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Angelica M. Bailon

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Stories of Persistence: Filipina/o American Undergraduate Students in a Private,
Catholic, and Predominantly White University

by

Angelica Mae Andaya Bailon

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

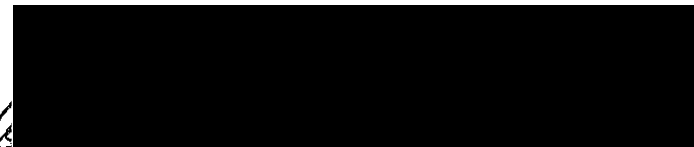
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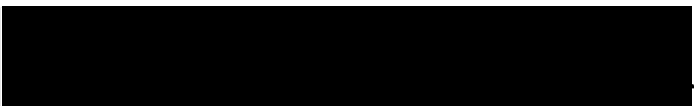
This dissertation written by Angelica Mae Andaya Bailon, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Catherine Andaya Bailon and Pablo Tiangco Bailon, Jr. Your unconditional love and support have made it possible for me to reach this milestone. I am so blessed to have you as my parents and I could not have done this without you.

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ABSTRACT

Stories of Persistence: Filipina/o American Undergraduate Students in a Private,
Catholic, and Predominantly White University

By

Angelica Mae Andaya Bailon

At more than three million, Filipina/o Americans are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the United States. Yet, few studies have focused on the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in institutions of U.S. higher education. Given the increasing disparity in degree achievement between first and second generation Filipina/o Americans, this qualitative study investigated the challenges to persistence that Filipina/o American undergraduates have faced in college and identified resources and strategies that have facilitated their survival in higher education. Through individual interviews and a focus group, participants shared their experiences in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White institution. This study found that challenges to persistence included feelings of cultural dissonance between Filipina/o Americans and a predominantly White and affluent student body, feelings of invisibility and marginality due to lack of representation in the institution's academic and social spheres, and personal academic challenges. Their stories also elucidated that despite these struggles, students were able to persist. Campus subcultures such as ethnic and cultural organizations, an Asian-

interest sorority, and service organizations were primary factors in persistence. Additionally, the support of family was key in fostering participants' educational aspirations. Institutional characteristics such as size, religious affiliation and mission, and available resources were also cited as important factors in building their commitment to persist. The stories shared in this study are a testament to the need to destabilize dominant narrative of persistence in higher education to include Filipina/o American students who are often overlooked as a result of the model minority myth.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

At nearly 3.4 million, Filipina/o Americans are the second largest Asian subgroup in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). After Mexican Americans, they are the second largest immigrant population in the country (Nadal, 2009; Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Demographic data on Filipina/os in the United States, especially first generation immigrants, seems to support the notion that Filipina/os fit the profile of the model minority—high achieving, highly educated, and most importantly, culturally assimilated (Takaki, 1998). According to the United States Census Bureau (2011), 45.9% of Filipina/o Americans age 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, exceeding the national average for all Americans of 28.2%.

Though these statistics bolster the notion that Filipina/o Americans are achieving academically in areas where other racial and ethnic minority groups are not, these numbers cannot be viewed as the entirety of the Filipina/o American educational experience. A lack of research on Filipina/o Americans in higher education has concealed the struggles of this community in their pursuit of educational success (Buenavista, 2007, 2009; Maramba, 2008b; Nadal, 2009; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). While a notable percentage of Filipina/o Americans hold college degrees, a growing gap in educational attainment has developed between first and second generation Filipina/o Americans (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). The data showed that only 30.7% of second generation Filipino Americans and 32.3% of second generation Filipina Americans hold a

bachelor's degree or higher compared to 41.1% of foreign-born Filipino Americans and 46.9% of Filipina American foreign-born (Bankston, 2006). Additionally, research has also shown that among Filipina/o Americans ages 18-24, foreign-born Filipina/o Americans are enrolled in college at a greater percentage (56.9%) than U.S.-born Filipina/o Americans (42.8%) (Bankston, 2006).

This growing gap in degree achievement and college enrollment between generations is just a starting point in the discourse on the status of Filipina/o Americans in higher education. In addition to a growing disparity in degree attainment between foreign-born Filipina/os and U.S.-born Filipina/os, data showed that overall educational attainment for Filipina/o American adults is stalling at the undergraduate level. Filipina/o Americans are not obtaining graduate degrees at the same rates as some of their Asian counterparts. Though 4.4% of Filipina/o Americans hold a master's degree and 3.1% have earned a professional or doctoral degree, these levels of attainment do not match that of other Asian groups in the U.S. such as Asian Indians (29.7% master's, 10.6% professional/doctoral), Chinese (17% master's, 9.4% professional/doctoral), and Korean (11.6% master's, 6.1% professional/doctoral) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Due to a paucity of scholarship on this group, researchers and practitioners working with Filipina/o Americans in education settings are unable to gain a solid understanding about what is influencing this shift in levels of educational attainment. Moreover, limited research is available for secondary and postsecondary educators and administrators to help inform their efforts to support Filipina/o American students' educational aspirations. Without solid a foundation to help them situate Filipina/o

American students' educational experiences, these support systems and agents cannot be fully effective.

Though a growing body of research has focused on how the various social, cultural, and political components surrounding public higher education have affected Filipina/o American students (Buenavista, 2007; Castillo, 2002; Gonzalez, 2007; Jacinto, 2001; Maramba, 2003, 2008a, 2008b; Oliveros, 2009), little is known about the experiences of Filipina/o American students in private institutions, specifically Catholic universities. This designation of institution type is important to recognize because students from Catholic colleges are found to graduate in four years at a higher rate (46.4%) than their public university counterparts (28.1%) (The Higher Education Research Institute, 2003).

Acknowledging that students at Catholic colleges have an increased likelihood to graduate in four years, it is critical to bridge this gap in the knowledgebase because the current discourse on student persistence—defined as continued work towards and the presence of a commitment to graduation—excludes the voices of Filipina/o American students attending private universities and their stories of resilience. This lack of recognition and exploration of their experiences in college—both the challenges and successes—reifies the invisibility and marginality of Filipina/o Americans that other works on this group have attempted to rectify.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White

university. Though perceived to be members of a model minority, Filipina/o Americans are clearly facing challenges to college access as well as undergraduate degree completion and additional higher education. As the percentage of students enrolled in college and college degree holders drops between first and second generation Filipina/o Americans, it is imperative to determine what challenges these students encounter on their journeys towards college graduation and how they work to overcome such obstacles. It is equally vital to understand in what ways Filipina/o American students think and act in order to remain motivated and committed to the completion of a bachelor's degree. While a number of studies have looked at the factors that contribute to the retention of Filipina/os Americans in higher education (Besnard, 2003; Buenavista, 2007; Castillo, 2002; Gonzalez, 2007; Oliveros, 2009), this research has focused chiefly on Filipina/o Americans in public universities. The present study investigated singularly the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university and their journeys to graduation.

Through the exploration of their experiences, I hoped to suggest new ways of looking at the Filipina/o American college student experience. Specifically, I aimed to destabilize the notion that Filipina/o Americans belong to a model minority who, as a consequence of their perceived success, do not merit attention, resources, or support from institutions of higher education. This study provides a counternarrative to the discourse on college student persistence—one which has silenced the voice of Asian American and consequently Filipina/o American students—in the hope of raising awareness about how

the needs of this population may be met in order to improve their chances for persistence and eventual completion of higher education.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it adds to a growing body of research on Filipina/o Americans undergraduates in higher education. Most research on Filipina/o Americans in higher education has focused on three strands: identity development, the role of student support offices, ethnic or cultural organizations and other cultural agents on Filipina/o American college access and retention, and the significance of Filipino cultural values on schooling outlooks and achievement. This study contributes to the existing literature by validating and expanding upon those previous research findings.

Additionally, the majority of research on Filipina/o Americans has been performed primarily at public institutions of higher education. This study is significant because it built upon on existing research, but examined the ways in which Filipina/o American students engage in various strategies of survival to aid them in their pursuits of their undergraduate degrees and how those strategies were developed and occurred within a Catholic and predominantly White university setting. It is important to look at student experiences in a Catholic university context since students attending these types of institutions have a higher likelihood of graduating in four years than their public university peers. Given this lack of knowledge about Filipina/o American students in Catholic higher education settings, this study's findings provided data which can better inform practices and programs aimed at improving racial and ethnic minority student

persistence, especially those concerning Filipina/o Americans in private, Catholic, and predominantly White institutions.

The inclusion of an examination of a Catholic university context is also significant since more than 85% of Filipina/os in the Philippines identify as Roman Catholic, a demographic that is estimated to be mirrored in the U.S. Filipina/o population (Gonzalez, 2009). To date no major research on Filipina/o Americans' undergraduate experiences has had the possibility to explore the potential role that their affiliation with the Roman Catholic faith tradition may have on their college experiences. While this aspect is not the main focus of the study, it is a part of Filipina/o American students' pre-college culture that may influence their college choice process and the way in which they engage in the university socially and academically, and thus merits consideration.

This research also sought to raise the critical consciousness of the researcher, the Filipina/o American student participants in the study, and the broader educational community about Filipina/o Americans' experiences and outcomes in higher education. Through our conversations, the researcher and participants questioned the ways in which the traditional notion of success in higher education (degree achievement) and Filipina/o Americans' seeming attainment of such success has determined the ways in which Filipina/o Americans have been excluded, rather than included from the discourse of minority experiences and persistence in higher education. The research process allowed the researcher and participants to engage in a critical and constructive dialogue about how to develop strategies and programs that create more equitable and socially just educational experiences for Filipina/o American students in higher education.

Research Paradigm

Hatch (2002) stated that research questions are essential to the inquiry process, “but they ought not be the starting point” and researchers must not ignore the “belief systems that undergird our thinking” (p. 12). To know my own worldview and beliefs about how knowledge is known, gained, and constructed is to recognize how I should perform research and what that research should accomplish. With this in mind, I acknowledge myself to be ontologically and epistemologically situated with the paradigm of critical constructivism. Critical constructivism is defined as a “social epistemology that addresses the sociocultural context of knowledge construction” and views the research participant as a “sociocultural being suspended historically in semiotic systems whose invisibility is potentially disempowering” (Taylor, 1996, p. 159).

In its application to research approaches, critical constructivism recognizes that knowledge is subjective, political, and influenced by power structures as well as an individual’s specific experiences. Research influenced by a critical constructivist paradigm also supports the notion of research as a transformative force that can address issues of social justice and power (Mertens, 2007). Thus, it followed that this research was informed by theories and concepts that acknowledge the Filipina/o American student’s place as a sociocultural being and that the negotiation of their historical and sociocultural selves is an essential aspect of their college experience.

