarded...young ones must conform to the wisdom of older people regardless of whether it is right or wrong." Furthermore, the writers were taught that the true Filipino is modest and "tends to attribute success to luck and God's will. When praised for an achievement, [Filipinos] will say *Sinuwerte lang* (*I was only lucky*)... even though they worked hard for their achievement."

The essentialist construction of Filipino created two groups for students: individuals who understand and adopt true Filipino values and those who do not. Unlike the colonial mentality, the individuals who demonstrated the essentialist Filipino characteristics were privileged over those who did not. These teachings and othering

processes were demonstrated in many of the essays. As one student noted, “Nowadays, people that are born in America are becoming Americanized and follow the American way of life such as speaking English...if you don’t know your language, then you won’t know your culture.” Here, individuals who understand the Filipino language are portrayed as cultured and privileged. Other writers expressed similar sentiments.

When discussing family, one individual wrote:

Unlike a Filipino family, many American families do not have this value. Although American families do care for one another, they do not provide care all throughout one’s life... In many [Filipino] homes you will see three generations living under one roof. These are the grandparents, parents, and the children who all take care of one another.

In this instance Americanized families are viewed as less caring and less supportive than Filipino families. Other writers criticized local or Americanized Filipinos, while privileging those that abided by true Filipino values, by discussing the value of respect.

One essay included the following passage:

Children are raised to be submissive and obedient, but through the influence of peers, and because of outside influences, they become unruly and rebellious, and begin having characteristics that are unlike children in the Philippines. In Hawai’i, it is common to see Filipino children answering back their parents without any guilt. It is obvious that the values of *hiya* and *utang na loob* are obviously not preventing them from acting so disrespectful to the parents whom they owe so much.

Another individual expressed a similar sentiment about local or Americanized Filipino students in the classroom and wrote, “Students speak their mind regardless of what other students feel. This is an outrageous act based upon my social value of maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships.” In another essay, a student explicitly defines the problems with local or Americanized Filipinos:

I see Filipino families come to Hawaii and become disoriented from their family values, becoming materialistic, trying to show society their

success...respect is important but is slowly disappearing as the younger generations believe that respect must be reciprocated by their parents...there are many negative aspects about Filipino culture here in Hawaii.

Overall, it is clear that these students developed pride in being Filipino and are, perhaps, more secure in their Filipino identity than before they enrolled in the course. However, it is arguable that their new pride in being Filipino does not stem from a decolonizing educational experience that allowed these individuals to create and understand a personalized Filipino identity. Instead these individuals were presented with a master narrative about what it means to be Filipino, which privileged individuals who *understood* what it meant to adopt *true* Filipino values. These individuals then had to choose to adopt or reject this master narrative and the essential construction of Filipino. The danger of these kinds of educational practices mean that many experiences where class, gender, race, and ethnicity intersect are not critically examined to show how systems of oppression are pervasive and co-constitutive. The essays suggest that as students accepted the curriculum's positive representation of Filipino culture, they also participated in the othering of local or Americanized Filipinos. This is especially clear in this passage from an essay:

To attain social mobility, she had to do something about it and not wait for fate to decide it for her. My sister and I have been quite ignorant about what it means to be a Filipino. Now, thanks to [this] Filipino [course], I am learning the meaning of being Filipino and I can remind my mom of the values she left behind and educate my sister.

This statement, as well as many others presented above, suggest that Filipino culture is in conflict with American or local culture. Furthermore, students expressed a sentiment that there is a correct way to understand what it means to be Filipino. In the last quote the writer clearly suggests that now that he or she understands the essentialist

construction of what it means to be Filipino, he or she can remind his or her mother about the important values that were left behind in order to achieve success.

Discussion and Conclusions

This qualitative analysis of essays written by students enrolled in Filipino language and culture courses demonstrates that being Filipino still operates as a stigma in Hawai'i. Although Filipino language and culture courses provide a positive lens to understand Filipinos through, students often write about the transformation as adopting an essentialist construction of what it means to be Filipino. Therefore, even if the instructors are attempting to engage in decolonizing educational practices, the students may not be experiencing a decolonizing of the mind, as they are simply replacing a negative master narrative with a more positive master narrative. This was clearly demonstrated in the way students wrote about their new understanding of being Filipino, as an identity they adopted rather than constructed.