Conceptual Framework

This study investigated the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students in a Catholic and predominantly White university and the challenges they have

encountered in their pursuit of a college degree. This study aimed to present their lived realities and experiences as students of color in an institution in which they are members of the minority population (non-White students), but also are identified with a population that has been generally perceived to be successful in higher education and viewed as a model minority (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders). It was therefore necessary to use a theoretical framework that considered what these different affiliations, cultural outlooks, and historical influences have on Filipina/o American students' ability to persist and graduate in these contexts.

Intercultural perspective of racial and ethnic minority student persistence.

Research on student persistence in higher education has heavily utilized Vincent Tinto's theory of student integration to frame modes of inquiry into this issue (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). While Tinto's work remains foundational, recent scholarship has critiqued Tinto's model of student integration as culturally biased and framed by the viewpoints of White, middle-class students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1999). They have argued that his theory has not taken into account the particular experiences and perspectives of minority students. Consequently, it is not a framework that can be adequately applied to research conducted on the commitment of students of color to degree attainment.

Alternatively, Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspective on racial and ethnic minority student persistence was used to guide the present study.

Museus and Quaye built upon Kuh and Love's (2000) propositions of premature student departure. Kuh and Love theorized that students' precollege cultures play an important role in their subsequent persistence in the university and that often, student

departure—especially for minority students—is a product of perceived incongruence between the students’ home culture and that of the dominant campus culture, as well as an inability to find membership and belonging to the university. They postulated that college students who had a strong sense of cultural incongruence needed to become immersed in one or more enclaves or subcultures as a strategy of survival. This immersion through collective and individual agents was critical to their ability to both attach and engage with the college. Museus and Quaye expounded upon these postulations and specifically targeted their revisions to focus on racial and ethnic minority student persistence. Their intercultural framework reaffirms the importance of understanding the cultural meaning making systems of racial and ethnic minority students and the role of those perspectives in their persistence. Museus and Quaye’s framework also underscores the need for colleges to cultivate their campus cultures so that they may be sites conducive to fostering minority student persistence. Further, the scholars focused not just on membership, but the quality of connections between the racial and ethnic minority student and the individual and collective cultural agents they associate with at campus.

Museus and Quaye’s (2009) intercultural perspective on racial and ethnic minority student persistence was important to consider in the investigation of Filipina/o American students’ paths to graduate from a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university for multiple reasons. First, this perspective validates the importance of culture for minority students as they navigate their way through higher education; culture is seen as an asset rather than as a disadvantage to a minority student’s overall experience as well

an influence on students' perspectives about college. Additionally, these propositions provide an alternative conceptual grounding to the oft-utilized, default theoretical framework of student persistence postulated by Tinto and is one that is centered on the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students. Finally, these postulations illustrate the significance of developing a sense of belonging to the minority college student experience, and that often that sense of membership and belonging, and consequently persistence, is developed not by shedding one's precollege culture or identity, but by learning to function as a bicultural individual in multiple distinct sociocultural environments (Darder, 1991). Museus and Quaye's intercultural framework of racial and ethnic minority student persistence demonstrates the need to understand the impact of various affiliations on students' perceptions of their ability to graduate from their institution and achieve the goal of obtaining a college degree. The tenets of the framework are defined and discussed further in the literature review.

Pinayism. This work was also strongly informed by Pinayism, a relatively new concept used chiefly by Filipina/o American scholars. As the originator of this framework, Tintiangco-Cubales (2005) has conceptualized Pinayism as *praxis*—the convergence of theory and practice, embodied in social action—which helps to “explore and create new forms and mechanisms to understand the Pinay/Pinoy [a woman of Filipina descent/a man of Filipino descent] experience in the United States” (p. 140). According to Tintiangco-Cubales, research as Pinayist praxis “aims to look at the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational state, age, place of birth, Diasporic migration,

citizenship, and love cross” (p. 141); it asserts “transformative and transgressive agency” (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007, p. 167). Utilizing a Pinayist perspective captures the complexities of the issues that impact the broader Filipina/o community (globalization, immigration, poverty, declining levels of educational achievement, and entry into professional fields) and does not allow for issues to be detached from the intersectionality of those issues.

A lack of research on Filipina/o Americans stretches across academic disciplines and is especially lacking in the field of education. I believe that this dearth in research exists because Filipina/o Americans have not been seen as a group in need of acknowledgment or investigation as the statistics seem to point to their academic and professional success in the United States compared to other immigrant groups. Yet, there is an absence in the knowledgebase of higher education research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at that, on the experiences of specific ethnic groups within that categorization (Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Maramba, 2010). As a result, it is necessary to bring to the forefront the voice of Filipina/o Americans and do so in a manner that engages the Filipina/o American community in active questioning and critiquing of the way in which the Filipina/o story in America has been told from the dominant perspective (White and middle class) rather than from our own experience and our own voice. Pinayists must “begin to engage in a discussion that should be a repetitive process of reevaluation, reconstruction, retransformation, re-transgression, and especially, for relove for one another” (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005, p. 147).

The research process was rooted in sharing the experiences of Filipina/o American students in a way that allowed them to reconstruct and retransform the narrative of Filipina/o students in higher education into one that has been embodied by persistence, resilience, and agency rather than marginalization and invisibility. Ultimately, the goal of Pinayism is to bring a critical focus to the issues faced by Filipina/o Americans and together through the exertion of voice and agency, “[legitimize] our existence in the world” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 186). Thus, by engaging in a Pinayist praxis, as a researcher I framed this work as an ongoing reevaluation and reconstruction of the discourse and dialogue between myself as researcher and the research participants, between the participants and their university, and between the researcher, the participants, and the broader Filipina/o American community. Together with Museus and Quaye’s intercultural framework of racial and ethnic minority student persistence, this work is rooted in the importance of multivocal, diverse Filipina/o American perspectives and how these points of view aid our understanding of the challenges Filipina/o American youth encounter on their road to college graduation. Pinayism grounds this work in the pursuit of social justice and advocacy.

An intercultural perspective of minority student college persistence and Pinayism are connected by their core values—bringing to the center of research voices that have been subjugated in the mainstream discourse in education. Kincheloe (2002) argued that this “voice” that emerges from research based in the critical perspective is a voice that is “informed” and “fashioned to speak/write in the cause of social justice [and] egalitarian social change...” (p. 121). Together these concepts provided a powerful, critical lens

through which the critical consciousness of Filipina/o American students and the researcher was raised in order to make them “better equipped to make conscious decisions about who they want to be” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 49).

Research Questions

The guiding line of inquiry that informed the research questions was an attempt to understand the experiences of Filipina/o American students as they work towards undergraduate degree completion. This research study was directed by two research questions:

1. What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?
2. What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?

By identifying and examining the challenges Filipina/o American students have faced as undergraduates and the actions they have taken to overcome those challenges, I aimed to conduct research that shed light on the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in higher education and helped bring visibility and agency to this community of students.

Additionally, this study adds to both a growing body of research on Filipina/o Americans in education and to the broader Filipina/o American historical narrative.

Research Design & Methodology

The research study endeavored to bring voice to the experiences of undergraduate Filipina/o Americans in higher education and what the process of persistence has entailed

for them—that is, to build awareness of what challenges they have faced and how they have worked to overcome those obstructions as they work towards their degrees. As an understudied group in educational research, perspectives of Filipina/o American students have remained on the outskirts of discourse on educational achievement and attainment (Buenavista, 2007, 2009; Maramba, 2008a; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). This work is centered on those student perspectives and voices. I believed that I could do this most effectively through a qualitative study using interviews and a focus group. Merriam (1998) asserted that a basic or generic qualitative study is one that “[seeks] to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11). Qualitative studies seek to develop an understanding of “how individuals make sense of their everyday lives” and realities (Hatch, 2002, p. 6).

Qualitative methods of interviews and a focus group were chosen because the purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students as they worked towards degree completion. I believed it was necessary to gain rich and detailed information about the issue of persistence from the perspectives of individuals. In order to recruit interview and focus group participants and gain a general understanding of the context in which these individual participants’ experiences occurred, I administered a survey to group of Filipina/o American undergraduates at the research site that collected demographic and descriptive data. This survey also included a seven-item scale prompting students to reflect on their experiences at the research site and their level of satisfaction with certain aspects of their college experience. This data informed the research by providing essential contextual

information and establishing a point of reference from which to view the individual perspectives gathered in the qualitative phase.

Because this work was aimed at bringing Filipina/o American student voices and experiences to the forefront, it was absolutely imperative to conduct qualitative data collection. This study was influenced by the critical constructivist research paradigm and conceptually framed by Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspective on racial and ethnic minority student persistence and Pinayist praxis, all of which are rooted in reevaluation, reconstruction, and retransformation of dominant discourses. Hence, Filipina/o American student participants had the chance to deconstruct hierarchies of knowledge and knowledge-holders through interviews and focus groups. As the researcher, I was not the nexus of meaning and interpretation, but rather an instrument through which the participants were able to relay their truths and understandings of the world.

A critical constructivist standpoint maintains that there are multiple realities and understandings of the world and that such understandings are influenced by power and social relationships within society (Hatch, 2002). Moreover, from the critical constructivist perspective, researchers and participants coconstruct knowledge and meaning about these experiences together (Hatch, 2002). In-depth interviews and a focus group allowed for this coconstruction to take place. These methods were used to gather data about informants' experiences and meanings that they give to those experiences and thus, how they make sense of their worlds.

Interviews are a way to gather data about events, behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations of the world that cannot be observed (Merriam, 1998). Through the interview process, dialogue is able to develop between researcher and the research participants. In this research study, the interviews were opportunities for reflection about what was shared and learned through the process of remembering and giving meaning to those memories or experiences. From these exchanges, I hoped that a transformative dialogue would transpire in which both the research participants and myself identified ways to assist Filipina/o American students in their paths of persistence.

A purposeful sample of eight individuals was chosen from the pool of students (n=33) who completed the survey. Student research participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and share their stories, availability, as well as some demographic factors, primarily gender and year of study. The in-depth interview and focus group participants included three females in their senior year, one female and two males in their junior year, and one female and one male in their sophomore year. All participants were traditional college students (full-time status and between the ages of 18 and 22 years old).

A series of individual interviews took place with the participants from October 2011 through December 2011. Interviews were individual, in-person, and utilized an in-depth approach to interviewing. Each participant was interviewed at least once; six participants were formally interviewed twice and also answered follow-up inquiries via email. Two participants, who could not be formally interviewed a second time due to scheduling conflicts, completed their participation through email and in informal,

unrecorded conversations. For the in-person interviews, a limited number of open-ended questions focused on very specific topics regarding their lived experiences in college. Using this approach allowed the research participants to respond directly to the research questions. These interviews provided participants a forum to share their stories of persistence and their experiences as Filipina/o American students in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university.

I also remained flexible to posing new questions based on the participants' responses in the interview setting. Remaining flexible was a way to build the trustworthiness of the data collected by qualitative methods because it allowed me to become a research instrument and build upon "tacit knowledge" that was shared in the qualitative research process (Guba, 1981). Maintaining this flexibility in the research setting illustrated a continued awareness of the researcher's role in a qualitative research process: the researcher and the subject of inquiry cannot be independent of one another and are instead, interrelated and bear influence upon each other (Guba, 1981). Therefore, I sought to be flexible, while also using a formulated interview protocol to obtain the information needed to support the purpose of the inquiry.

In addition to the in-depth individual interviews, participants had the opportunity to voice their perspectives through a group interview, commonly known as a focus group. Focus groups are called such because they focus on specific topics and this focal point of discussion can "generate a lot of data in a relatively short period of time" (Hatch, 2002, p. 132). Focus groups also allow for the ability to capture group dynamics and reveal how the participants construct meanings and responses to the questions based on that dynamic.

Hatch stated that this component can produce rich and powerful data since recording how “meaning is negotiated in groups” is difficult to garner using different strategies (p. 132). It was my hope that participants would feel more open to sharing their experiences as part of a group and that the group dynamic gave them a sense of solidarity, to know that their experiences as ethnic minority students at Ignatian University (a pseudonym for the research site) have underlying similarities.

Focus group participants included four of the eight qualitative research participants. They participated in a focus group after their initial individual interviews in order give the participants and myself the opportunity to reflect on the initial common themes and patterns that emerged from the one-on-one interviews. The focus group enabled them to negotiate as a group the meanings of the initial findings. The focus group allowed participants to build an awareness of and engage in dialogue about the issues that are raised about their collective experiences as Filipina/o Americans in a Catholic and predominantly White university.

Limitations

In order to address the limitations of this study, I needed to be transparent and recognize the significance of my positionality in my work. I am the U.S.-born daughter of first generation Filipino immigrants. My entire schooling experience—from kindergarten to present day—has been spent in Catholic schools. Until I left to attend college, I lived in an area of Los Angeles where I was surrounded by people mostly “like me,” that is Catholic or Christian and people of color, many of whom were immigrants or children of immigrants. As an undergraduate, I moved to New York City and attended a

Catholic, predominantly White university where I experienced for the first time in my life a context and school culture in which being a person of color was not the dominant perspective or the “norm.” Furthermore, there was a marginal number of Filipina/o American undergraduate students at my particular campus and by extension, a small percentage of Asian American and Pacific Islander undergraduates. I attended the same university for my graduate studies and was the only Asian American in my cohort.

I acknowledge that my experiences as a Filipina American in higher education have influenced my research interests and pursuit of this topic. Therefore, I am highly aware of the personal nature of my research. Hatch (2002) stated, “Researchers are part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (p. 10). As a Filipina American researcher investigating the realities and “truths” of the lives of Filipina/o American youths in a university setting, I understood that I was a part of that world, even if I was also simultaneously outside of it as “the researcher.” I hoped that by acknowledging my positionality and my personal sense of belonging to my informants, I was being transparent about the limitations of this study. I envisioned this study as a way to bring a critical consciousness about the ways Filipina/o American students persist and navigate their way through their higher education structures. Moreover, through this research and their participation, it was hoped that Filipina/o American students would be able to identify, problematize, and actively transform any practices or cultural components that have been present in their specific setting that have made persistence towards degree completion for students of color difficult. Further, by naming such oppressive practices, it was hoped that they would be encouraged to create more positive

learning cultures and environments that would foster their own self-defined notions of success in higher education.

The threats to the validity of this study were directly related to the chosen research site and sample as well as the role of the researcher. Because this study focused on participants derived from a purposive sample—Filipina/o American students at a specific Catholic, predominantly White university in Los Angeles County—and I, the researcher, also identify as a Filipina American who attended a Catholic, predominantly White university, there was a possibility of experimenter effects wherein the students responded or behaved in certain ways because of our shared markers of identity. Our shared background and shared identity as Filipina/o Americans may have also influenced them and thus, impacted the external validity of the project. While there was a possibility for participants to only present information or experiences in such a way that did not paint a picture anything less than resilient, successful, and thriving students, I believe that their responses were transparent and reflective of their truths.

Delimitations

This findings of this study do not intend to be generalizable or representative of the experiences of Filipina/o American students in all predominantly White, Catholic universities. Rather the results are a reflection of the experiences of Filipina/o American students within a specific school context and experience. This study adds to the literature on Filipina/o American education and achievement by exploring the challenges of primarily second generation students as a way to understand possible reasons for the

growing achievement gap between generations of Filipina/o Americans. Additionally, this study was limited to those students who chose to participate.

Definition of Terms

Filipino or Filipina. A person whose ancestry traces back to the Philippine Islands (commonly known as the Philippines). This term may also be spelled Pilipino or Pilipina. This is often done to reflect that the sound for “f” was not present in the Philippine languages that were used before the Spanish colonial presence on the islands. Some scholars spell it as such to make a political statement (Galang, 1999; Nadal, 2004).

Filipino or Filipina American. A person of Philippine ancestry who either immigrated to and currently resides in the United States or was born in the United States. In this study, when referring to all members of this group as a collective entity, Filipina/o American will be used. Filipina American shall be used when referring specifically to a Filipina American female. Filipino will be used when referring specifically to a Filipino American male.

Persistence. Broadly refers to a student’s continued enrollment at a university or continuation in higher education at another college through the transfer process (Kuh & Love, 2000). For the purposes of this study, persistence refers to the continued work towards and commitment of a student to degree completion and graduation from a private, Catholic university.

Commitment to graduate. In this study, commitment to graduate refers to a student’s intention to graduate from a private, Catholic university in a prescribed time frame of four years. See persistence.

Retention. From an institutional standpoint, students continue to matriculate at that particular institution.

Minority/student of color. For the purpose of this study, the terms “minority” or “students of color” refer to individuals considered racial, cultural, or ethnic minorities in America; for example, Black, Latina/o, Asians, Filipina/o, Chinese, Mexican, Lao. The usage of these terms is consistent with other scholarship that has focused on the persistence of these groups in higher education.

Critical constructivism. A research paradigm that holds that knowledge is socially constructed and influenced by sociocultural, historical, and material realities of those constructing knowledge. These experiences shape individuals’ worldview and how they approach education, learning, and constructing knowledge.

Pinayism. A praxis and pedagogical approach to understanding the Filipina/o experience in the United States. Pinayism’s originator Tintiangco-Cubales (2005) maintained that “Pinayism is not about one single epistemology, nor does it have a set definition or rendition” (p.139). It is a praxis “asserting a transformative and transgressive agency that combines theory, practice, and personal reflection” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 179). Also, Pinayism “aims to look at the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational state, age, place of birth, Diasporic migration, citizenship, and love cross” (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005, p.141).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study examined the experiences of Filipina/o American students at a private, Catholic university, and specifically, the challenges they have faced in pursuit of their undergraduate degrees and the strategies and resources that they have used to overcome those challenges. As the second largest Asian subgroup and the second largest immigrant group in the United States, Filipina/o Americans have been long understudied and overlooked in educational research. This study sought to add to the existing body of literature and to bring voice to Filipina/o Americans and their experiences in higher education.

This study was informed by a critical constructivist research paradigm and was conceptually framed by Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural framework on racial and ethnic minority student persistence and the tenets of the praxis of Pinayism (Tintinagco-Cubales, 2007, 2009). Chapter 2 focuses on a review of literature on Asian Americans in education, the influence of the model minority myth on discourse on Asian Americans in education, the sociocultural and historical foundations of Filipina/os in the United States, Filipina/o Americans in American educational systems, and Filipina/o American identity development, as well as the theories of student persistence, including Museus and Quaye's intercultural perspective of racial and ethnic minority student persistence and Pinayism. Chapter 3 includes an outline of the research methods and design as well as provides details about the role of the researcher's background in the research process. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research study derived from the interviews and focus group. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation and offers a discussion

of the findings as well as the implications and recommendations for future research. The final chapter also includes participants' and the researcher's reflections on the research process.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and share the experiences of Filipina/o American students in a Catholic and predominantly White university in Los Angeles. Specifically, this study examined the challenges they faced as they worked towards graduation and the strategies and resources they have used to cope with these obstacles in order to be successful. This review of literature provides context as to why the study of Filipina/o American student persistence and graduation is significant as well as introduces the conceptual underpinnings of the this research. The first half of this chapter includes a brief overview of Asian Americans in education, then charts the experience of Filipina/os in the United States. This includes the historical context of Filipina/os in the United States, Filipina/o American educational achievement, the significance of Filipina/o culture and values on educational outlooks, the role of identity development in building strategies of persistence, and the social and academic experiences of Filipina/o Americans in U.S. institutions of higher education. Additionally, theories of student persistence will be reviewed to make sense of how Filipina/o Americans college student persistence fits into the existing research on college student persistence. The second half of this review presents the conceptual framework, Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspective on racial and ethnic minority student persistence and the praxis of Pinayism.

Context: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education

Definition and demographic information. The term Asian American refers to individuals of Asian descent in the United States. Civil Rights activists were the first to employ the term in the 1960s; they did so to create a sense of solidarity and political empowerment amongst the various Asian groups during the Civil Rights movement (Hune, 2002; Omatsu, 2009). In 1980, the term was adopted by the federal government to collect data for the U.S. Census and continues to be used for reporting purposes (Hune, 2002; Min, 2005). In the current discourse on issues of race, ethnicity, and their intersections with education, Pacific Islanders, people whose ethnic origins are Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, are often grouped with Asian Americans. For the purposes of this study, the acronym AAPI will be used to refer to the forty-eight different ethnic groups that comprise the Asian American and Pacific Islander racial category (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010).