It is important to note that many of the students did not initiate the process of distancing themselves from being Filipino. Instead, the colonial mentality was transferred from one generation to the next through early familial socialization. The fostering of a colonial mentality did not allow many individuals to understand what it meant to be Filipino and, therefore, they could not critically examine the negative stereotypes and oppressive structures that marginalize Filipinos in Hawai'i. Without a firm understanding of what it means to be Filipino, the students' experiences with racist ideology and discrimination encouraged them to further distance themselves from being Filipino and reinforced a colonial mentality. Thus, the students were socialized to

inhabit what Nadal (2004) identifies as the assimilation stage in Filipino identity development.

While this research critically examines the outcomes of the Filipino language and culture courses, it is important to note that, as previous research suggests (David, 2011; Nadal, 2004; San Juan, 2006; Strobel, 1996, 2001; Tuason, Taylor, Rollings, Harris & Martin, 2006), many of the students left the class with a stronger sense of pride in being Filipino. While this is a positive outcome, it is important to critically examine the process that allowed these individuals to develop a greater sense of pride in being Filipino. As shown through this analysis, these students wrote about learning to be Filipino by adopting an essentialized image of what it meant to be Filipino. Thus, Filipino identity became a checklist of values, attitudes, and behaviors that had to be adopted. This checklist could be compared to an alternative experience that centers around self-reflection on whether these various cultural ideas actually reflect students' current identities and daily experiences and, moreover, whether forces other than mere culture (for example, economic and political forces) that shape contemporary Filipino identity in different social contexts.

The representation of an essentialized image of Filipinoness in these classes can be problematic for two reasons: (a) it justifies many of the stereotypes about Filipinos and (b) it continues to encourage processes of othering within the Filipino community. First, the essentialist argument that all Filipinos are docile, humble, soft-spoken, obedient, and fatalistic appears to employ a core frame of colorblind racism known as cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), which blames ethnic minorities for their inability to thrive in a white dominated society. Therefore, the

low social status and marginalization of Filipinos becomes justified and explained through a cultural logic. When these traits are highlighted as the core essence of being Filipino, they can be used to explain why Filipinos are concentrated in the service sector and not managerial positions, by supporting the argument that Filipinos are content and well-suited for subservient positions that do not offer opportunities for upward social mobility. Ultimately, this representation of being Filipino is problematic because while it allows an individual to feel better about being Filipino, it provides a cultural explanation for Filipinos economic and structural subordination. Moreover, the cultural explanation seems to suggest that culture is static and unchanging and not influenced by economic and political realities (Lowe 1996; Ong 1999).

Secondly, the essentialist argument about true Filipinoness creates a dichotomy between individuals that understand what it means to be Filipino and those that do not, with the former being viewed as the privileged group. Therefore, students felt the need to “rediscover their Filipino roots” and remind others about the Filipino values that they may have left behind in their Americanization process. These students began to argue that those who did not understand being Filipino through the positive image presented in the language and culture classes did not have a thorough understanding of what it means to be Filipino. In this reframing of what it means to be Filipino, Filipino became constructed as a privileged status. However, Filipino culture and American culture were still presented as a dichotomy, which suggested that the two identities could not be reconciled and that an individual would have to choose a side. These cultural tensions were especially evident in the students’ statements that an individual could not truly understand Filipino culture, attitudes, or values without speaking a Filipino language.

The attempt to develop a sense of pride in being Filipino reinforced distinctions of difference and value, suggesting that Filipinos who could speak the language had more value as real Filipinos than Filipinos who could not. This kind of boundary-marking undermines the goal of developing pride in a changing Filipino identity and community.

Overall, the Filipino community in Hawai'i has been quite successful in becoming recognized as a unique ethnic group, which is evidenced by the presence of Filipino language, history, and culture classes at various universities in Hawai'i. While this is no small feat, it is arguable that the community and development of pride in being Filipino can be strengthened by reevaluating the way these courses encourage students to develop a Filipino identity. It is arguable that, perhaps, these classes are structured to present students with an essentialist view of what it means to be Filipino because professors are required to evaluate their students' progress and assign a grade to their intellectual development. This, of course, is a problem of the banking system of education (Freire, 1970), which depends on tests and the regurgitation of information to prove mastery over course content.