The Asian American and Pacific Islander population in the United States has seen unprecedented growth in the last few decades. In 1960, the AAPI population stood at 877,934 (Takaki, 1998). In the aftermath of the Immigration Act of 1965, the Asian American population grew exponentially and by 1980, the number climbed to 3,500,000 in total (Takaki, 1998). Ten years later, the population increased by 108%, totaling more than 7,300,000. The 2000 Census recorded that the AAPI population in the United States had increased to 12.7 million, about 4.5% of the population (Barnes & Bennett, 2002). In 2010, it was estimated that the combined number of AAPIs had grown to 18.5 million,

making AAPIs the fastest growing race group in the United States (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

Despite their growing numbers, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have remained on the margins in the discourse on student achievement and schooling in the United States (Buenvista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010; Darder & Torres, 2004; Hune 2002; Lee, 2006). This is due in large part to the conceptualization of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as the “model minority.”

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the model minority myth. The myth of the model minority is one that has occupied much of the attention of researchers of Asian American issues and in particular, those focused on AAPIs and education. The model minority stereotype has suggested that “Asian Americans receive universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success” (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Because this term has been applied universally to all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, it has veiled the disparities and diversity of experiences, abilities, and achievement among those categorized as such. In the United States educational system, homogenized notions of AAPIs students’ abilities and achievement have kept Asian American and Pacific Islanders largely excluded from the discourse on the achievement gap amongst students, a discourse that has been traditionally focused on the gap between White and Latino and Black students (Darder & Torres, 2004). Furthermore, this misrepresentation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders is particularly problematic in higher education: the model minority myth has perpetuated the notion that AAPIs are overrepresented in

institutions of higher education when in fact, certain groups within the AAPI categorization are underrepresented, underserved, and most strikingly, underachieving such as Cambodians, Lao, Hmong, Pacific Islanders, and Vietnamese compared to other ethnic groups like Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese (Buenavista et al., 2009; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010; Lee, 2006; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Teranishi et al., 2004).

The construction of the model minority myth emerged in the 1960s to reaffirm the ideological notion of the American Dream during a time when the United States was experiencing a decline in the international economy and saw the birth of a new Black underclass and a diminishing White middle class (Kawai, 2005; Lee, 2009; Takaki, 1998). By positioning Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as a model minority who achieved regardless of their immigration status, previous history or discriminatory practices enacted against them here in the United States, the media veiled the experiences of prejudice, struggle, and political agency of AAPIs while it also created a divide between this group and other historically marginalized groups (Suzuki, 2002; Wu, 2002).

Wu (2002) stated:

As well meaning as it may be, the model minority myth ought to be rejected for three reasons. First, the myth is a gross-simplification that is not accurate enough to be seriously used for understanding 10 million people. Second, it conceals within it an invidious statement about African Americans along the lines of the inflammatory taunt: "They made it; why can't you?" Third, the myth is abused both to deny that Asian Americans experience racial discrimination and to turn Asian Americans into a racial threat. (p. 49)

Through the model minority myth, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have thus been marked as "White" rather than as marginalized people of color, signifying that

educational, economic, and social capital are markers of Whiteness and that failure to obtain certain levels of capital is a marker of otherness, an otherness associated with people of color and other minority groups (Lew, 2006; Wu, 2002). This not only creates an inaccurate portrait of the experiences of AAPIs in the United States, but effectively creates conflict amongst people of color by racializing one group as “successful” as a result of their supposed assimilation into White culture and all others as outsiders, unable to attain that level of success as a result of their supposed inability to conform into the dominant culture (Kawai, 2005; Suzuki, 1995, 2002). In contemporary times, this ultimately has served to delegitimize Asian American and Pacific Islander students’ struggles for equity and access in education such as the initial exclusion of Asian Americans as a protected class under federal affirmative action laws and the removal Filipina/o Americans from affirmative action protections in university admissions in the 1980s (Buena Vista et al., 2009; Wu, 2002).

The usage of the model minority stereotype in schools has perpetuated an ideological hegemony in the United States that favors students from the American dominant culture and supports the notion of meritocracy (Lee, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009). It has created an educational culture in which Asian American and Pacific Islander students’ issues and needs are rendered invisible because if the model minority myth is true, then it is not possible for such struggles, conflicts, or problems to exist (Lee, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2002). Yet, research in the last two decades has shown that this notion that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders achieve unparalleled success

and do not experience any sort of exclusion or disadvantage is untrue, misleading, and disenfranchising.

Educational achievement of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The numbers are certainly impressive: 71% of all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who enter a four-year postsecondary institution will complete a bachelor's degree within six years (Museus & Kiang, 2009). But this number oversimplifies the experiences of the diverse set of groups represented under the Asian American and Pacific Islander category. Data on AAPI students is typically presented in aggregate. Doing so supports the notion that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have a homogeneous schooling experience and that there is no variance in the ways in which the subgroups engage in education (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010; Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, 2002).

The invisibility of the Asian American and Pacific Islander students' needs and experiences is particularly important when looking at socioeconomically disadvantaged students who are statistically less likely to attend college and earn degrees than Asian American and Pacific Islander students with higher socioeconomic statuses (Kao, 1996; Lee, 2006, 2009; Lew, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, 2002). This correlation between underachievement and poverty particularly impacts Southeast Asian students as well as Pacific Islanders. According to the 2000 Census, 53.3% of Cambodians, 59.6% of Hmong, and 49.6% of Lao age 25 or older have less than a high school education (Lee, 2006); among Pacific Islanders, 34.7% of Tongans, 33.2% of Fijians and 62.3% of Marshallese age 25 and older have not completed a high school education (National

Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008).

Furthermore, these same groups are not attaining college degrees at the same rate as some of their other Asian American and Pacific Islander counterparts: only 9.2% of Cambodian, 7.5% of Hmong, 7.7% of Lao, 8.6% of Tongans, 8.8% of Fijians, and 5.1% of Marshallese age 25 and older hold bachelor's degrees (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Thus, this conceptualization of AAPIs as universally high achieving cannot be validated because these students' experiences demonstrate otherwise.

In addition to research showing the range of educational achievement levels among Asian American and Pacific Islander groups, other research has illustrated that it is becoming increasingly important to study the intersectionality of various identifiers and their influence on the educational experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander students. This has been done primarily through qualitative study (Coloma, 2008; Kao, 1996; Kurien, 2004; Lee, 2006). Issues of language, gender, class, immigration status and generation, religion, and family structure and their impact on student achievement and persistence must all be analyzed to better understand the context and conditions under which these students must function and persist.

Research on the educational experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders is a growing field and receiving increasing attention. Though most studies have focused on the impact of the model minority myth on student experiences, current research is building on that paradigm to fill in the gaps in research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by focusing on specific ethnic subgroups within that categorization. This study

sought to understand the experiences and factors that impact the persistence of undergraduate Filipina/o American students at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university. However, in order to more aptly understand the experiences of these students in educational settings, it was necessary to understand the historical and sociocultural context of Filipina/os in the United States. The following section provides a brief overview of the ways in which history, culture, politics, and economics impact the Filipina/o American community, even before their youth set foot on the college campus.

Historical context: Filipinos, colonialism, and immigration to the U.S. In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan landed on the Philippine island of Cebu, initiating more than 300 years of Spanish colonialism of the Philippine people, their land, resources, and effectively, their minds, culture, and ways of being. The 7,100 islands became known as *Las Islas Filipinas* after King Felipe II of Spain. According to San Buenaventura (2002), what followed was not only a conquering of land and peoples in the physical and economic sense, but a mental and spiritual colonization—a “conquest-by-the-cross.” The Spaniards used the injection of morality through the institution of Catholicism as the official religion into Filipino life as the “ultimate justification” for their military conquest (San Buenaventura, 2002, p. 145). Until 1898, the Philippines remained under the Spanish imperial hold, only then to be passed on to another colonial power when Spain sold the islands to the United States for 20 million dollars (Bonus, 2000). What ensued was a devastating war for independence, the rarely discussed Philippine-American War (1899-1902), also referred to as the Philippine Insurrection or Philippine War of Independence. Ultimately, the revolution did not secure independence for the Philippines.

It must be recognized that Filipino/a Americans have a unique tie to the United States that other Asian American subgroups do not: the Philippines was occupied by the United States from 1898 to 1946, and Filipinos were treated as colonial subjects. Hence, the history of Filipina/os in the United States must be seen in the context of a neocolonial relationship with their new country: the collective memory of the American occupation of the Philippines for nearly fifty years, the early migrant experience of the recruited laborers, the enlistment and exploitation of Filipinos in the U.S. armed forces, and the mass immigration of Filipina/os in the wake of the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act.

These are but a few of the areas Filipina/o American scholars explore in attempts to carve out space for the *Pilipino* in the discourse of American history. Much of the scholarship on Filipina/os has focused on the experience of first generation, adult immigrants to the United States. Because this study focused on the experiences of Filipina/o American college students of various immigration generations, it adds to the existing research on both the Filipina/o American historical narrative as well as educational research on Filipina/o Americans. By looking at the subsequent generations of Filipina/o Americans and their pursuit of the “American Dream” in the United States through their persistence in higher education, this research has the possibility to inform educators and students alike of the challenges Filipina/o Americans face in American colleges and universities with a particular emphasis on a private, Catholic institution.

American colonialism and the (mis)education of the Filipino. As previously stated, the experience of Filipina/o American students in the United States must be viewed within the context of the neocolonial relationship between the people of the

Philippines and the United States. For most Filipina/o Americans, while no direct memory or experience of the colonization of the Philippines exists, this collective memory resides in the immigration histories of their families and the schooling experiences of their parents, grandparents, and extended family in the Philippines. As former colonial subjects of the United States, Filipina/os in the Philippines have experienced an education system modeled after the American public school system. What Constantino (1982) called the “miseducation” of the Filipino began in 1898 when the United States began their occupation of the islands following the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War. Education became a way of solidifying the American presence in the Philippines. English was instituted as the official language of instruction in schools. American teachers were brought to the Philippines to continue the colonization of the mind by placing Whites at the center of information and knowledge. Hence, schooling was a mechanism that legitimized American colonization and imperialism. The educational system instituted in the Philippines taught the Filipino people to be participants in American hegemony, adopt the values of American culture, and ultimately, to uphold the United States as the ideal democracy, a country for the Philippines to aspire to become (Buenavista, 2007; Cordova, 2003; Gonzalez, 2005).

To further this effort, the United States government initiated the *pensionados* program. This program sponsored young Filipino men to travel to the U.S. to attend college. About 14,000 *pensionados* studied in the United States between 1910 and 1938, all of whom were young, unmarried males from the middle and upper classes of Philippine society (Cordova, 1983). They were expected to return and take leadership

positions in the Philippine government, guided by the ideologies and values they learned in American institutions of learning. In addition to the use of this social institution to solidify American hegemony, this “Americanization” of the Filipino people was carried out through another social institution—the Church. Though efforts were made to inject Protestantism into Filipino life in an attempt to remove Catholicism as the central religion, today more than 80% of Filipina/os identify themselves as Roman Catholics (primarily the result of Spanish colonization), while 10% identify as non-Catholic Christians, a statistic that has remained steady since the onset of the American occupation (Gonzalez, 2009; Nadal, 2004). Due to this exposure to Western ideology and thought, “Long before the Filipina/o immigrant, tourist or visitor sets foot on the U.S. continent she—her body and sensibility—has been prepared by the thoroughly Americanized culture of the homeland” (San Juan, 1994).

Filipinos and the American labor market: The first wave. *Pensionados* were not the only Filipinos lured to the United States in hopes of finding work and reaping some benefits from the colonial relationship with the United States. In his seminal work *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1998), Takaki wrote, “Technically, they were not foreigners...they were classified as ‘American nationals’ which allowed them entry to the United States. The influx of Filipinos or ‘Pinoys,’ as they called themselves was sudden and massive” (p. 315). While the Manilamen of the bayous Louisiana—crewmen of Spanish galleon ships who deserted their posts due to unjust and abusive treatment—were the first to develop settlements in the United States in the mid-18th century, it was not until the early 1900s that the “first wave” of laborers made their way to America.

Filipinos were seemingly everywhere: Hawaii, Alaska, and the West Coast of the mainland. The first generation of Filipino immigrant laborers—now referred to as the *manongs*—worked in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, the salmon canneries of Alaska, the fruit orchards and vegetable farms of California, and in various parts of the mainland, in the service industry as janitors, busboys, valets, and porters (Takaki, 1998).

Filipinos were seen as both an asset and a threat. They were encouraged to immigrate to the U.S. to fill a cheap labor pool that had historically been occupied by the Japanese and Chinese immigrants; yet they were seen as an economic threat to European American laborers (Bonus, 2000). This perception of Filipinos, despite their status as American nationals, incited racial discrimination and eventually, the institution of the Tydings McDuffie Act in 1934, which granted “independence” to the Philippines (though not officially in effect until 1946) and rescinded Filipinos’ status as U.S. nationals. Consequently, the immigration quota from the Philippines was limited to 50 immigrants per year. Reclassified as aliens, Filipinos found themselves as perpetual foreigners in the United States. As the Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan—who came to the U.S. as a boy in 1930—wrote, “I know deep down in my heart that I am an exile in America. I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I didn't commit. And this crime is that I am a Filipino in America.” Though struggling to make their way, Filipinos immigrants—who were mostly young, unmarried men—found solidarity and agency in each other, and established labor unions including the Philippine Labor Chamber, Filipino Labor Union, Filipino Farm Labor Union, and the Filipino Agricultural Labor Union (Maramba 2003; Cordova, 2000).

The second wave. While Filipinos were being systematically deprived of certain rights and protections and subjected to increasing anti-Filipino sentiments in the United States, the second World War once again elucidated the ways in which the colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States played a role in the treatment and exploitation of Filipinos. To support the efforts of the United States in the war, Filipinos were recruited in the armed forces, despite the fact that they were not official U.S. citizens. The Selective Service Act enabled the enlistment of Filipinos into the United States military and promised that in exchange for three years of service, they would be granted United States citizenship. In addition to those who enlisted in the American service, Philippine armed forces were incorporated into the United States Armed Forces in the Far East. It is estimated that a total of 250,000-400,000 Filipinos served as members of the U.S. armed forces. Yet, with the passing of the Recission Act of 1946, they were denied the benefits they had been told they would receive; only 4,000 were granted citizenship and thousands were denied veteran's health care and financial compensation to families of soldiers killed in the war. While the Filipino Naturalization Act of 1946 and the Immigration Act of 1990 eventually fulfilled the promise of naturalization for many veterans, this struggle for equity and justice for Filipino veterans still continues today. In early 2011, the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act was introduced in the United States Congress in an attempt to restore full benefits and monetary compensation to Filipino veterans who have still not been recognized for their military service to this country.

The third wave. The passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 lifted former restrictions on immigration from Asian countries, including the Philippines. Many Filipinos were able to enter the United States under the status of family reunification. The third wave of Filipino immigration to the United States also signaled the entry of a new sort of Filipino immigrant—the professional. Many of these immigrants were doctors, accountants, engineers, and other highly skilled workers. Additionally, an influx of women immigrated in the post-1965 period, many of whom were nurses filling a critical shortage in the U.S. labor market, though many nurses had also come to the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s as part of the Exchange Visitor Program (Choy, 2003).

The third wave of Filipino immigrants is important to note for multiple reasons. First, the continued immigration to the United States from the Philippines demonstrates the “closed and sustained economic, political, and cultural relationship” between the two countries (Bonus, 2000). Second, it shows the pervasive and trenchant nature of the Americanization campaign of the early 20th century that created an idealized notion of America and the American Dream. Moreover, this phase of immigration is characterized by the arrival of highly skilled workers and professionals, armed with not only college or graduate degrees, but degrees acquired in an American-influenced Philippine education system (most notably, English as the language of instruction). Finally, this stage of immigration is significant, especially for the context of this study, because it is the period in which most of the families of students who are currently of college-age would have arrived in America. About 54% of Filipinos in the United States are foreign-born and more than half entered before 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Statistics on Filipina/o American educational attainment. In addition to the perceptions that the majority of Filipina/o immigrants are armed with English-speaking skills and are well-acquainted with American culture, demographic data on these immigrants seem to support the notion that Filipina/os fit the profile of the model minority—high achieving, highly educated, and most importantly, culturally assimilated. Nearly 46% of Filipina/o Americans age 25 and older hold a Bachelor degree or higher, far exceeding the national average of 28.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, only 7.6% of Filipina/o Americans age 25 or older hold less than a high school diploma, significantly lower than the national average of 14.4% of all Americans and 14.1% of all Asian Americans and 12.1% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Despite the seeming “strength” of the data to corroborate the compatibility of Filipina/o Americans with the myth of the model minority, what is most striking are data elucidating a gap in educational attainment between the first and second generation of Filipina/o American (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, only 30.7% of second generation Filipina/o Americans held a Bachelors degree or higher compared with 41.1% of foreign-born Filipina Americans and 46.9% of Filipino American foreign-born (Bankston, 2006). Additionally, the level of educational attainment does not necessarily equal in paying jobs and income. Buenavista (2009) reported that from 2006-2008, the per capita income for Filipinos was \$26,320, less than that of Whites (\$29,920) and the total population (\$27,470). Thus, the socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts of Filipina/o Americans may be much different than what

might be associated with or imagined for those with high levels of educational attainment.

In California and Hawaii, the two states with the highest concentration of Filipina/os, the underachievement of Filipina/o youth compared with other Asian American groups highlights the pernicious nature of the model minority myth. In Hawaii, roughly 34% of Filipina/o Americans are employed in service occupations (compared to 12% of Japanese); their per capita incomes of about \$16,500 compared to \$30,000 per capita income of the Japanese in Hawaii (Cunanan, Guerrero, & Minamoto, 2007). Furthermore, only about 11% of Filipina/o Americans in Hawaii are college graduates, a statistic that is particularly distressing given that about 14% of elementary and secondary school children in Hawaii are of Filipina/o descent.

At nearly 1.2 million, Filipinos are 3.2% of the population in California. In that state, the negative impact of the myth of the model minority on Filipina/o Americans is exemplified by inequities in the college admissions process. Once included in affirmative action programs, Filipina/os saw a drop in admissions rate to public universities after being taken out of the affirmative action protection plan in the 1980s. For instance, in 1996, only 26% of the 979 Filipina/o American applicants were admitted to the University of California, Berkeley; this was the lowest acceptance rate for any ethnic group to the University that year (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). Additionally, though by the year 2000 the student population of University of California, Berkeley registered at about 40% Asian American, Chinese American students outnumbered Filipinos seven to one (Teranishi, 2002). Buenavista (2007) reported that while an 81.6%

increase in admissions of Filipina/o American students at a public, highly selective research university occurred between 1996 and 2005, Filipina/os still remained to be less than 300 students out of the nearly 8,000 students offered admission. Moreover, at this particular institution, in 2005, though the total undergraduate Asian American population was 39.2% of the enrolled student body, Filipina/o American enrollment was only 3.7%. This percentage was just slightly higher than the enrollment of African American students (3.53%) and lower than the total Chicano/Latino population of approximately 10% (Buenavista, 2007).

Additionally, in their study of a sampling Asian American undergraduates, Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) found that less than 19% of Filipina/o Americans attended highly selective universities and colleges whereas their Korean and Chinese peers had higher attendance rates at 38% and 35%, respectively. Their findings also showed that among all the ethnic subgroups included in the study, Filipina/o Americans from the highest income bracket were the least likely to attend the most selective institutions and that Filipina/o Americans from both low and high socioeconomic backgrounds were the least likely to attend private colleges or universities (Teranishi et al., 2004).

These various studies illustrated that the underrepresentation of Filipina/o Americans in higher education—particularly in “top tier” schools—directly contests the viability of the Model Minority myth. The exclusion of Filipina/o Americans in the discourse on underachievement and the schooling climate, practices, and policies that contribute to those conditions can be attributed to the insidious nature of the model

minority myth to obscure the struggles of Asian American students (Buena Vista, 2007; Maramba, 2008a; Teranishi, 2002). It is also the result of a general lack of research on Filipina/o American youth and their lived experiences (Adefuin, 2001; Cordova, 2003; Museus & Maramba, 2010; Nadal, 2008; Teranishi, 2002).

Filipina/o Americans and Higher Education

Research on Filipina/o Americans in higher education has been framed within the context of the stagnation in Filipina/o American admission and enrollment at highly selective public universities. In the past fifteen years, though some research has been conducted on Filipina/o American students in higher education, most remain unpublished and are found chiefly in the form of graduate theses or dissertations. The research produced by Okamura and Agbayani (1997) has remained the foundational work in the field. Though an essay of only 14 pages, it has served as a starting point for many scholars of Filipina/os Americans in higher education. In this essay, the authors raised the issue of Filipina/o American education in a few key areas which have continued to be the focus of the majority of research: cultural values, identity development, and the role of Filipina/o American studies courses and ethnic clubs or organizations on students' sense of belonging and persistence. The following section will review the literature on these three areas of research on Filipina/o Americans in higher education.