While this method of learning may be beneficial in some courses, courses that attempt to help students understand and develop a sense of pride in their identity should strive to incorporate problem posing educational strategies that encourage critical thinking and move students beyond memorization of information into knowledge creation (hooks, 2010). Problem posing education aims to decenter power in the classroom by allowing instructors to move away from essentialist arguments about ethnic groups and encourages each individual to contribute to knowledge creation. Ideally, students in these classrooms would be better equipped to understand how their

Filipino background intersects with their other identities (e.g., gender, sexuality, social class). Helping students to interrogate essentialist constructions of ethnic identity by comparing these models to the messiness of lived experiences will intellectually prepare students to move beyond a discussion deceptively limited to ethnic identity formation.

References

- Acker, S. (2000). In/out/side: Position the researcher in feminist qualitative research. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28(1-2), 189-210.
- Allport, G. (1958). *The nature of prejudice*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Appiah, K. (2005). *The Ethics of identity*. Princeton, MA: Princeton University Press.
- Asselin, M.E. (2003). Insider research: Issues to consider when doing qualitative research in your own setting. *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development*, 19(2), 99-103.
- Bergano, A.L. & Bergano, B.L. (1997). Images, roles, and expectations of Filipino Americans. In M.P. Root (ed.), *Filipino Americans: Transformation and identity* (198-207). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism without racists* (4th ed). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. & Forman, T. (2000) "I am not racist but...": Mapping White college students' racial ideology in the USA. *Discourse & Society* 11, 50-85.
- Brannick, T. & Coghlan, D. (2007). In defense of being "native:" the case of insider academic research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(1), 59-74.
- Cariaga, R. (1974). *The Filipinos in Hawaii: A study of their social and economic conditions* (Master's Thesis), Department of Anthropology, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide to grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Collins, P.H. (2001). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.
- Cooley, C.H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribner's.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*.
- La David, E.R.J. (2011). *Filipino-/American postcolonial psychology: Oppression, colonial mentality, and decolonization*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
- David, E.R.J. & Okazaki, S. (2006a). Colonial mentality: a review and recommendation for Filipino American psychology. *Culture, Diversity, and Ethnic Minority*

Psychology, 12(1), 1-16.

David, E.R.J. & Okazaki, S. (2006b). The colonial mentality scale (CMS) for Filipino Americans: Scale construction and psychological implications. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 53(2), 241-52.

David, E.R.J. & Okazaki, S. (2010). Activation and automaticity of colonial mentality. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 40(4), 850-87.

Eisen, D.B. (2011). Becoming Filipino in Hawaii: Rejection, reframing, and acceptance of a stigmatized identity (Doctoral dissertation). Department of Sociology, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu, HI.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Adline Publishing Company.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Hacking, I. (2001). *The social construction of what*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Halagao, P.E. (2004). Holding up the mirror: The complexity of seeing your ethnic self in history. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 32, 459-483.

Halagao, P.E., Tintiangco-Cubales, A. & Cordova, J.M.T. (2009). Critical review of K-12 Filipina/o American curriculum. *AAPI Nexus*, 1, 1-26.

hooks, b. (2010). *Critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. New York: Routledge.

Kanuha, V.K. (2000). Being native versus going native: Conducting social work research as an insider. *Social Work*, 45(5), 439-47.

Kitano, H.H.L. & Daniels, R. (1995). *Asian Americans: Emerging ethnicities*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Klein, R.D. & Naccarato, S. (2003). Broadcast news portrayal of minorities: Accuracy in reporting. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(12), 1611-1616.

Labrador, R. (2004). We can laugh at ourselves: Hawaii ethnic humor, local identity, and the myth of multiculturalism. *Pragmatics*, 14(2), 291-316.