Cultural values and education. Filipina/o Americans attribute a high value to higher education and educational achievement (Agbayani-Sietwert, 2004; Nadal, 2008; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Wolf, 1997). Believing in the supposed validity of meritocracy as a vehicle to economic success and true attainment of the American

Dream, many Filipina/o families emphasize a high level of educational attainment as an expectation for their children and view educational success as a marker of honor and a source of pride for the family (Litton, 1999). Wolf (1997) observed that the “intense” pressure Filipina/o parents place upon their children to succeed academically was universally recognized by the teachers of Filipina/o students as being a value that made Filipina/o students “stand out” from other students in their classrooms. Yet, students also receive conflicting messages, a problem which is particularly salient for first generation immigrant youth as well as low-income Filipina/o American youth (Agbayani-Sietwert, 2004; Cunanan et al., 2007; Maramba, 2008a; Wolf, 1997).

This issue of mixed messages resides in the structure of the family—seen as the central social unit and center of Filipina/o life (Agbayani-Sietwert, 1997, Litton, 1999). The family is a Filipina/o youth’s primary socializing agent, cynosure of identity, and site for agency through an extensive network of immediate, blood-related family and an extended family which can include friends, parents’ coworkers, fellow church members, and neighbors. While Filipina/o students found their family units to be a source of strength and encouragement to achieve academically, family obligations—emotional and financial—could also serve as barriers to educational attainment (Cunanan et al., 2007; Maramba, 2008a; Teranishi et al, 2004; Wolf, 1997). For example, students from low-income families were expected to both work and attend school to help families to maintain their livelihood, an issue particularly significant for the older children in the family (Buena Vista, 2009; Litton, 1999). In some cases, young women were expected not necessarily to find employment, but to work in the home and often, to live at home during

college in order to take care of younger siblings and conduct domestic work so that one or both parents could be available to work more hours in their jobs (Maramba, 2008a; Teranishi et al., 2004; Wolf, 1997).

This expectation to contribute to one's family, whether financially or through domestic help often influenced a student's decision as to where to attend school and what to study (Buena Vista, 2007; Maramba, 2008a; Teranishi et al., 2004). Tintiangco-Cubales (2007) found that the reality of economic hardships was one of the most prevalent challenges facing urban Filipina/o American youth and undeniably shaped their outlooks and college-going aspirations. This "acculturative stress" experienced by Filipina/o American youth illustrates the need to more clearly understand the experiences of these youth as they navigate and negotiate their family life and educational goals (Cunanan et al., 2007; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007).

Wong (1990) also studied the educational aspirations and expectations of Filipina/o American high school students in a comparative study with White, Japanese, and Chinese high school students. While Filipina/o students responded at the highest percentage (91.3%) that they and their parents would be disappointed if they did not attend college, 83% stated that they would be *able* to attend college, the lowest percentage amongst all the groups included in the study. Therefore, it can be inferred that decisions regarding an individual child's pursuits in higher education were seen not merely as a choice to be made by the student who would go through that experience, but rather, a choice that an entire family had the responsibility *and* right to make.

The research supported the notion that Filipina/o students' experiences in schooling are already shaped by the cultural values, home, and family life they bring and carry with them as they move through the elementary and secondary educational system, their college choice process and eventually, their higher education experience. This external push from families and its effect on students' efficacy, agency, and choices, particularly in higher education, is vastly understudied. By looking at the "roots" of the Filipina/o community—that is, the value systems, ideologies, and cultural specificities that not so much define, but are embodied within the Filipina/o American community—scholars have attempted to understand how these aspects impact a student's experience in a college or university setting.

Filipina/o American identity development and education. Research on the schooling experiences of Filipina/o Americans in higher education is a growing body of literature, and thus, does not present a comprehensive picture, but rather, one that is fragmented and nascent. The study of cultural values and ideologies and Filipina/o American students has also been studied under the context of Filipina/o American identity development. For scholars attempting to better understand the lives of Filipina/o American youth, the processes of identity development and schooling, especially in higher education, are seen as highly interconnected.

Ethnic identity is defined as one's membership in an ethnic group, a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, ethnic involvement, and self-identification to that group (Phinney, 1990). The development of a Filipina/o ethnic identity is one that is entrenched in the historical and sociocultural backgrounds of immigrants as neocolonial subjects as

well as their experience in the United States (Strobel, 1997). In order to more accurately understand the unique historical and cultural place of Filipina/os and how this might influence their identity development, Nadal (2004) developed the Filipino American Identity Development Model. Nadal posed that Filipina/o Americans undergo both racial and ethnic identity development simultaneously. He described six statuses of Filipino American identity development: (a) Ethnic Awareness (early childhood-individual learns or understand they are Filipino based on environment one is exposed to); (b) Assimilation to Dominant Culture (individual realizes they are different and decides to conform to dominant culture norms); (c) Social Political Awakening (individual becomes actively aware of the racial and cultural differences from the dominant group, an awakening that is typically initiated by a negative experience [discrimination] or something positive [affirmation of culture in a class]); (d) Panethnic Asian American Consciousness (Filipina/o adopts an Asian American identity; feels a sense of community with other Asian Americans to help cope with acculturation or discrimination); (e) Ethnocentric Realization (Filipina/o may reject other Asian culture or Asian American identity and associate with an ethnocentric, Filipina/o identity); (f) Introspection (Filipina/o American has learned to accept one's role as an Asian American while still having a strong sense of Filipina/o identity; now also accepting of Whites and has selective appreciation). The model is nonsequential and nonlinear; individuals may move in and out of different statuses depending on their current experiences and contexts. This model is helpful in recognizing the various statuses Filipina/o American youth experience while undergoing

identity development and recognizes the diversity of experiences individuals of Filipina/o descent have in that process.

While Filipina/o American youth are composed of individuals from various immigration generations—first, 1.5 (those who immigrated between the ages of five and seventeen) and second (those who have at least one parent born outside of the U.S.)—most of the scholarship on Filipina/o youth has focused on 1.5 and second generations and their identity development processes. The 1.5 generation consists of individuals who were born outside of the U.S. and thus, have a real and lived, rather than “imagined,” conceptualization of the homeland. These youth have what Ogbu (1993) called a “dual frame of reference” between the Philippines and America. For many 1.5 Filipina/o American youth, this memory of the homeland has served as source of strength, but also a barrier to forging ties with second generation Filipina/o Americans (Adefuin, 2002). Most arrive bilingual, and while they can operationalize English, choose to speak in their native Filipino-tongue, which often marks them as a “FOB” (Fresh Off the Boat), a term used to describe newly arrived Filipina/os and thus, distinguishes and separates them from American-born Filipina/o Americans (Adefuin, 2002; Basa, 2003; Nadal, 2004). Research has found that language maintenance serves as a way for 1.5 generation Filipina/o American youth to preserve ties to the homeland in a manner that most second generation Filipina/o American youth cannot. In Adefuin’s (2002) study of 1.5 and second generation Filipina youth, language maintenance was one way to define an individual’s “Filipino-ness.” The 1.5ers viewed second generation Filipinas as assimilated and “American,” not only due to their inability to speak Pilipino languages,

but because of their seemingly more “American” behaviors—dress, friendships (with non-Filipina/os) and interracial dating (Adefuin, 2002).

Filipinos from the 1.5 generation admitted to forging relationships mostly with other Filipinos born outside of the U.S., feeling stronger bonds and sense of belonging to them; additionally, they believed this was a way to maintain a “Filipino” identity and remain connected to their home culture. Thus, in the view of these students, a “Filipino” identity was viewed as entirely separate and potentially incongruous with a “Filipino American” identity. Several studies have come to similar conclusions; many 1.5 generation Filipina/o Americans want to remain distinct and even see themselves as holding different values, history, and culture from second generation Filipina/o Americans (Basa, 2003; Galang, 1999; Jacinto, 2001). This is a distinction they actively work to maintain through their behavior, attitudes, and social interactions, showing an intergenerational tension between the 1.5 and second generation and conflicting definitions of what it means to be “Filipino.”

Buenavista (2007, 2009) conceptualized a different kind of 1.5 generation, what she called a “Pilipino 1.5 generation college student.” Based on a qualitative study of a student-run retention effort and twelve 1.5 and second generation Filipina/o Americans at a California public university, Buenavista determined that these students created a “1.5 generation college student” identity as a way to challenge their marginality in the university. These students were not necessarily first generation immigrants or first generation college students, but did not exactly fit the mold of a second generation

college student. Rather, they were “in the middle” as a result of their parents’ immigration and levels of educational attainment (Buenavista, 2007).

The experiences of these students contested the notion that college students with college-educated parents experience college similarly (Buenavista, 2009). In many cases, parents educated outside of the United States did not have the social or cultural capital to help their children navigate the American college choice process. This lack of perspective often limited the ways in which Filipina/o parents and their children could come to an understanding about what was involved in applying to college, getting admitted, and ultimately, what the experience of actually attending would be like, not just for the college student, but the entire family. The students involved in Buenavista’s study embodied a “liminality” which caused them to reside in a space of ambiguity; in the university, as 1.5 generation college students, they were racialized as model minorities yet had a collective notion of a neocolonial identity that colored their everyday lives and educational experiences (Buenavista, 2007, 2009). While these students may have been distinct from each other in that some were American-born and others were immigrants, their collective experience as Filipina/os college students in America caused those lines to be blurred and created a shared identity development process.

For second generation Filipina/o American youth, the experience of constructing a Filipina/o identity differs from that of first or 1.5 generation youth (in this case, those who came after the age of twelve). Espiritu (1994) posited that for many second generation youth, their “behavior is largely symbolic, characterized by nostalgic but unacquainted allegiance to an imagined past” (p. 253). Through interviews with second

generation Filipina/o American college students in San Diego, Espiritu (1994) found that these youth were highly acculturated to American culture having been raised in predominantly White, middle class neighborhoods by professional immigrant parents, who raised them to speak only English and associated only sporadically with other Filipina/os. With limited exposure to other Filipina/os and Filipino culture, when these “ethnic experiences” did occur—such as family parties, Filipino cultural celebrations, trips to the Philippines—they had little impact on these individuals due to their lack of relevance to their daily life (Espiritu, 1994).

Yet, these second generation Filipina/os spoke to how *non-Filipinos* constructed meanings of “Filipino-ness” which they had to actively deconstruct; that is, as Filipina/o Americans, while they may not have regularly participated in cultural traditions or felt part of a broader Filipina/o American community, their racialization as “others” forced them to confront what it meant to be a Filipina/o in America. They began to seek out meaning to their ethnic identification, what Nadal (2004) described in his Filipino American Identity Development Model as “Social/Political Awakening.” These second generation Filipina/o Americans actively constructed what it meant to be both Filipina/o and American, which allowed them to operate on multiple levels to demand recognition and equity (Espiritu, 1994). Because they still experienced inequality in a race-based social world, they continually “reconsider[ed] their relationship to and understanding of their assigned place in U.S. society” (Espiritu, 1994, p. 259). As a result, they exhibited “multiple, simultaneous identities” rather than ones which demanded they either

assimilate or remain distinctly connected to their “home” culture as suggested by the pluralist model (Espiritu, 1994).

This multiplicity for Filipina/o Americans, given their neocolonial relationship to the United States, suggests that Filipina/o Americans experience “emotional transnationalism” in which these second generation Filipina/os maintain direct links to the Philippines through various cultural codes, cultural traditions, language, ideologies, and values (Wolf, 1997). As transnational agents, Filipina/o American second generation youth are able to manifest both “American” and “Filipina/o” traits and thus, their lives are guided by such multiple discourses and consciousnesses.

Tuason, Taylor, Rollings, Harris, and Martin (2007) posited that U.S. born Filipina/o Americans were actively aware of the transnational nature of their identity. The subjects of their study identified the importance of continuing to learn about their culture and visiting the Philippines as a way of maintaining these ties. Furthermore, they saw themselves as “[mediators] to both worlds and being able to advocate for each culture, Filipino and American, when needed” (p. 367). These individuals identified with both the dominant and home culture and embodied a bicultural or hyphenated identity, which allowed them to exist on “both sides of the hyphen” of their Filipina/o-American identity (Tuason et al., 2007). This notion of a hybridized identity is one that allows Filipina/o American youth to navigate the various worlds and affiliations they hold (Besnard, 2003; Espiritu, 1994; Gonzalez, 2007; Jacinto, 2001).

While using one’s hybrid and hyphenated identity to operate in multiple worlds, there are challenges that inevitably arise—namely tension between the bicultural

individual and other actors in each of their worlds. Support systems are thus necessary to ensure that students of color who perform in multiple realities have the opportunity for reflection and experience agency in communion with others who may be going through the same process. This *communitas* also allows them opportunities to learn and grow in the development of a critical consciousness about their hybridity. One avenue available to students to conduct this crucial stage of identity development is through cultural and groups and organizations, both school-based and community-based.

The role of ethnic/cultural organizations and Filipina/o American education.

Researchers have attempted to identify what strategies institutions of higher education may employ to assist these students in their pursuit of degree completion. In many cases, this has been done using Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration, which postulates that when students chose to leave the university, it is due in large part to their inability to find a sense of belonging and membership in the culture or subcultures of the university, especially in predominantly White institutions. A campus subculture is defined as "the distinct culture that is created and perpetuated by a group on campus that (a) is in persisting interaction with each other, (b) has developed distinct values, assumptions, and perspectives that guide behavior of its group members, (c) transmits those values, assumptions, and perspectives to newcomers to facilitate conformity to them, and (d) differs from the dominant culture of the campus" (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012, p. 7). A growing body of research on student-run and initiated ethnic and cultural clubs has demonstrated the efficacy of these groups in facilitating the integration and developing sense of belonging for minority students, specifically those in a predominantly White

context (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009; Buenavista, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Inkelas, 2004; Kurien, 2005; Museus, 2008b). The findings support the notion that involvement and engagement in ethnic and cultural clubs or other such subcultures has a positive influence on student adjustment and membership, giving them the confidence needed to deal with the general college environment and culture and to contest feelings of marginality.

Museus and Quaye (2009) also found that ethnic and cultural organizations are important spaces for students in which they can engage in the process of collective remembering, nourishment, and reconnection with their pre-college cultures. They determined that such organizations provided opportunities for students to socialize as well as socially integrate with other students with shared markers of identity who had already exhibited persistent behaviors by returning to school as second, third, and fourth year students. Students in the study bolstered the notion that cultural and ethnic clubs provided students the chance to interact with people who have already been through the difficult periods of transition that many minority students experience in their first year of college. This study underscored the notion that, by having examples of peers with similar backgrounds and histories come together, students can see that they can overcome barriers to persistence because their peer models have and these same peers can give them support and guidance through that process.

In addition to using them as spaces to socialize, build friendships, and develop a sense of belonging to the university, ethnic and cultural organizations play a role in the education of Filipina/o American students and the construction of their own sense of

Filipina/o ethnic identity. Strobel (1996) argued that though Filipina/o American youth are encouraged to mainstream in American culture, many Filipina/o American youth have chosen to combat this Americanization of their identity and maintain ties to their Filipina/o ethnic identity through youth organizations. The first examples of this type of youth organization appeared in the 1960s, directly influenced by the Civil Rights movement and the experience of marginalization many Filipina/o students felt on college campuses (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). One of the most visible examples of student organization for advocacy occurred at California public universities—San Francisco State University, University of California, Berkeley, and University of California, Los Angeles. For example, Filipina/o American students advocated in solidarity with Chicano, African American, Native American, and Asian American students for a Third World College at University of California, Berkeley, a space in which students of color could pursue studies in the understudied histories of people of color. These student organizations, collectively known as the Third World Liberation Front, were successful in advocating for the creation of the department of Ethnic Studies at the university in 1969 (University of California, Berkeley, 2011). The University of California, Berkeley Filipino Students Association (FSA) was created out of that movement; the group still exists today as Pilipino American Alliance (PAA) and is one of the oldest student-run and student-organized associations in the country.

Strobel (1997) described Filipina/o American youth's interest in such ethnic organizations as part of the “born-again Filipino” experience. These youth desire to be connected with Philippine culture, learn its history, gain language fluency, and develop a

sense of belonging. This “born-again” experience is particularly important for first and 1.5 generation youth who have a memory of the homeland and may associate themselves more strongly with the Philippines rather than American culture. On-campus student clubs are spaces where students of Filipina/o descent are able to congregate and have this “born-again” experience (Adefuin, 2002; Besnard, 2003; Jacinto, 2002; Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Oliveros, 2009). They provide a forum for dialogue with one another about issues that pertain specifically to the Filipina/o American community, but also about everyday challenges of being a college student. Studies have found that these student organizations assist students in dealing with the transition to college and are effective tools for retaining students, especially those for those who are part of a minority population on campus (Aure, 2005; Besnard, 2003; Buenavista, 2007; Gonzalez, 2007; Jacinto, 2002). Student-run organizations provide a space for students to experience a support system created by their peers and thus, have sources of information who have lived the experience they are currently undergoing. These spaces are especially significant in predominantly White institutions because organizations based on ethnic identification can provide students with a space to conduct counterhegemonic activity (Oliveros, 2009).

The notion of performing counterhegemonic activities in higher education is one that allows students of Filipina/o American ethnic affiliation to deconstruct and decolonize their Filipino identity. The process of decolonization is one that is salient in identity development studies on Filipina/o Americans of all generations. Strobel (1997) described decolonization as “a process of reconnecting with the past to understand the

present and be able to envision the future” (p. 63) and the ability to “tell one’s story in a manner that makes sense and meaning out of all the experiences of the past. To locate one’s personal history within the history of the community is to find the relationship between the self, the nation, and the narration” (p. 70). Thus, decolonization for young Filipina/o Americans is not merely reconstructing the past in order to conceptualize the future; it is a process by which Filipina/os of all backgrounds and immigration generations reflect on the shared history between them and how that history—one of hundreds of years of colonization and marginalization—has affected the Filipino consciousness and therefore, each person’s development and growth in American society. This is particularly important in a college or university setting where students may feel marginalized or ostracized from the larger population or dominant culture. These clubs or organizations serve as spaces for education as well as agency.

Cultural clubs and student organizations facilitate the process of decolonization by providing opportunities for learning and gaining of historical and cultural knowledge, a critical component of the process of decolonization (Strobel, 1997). Students are able to commune and perform the counterhegemonic act of reconstructing and reclaiming Filipino history. While larger movements, such as the Third World Liberation Front, clearly elucidate this aim on a macro-level (school-wide or university system wide), student organizations operate on the micro-levels to serve their specific constituents; their existence and the activity of the student agents serve as examples to their school community that they want to be acknowledged and given opportunities to “demonstrate

that Filipinos do have a culture, that they are visible despite the persistent, institutional erasure from U.S. ‘official’ history” (Gonzalves, 1997, p. 175).

Filipina/o American education on the postsecondary level and its interaction with identity development is a process that is complex and influenced by various factors—environment, peer groups, immigration generation, and situating oneself within the Filipina/o American community. Students assert agency by purposefully engaging in counterhegemonic acts that put Filipino culture at the nexus of that development and create spaces for dialogue, negotiation, and performance of the lived hybridity of Filipina/os Americans to take place. Additionally, the scholarship demonstrates how significant, self-directed, and self-selected educational experiences allow Filipina/o American students to not only develop their identity and internalize their ideologies, values, and ways of being, but how that process can influence and impact others. By allowing the process of decolonization to occur in public spaces, Filipina/o American students not only educate themselves on their cultural heritage, but inform their non-Filipina/o peers, and together construct counternarratives to the dominant culture. Schooling and the act of performing identity conducted simultaneously provide for experiential pedagogies to prevail as legitimate forms of instruction and creating knowledge.

Theories of Student Persistence

The previous section outlined the various components that influence Filipina/o American student experiences in higher education. Because the purpose of this study was to understand the factors that directly challenge Filipina/o American student persistence

in higher education, it is necessary to discuss in this literature review how theories of student persistence have been generally conceptualized; having a more nuanced understanding of the existing literature on student persistence helped frame my own study on Filipina/o American undergraduate persistence at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university.

Student persistence in higher education is one of the most written about topics in higher education research (Braxton, 2000). It has been found that more than half of all students who enter a postsecondary institution will fail to complete a bachelor's degree in six years. Further, recognizing the broader economic and societal implications of declining levels of educational attainment in the United States, the study of student persistence and identifying successful strategies and models to support postsecondary educational attainment remains salient and urgent. In the study of student persistence, Tinto's Student Integration Model remains one of the seminal theories in the field. Tinto (1975, 1993) developed the Student Integration Model to elucidate the problem of student departure from college. Tinto posited that when students enter college, they bring with them their precollege experiences, behaviors, and perceptions of the world. Once at college, students must learn to make meaning out of their experiences in college and decipher how to navigate the social and academic systems of higher education.