- Lewis, J. & Jhally, S. (2008). Television and the politics of representation. In C. Gallagher (Ed.), *Rethinking the colorline: Readings in race and ethnicity* (302-309). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Lichter, R. & Amundson, D. (2008). Distorted reality: Hispanic characters in TV entertainment. In C. Gallagher (Ed.), *Rethinking the colorline: Readings in race and ethnicity*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Lowe, L. (1996). Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique. Chapter 1 in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Marica, J. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (159-187). New York: Wiley and Sons.
- Nadal, K. (2004). Pilipino American identity development model. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 32(1), 45-62.
- Nakano Glenn, E. (1992). From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor. *Signs* 18 (autumn): 1-43.
- Nilsen, A.P. & Nilsen, D.L.F. (2006). Just how ethnic is ethnic humour? *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 38, 131-139.
- Okada, K. (2007). An analysis of Hawaii's tradition of local ethnic humor. *University of Hawaii Law Review*, 30(1), 219-41.
- Okamura, J.Y. (1990). Ethnicity and stratification in Hawaii. *Operation Manong Resource Papers* 1(1), 1-15.
- Okamura, J.Y. (1998). *Imagining the Filipino diaspora: Transnational relations, identities, and communities*, New York: Garland Publishing.
- Okamura, J.Y. (2008). *Ethnicity and inequality in Hawaii*. Philadelphia, PN: Temple University Press.
- Okamura, J.Y. (2010). From running amok to eating dogs: a century of misrepresenting Filipino Americans in Hawaii. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(3), 496-514.
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.
- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Phinney, J. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 499-514.
- Phinney, J. (1993). A three-stage model of ethnic identity development. In M. Bernal & G. Knight (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Formation and transmission among Hispanics and other minorities* (61-80). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Phinney, J. & Ong, A. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 271-281.
- Phinney, J., Romero, I., Nava, M., & Huang, D. (2001) The role of language, parents, and peers in ethnic identity among immigrant families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30(2), 135-153.
- Porteus, S. & Babcock, M. (1926). *Temperament and race*. Boston, MA: R.G. Badger.
- Pyke, K. (2011). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives* 54(4), 147-72.
- Pyke, K. & Dang, T. (2003). FOB and whitewashed: Identity and internalized racism among second generation Asian Americans. *Qualitative Sociology* 26, 147-172.
- Revilla, L.A. (1997). Filipino American identity: Transcending the crisis. In M.P. Root (Ed.), *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity* (95-111). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schwalbe, M., Godwin, S., Holden, D., Schrock, D., Thompson, S., & Wolkomir, M. (2000). Generic processes in the reproduction of inequality: An interactionist approach. *Social Forces*, 79(2), 419-52.
- San Juan, JR, E. (2006). Toward a decolonizing indigenous psychology in the Philippines: introducing sikolohiyang Pilipino. *Journal for Cultural Research* 10(1), 7-67.
- Steele, C.M. (2010). *How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J. (1998). *The basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

- Strobel, L.M. (1996). Born-again Filipino: Filipino American identity and Asian panethnicity. *Amerasia Journal*, 22(2), 31-53.
- Strobel, L.M. (2001). *Coming full circle: The process of decolonization among post-1965 Filipino Americans*. Quezon City, Philippines: Giraffe.
- Sue, D.W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sue, D.W., Bucceri, J., Lin, A.I., Nadal, K., & Torino, G.C. (2007). Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13, 72-81.
- Takaki, R. (1998). *Strangers from a different shore*, New York: Brown and Company.
- Tuason, T.G., Taylor, A.R., Rollings, L., & Harris, T. (2007). On both sides of the hyphen: exploring the Filipino-American identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(4), 362-72.
- Umana-Taylor, A., Bhanot, R., & Shin, N. (2006). Ethnic identity formation during adolescence: the critical role of families. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(3), 390-414.
- Umana-Taylor, A., Yazedjian, A. & Bamaca-Gomez, M. (2004). Developing the ethnic identity scale using Eriksonian and social identity perspectives. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 4, 9-38.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- Zhenchao, Q., Blair, S.L., & Ruf, S.D. (2001). Asian American interracial and interethnic marriages: Differences by education and nativity. *The International Migration Review* 35(2), 557-86.