According to Tinto, persistence is a longitudinal process and grows out of learning to ascribe meaning and commitment to the institution. This commitment is what he called integration and can consist of academic integration, social integration, or both. Moreover, the level of integration of a student directly impacts their commitment to the

institution and thus, to the goal of graduation. As a result, students are likely to persist if they become integrated into the institution. Integration is influenced by the student's interactions with the institutions and their agents such as peers, faculty, and staff. Hence, integration must be seen as a "reciprocal commitment" between the student and the institution (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) furthered Tinto's theory by examining factors that contribute to freshmen student persistence and the potential causes for voluntary dropout decisions. In a quantitative study of about 775 freshmen at a private university, they attempted to confirm the predictive validity of Tinto's model, specifically how variance in levels of academic and/or social integration can predict a student's ability to persist. Their study found that the most significant factors included the quality of student-faculty interactions, both formal and informal. Interestingly, Pascarella and Terenzini concluded that grade point average, student involvement in extracurricular activities, and peer relationships had a statistically significant relationship to a student's decision to persist or dropout. Given this finding, it is not surprising that a later study conducted by the same researchers focused on institutional intervention on persistence rather than social factors influencing persistence.

Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) found that the institutional intervention of a pre-freshman year orientation had a significant relationship to a positive social integration and institutional commitment. This institutional intervention had the most influence on a student's sense of belonging and ability to identify with the larger student body as well as the goal of graduation. As Astin (1993) suggested, it is "highly involved"

students—those who devote a marked amount of time and energy participating in student organizations, spending time on campus, and building relationships with peers and faculty—who are most likely to persist in college.

While each of these noted researchers found a connection between a student's level of involvement or integration, whether it be socially or academically, and their persistence in the university, they have lacked a critical component in their analysis. These models do not take into account the sociocultural and historical influences on a student's integration. Tinto's model (1975, 1993) presumed that students, to some extent, must learn to separate themselves from their home culture and precollege experiences in order to become more integrated into the college culture and community. Influenced by Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*, a study of rites of membership in tribal societies, Tinto suggested that passage into a university setting likens a border-crossing passage which includes separation and isolation from one's home culture, transition into the new culture (where one begins to accept the norms and behaviors of this new membership group), and finally, incorporation, a stage wherein the individual now belongs fully to the new group or culture, though they may still maintain links to their home culture or group.

While Tinto's model has been validated by numerous studies, mostly quantitative in nature, it does not sufficiently account for the experiences of students of color or from other underrepresented groups in the university. Tinto's theory of student integration proposed that students must learn to reject their home cultures rather than use them as sources of strength and support in their pursuit of higher education. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson's (1997) analysis of numerous studies attempting to validate Tinto's

theoretical propositions illustrated that limited research has focused on specific racial or ethnic groups within a single institutional sample. As a result of this gap in research on student persistence utilizing Tinto's model, recent studies have examined the utility and significance of students' sociocultural and historical contexts and backgrounds on their ability to persist in the university.

Nora and Cabrera (1996) were among those who began to more deeply delve into the issue of minority student persistence in higher education. Acknowledging that students of color consistently recorded the lowest participation rates in college and exhibited a high probability for dropping out, they posited that a lack of adjustment for these students in predominantly White institutions and perceptions of prejudice could have an adverse effect on the persistence of students of color in higher education. Using the basic tenets of Tinto's model—how social and academic integration contribute positively to a student's level of persistence—they sought to make sense of how prejudice or discrimination impact a student's academic performance or social adjustment at the institution. Employing quantitative methods to support this hypothesis they found that, in contrast to Tinto's argument, continuing to maintain ties to one's pre-college communities, friends, and family was a significant factor in helping a student of color transition into higher education. It was also found that while perceptions of prejudice and discrimination have a negative effect on minority student adjustment, they do not necessarily have an overwhelming impact on their ability to persist. Nora and Cabrera (1996) posited that minority students may be already used to experiencing such discrimination and hence, have developed resilience against the negative effects of such

experiences. Their study was significant because it laid the groundwork for many of the other studies conducted on the experience of students of color in the university.

Research has supported the notion that minority student adjustment is influenced by components of the campus climate and culture (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Kuh & Love, 2000; Lee & Davis, 2000; Museus, Yang, Byers, Salazar, & Salas, 2009). Scholarship has demonstrated that often times, racial and ethnic minority students experience culture shock or dissonance at predominantly White universities due to perceived incongruity between their own culture and that of the campus dominant culture (Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado et al., 1996; Kuh & Love, 2000; Maramba, 2003; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Museus, Ravello, & Vega, 2012). Cultural dissonance is described as “conflict or tension perceived and experienced by an individual as a result of inconsistencies between the individual’s cultural habitus and newly encountered culturally-specific information and experiences” (Museus, 2008a, p. 217). The cultural dissonance experienced by students of color in college highlight the significance of campus cultures and campus racial climates in being able to either prevent or facilitate minority students’ integration into the college. It must be noted that even at colleges where there is a high percentage of students of color, a lack of diversity in other realms of the institution—curricular offerings, representation amongst faculty, administrators, and other personnel—can arouse such feelings of dissonance and hinder students’ abilities to see themselves as part of the larger campus community (Harper & Antonio, 2008; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2008a).

Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) found that in their study of Latino student adjustment, in addition to campus culture and climate, college size had a significant effect on their attachment and adjustment in the university. Additionally, attending a private college also had a positive correlation to student adjustment and attachment. Harkening back to the findings of Nora and Cabrera's (1996) study, building relationships with peers as well as faculty and maintaining family ties and friendships from their pre-college life had positive associations with students' personal and social adjustment (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Similarly, it was found that student membership in racial-ethnic student organizations helped to mitigate negative college climates that are not responsive to minority students' needs. Membership in various organizations, including religious groups and fraternities and sororities, fostered a sense of belonging for minority students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that students who belonged to racial-ethnic clubs or organizations exhibited a relatively higher sense of belonging to the university than students who did not belong to such groups, despite negative college climates or direct experiences of racial or ethnic tensions in their university context. These findings support one of the factors Braxton and Hirschy found to influence student social integration—*communal potential* (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Communal potential is described as “the extent to which a student believes a subgroup of students exists within the college community with which that student shares similar values, beliefs and goals” (Braxton et al., 2004, p. 23). This idea is worth highlighting because it implies that students who seek out a cultural enclave or subculture of students with their

shared background are attempting to facilitate their group's communal potential as well as develop a sense of belonging in the university. If students do not see communal potential as a possibility, they may retreat and exhibit less persistent behavior. Therefore, it is of importance that, especially for minority students, they find groups that will help support them in their endeavor to persist, specifically groups that provide them with a shared connection and common perspective such as an ethnicity or culture-based organization. As evidenced in the literature on the role of Filipina/o ethnic and cultural organizations on Filipina/o American student sense of belonging and development in the university setting, the literature on cultural groups, perceptions of communal potential, the role of shared culture on a student's sense of belonging to an institution, and the role of culture in student persistence is highly salient to this study.

Asian American and Pacific Islander student persistence. A growing body of literature has sought to assess the utility of Tinto's theory of student integration in understanding the experiences of students of color and others from underrepresented groups. Still, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders remain marginalized in the discourse on minority student persistence in higher education since most research on ethnic subgroups has focused on Latinos and African Americans (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rayle & Chung, 2008; Tierney, 1999; Yang et al., 2009). This is due in large part to the pervasive nature of the model minority myth as well as a general paucity of research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education research (Lee & Davis, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Museus and Kiang (2009)

reported that in the last decade, only 1% of articles in the five most widely read peer-reviewed journals have focused on issues pertaining to AAPI university students. Moreover, few empirical studies have been performed to investigate the experience of Filipina/o Americans and other specific AAPI subgroups in the field of higher education (Museus & Maramba, 2010).

The existing research on Asian American and Pacific Islander student persistence has focused chiefly on how culture and affiliation with a subculture within the broader university community help students develop a sense of belonging and connectedness to their institutions (Lee & Davis, 2000). In this research subcultures, such as cultural clubs and ethnically-oriented groups and student-support service offices for AAPI students, have served as the primary means to understand this mediation by students (Inkelas, 2004; Maramba, 2008b; Museus, 2008a; 2008b; Oliveros, 2009; Yang et al., 2002). The findings of these studies affirm the importance of cultural groups and peer-support groups in the process of persistence for Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Still, it is insufficient to utilize this information as the only point of reference from which to approach the persistence issue for AAPIs. Thus, it is necessary to look at the role of other facets of higher education institutions and interrogate their role in the student persistence process.

Moreover, research is limited on Filipina/o American persistence in higher education. The doctoral dissertations of Buenavista (2007), Castillo (2002), Gonzalez (2007), Maramba (2003) and Oliveros (2009) have all explored the issues of persistence of Filipina/o American students in higher education. Each study looked at specific

programs or areas of support through which these students were bolstered in their pursuit of college degrees. These studies are useful in understanding how these specific programs in specific contexts contribute to Filipina/o American persistence. Though these works are informative, especially for the purposes of this study, they remain obscure to most higher education researchers; only Buenavista and Maramba's research have been published beyond dissertation form (Buenavista, 2009, 2010; Buenavista, et al., 2009; Maramba, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Museus & Maramba, 2010).

Hence, the research I conducted contributes to the discourse on student persistence in several ways. It not only adds to the research on Asian American and Pacific Islander student persistence, but specifically to the literature on the factors which support Filipina/o American students' persistence. Also, this study provides "insider" knowledge on that the challenges that are specific to a particular context (private, Catholic, and predominantly White) and consequently, those specific students. In addition, this research adds to the literature because of its attempt to make sense of various components that contribute to persistence rather than the role or effectiveness of one specific office, program, or group.

Conceptual Framework

This review of literature thus far has discussed what research has uncovered about the experiences of Filipina/o American college students. It has also served to demonstrate the historical and sociocultural context under which the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university must be viewed. It is imperative to recognize that these students have

unique educational experiences and that their voices and stories must be heard in order to not only build a greater understanding of what it means to be a college student, but what that experience is like and how those meanings are negotiated by minority students from immigrant, underserved, or underrepresented communities.

As previously discussed, much of the research on student persistence has focused on investigating Tinto's theory of student integration. Yet, this theory has been critiqued as culturally biased because it failed to take into account the specific cultural and historical influences that impact minority students' interactions with their college and presented the theory from the perspective of the dominant culture, which is White, middle class, and heterosexual. Furthermore, many studies on minority student persistence have investigated the experiences of Black and Latina/o students, but as a result of this emphasis, Asian American and Pacific Islander students' voices and experiences have remained excluded and veiled. Because this study intended to bring to the forefront the voices and stories of Filipina/o American undergraduates, this research provided a forum for student research participants to exert increased agency and power in managing their own educational outcomes. Moreover, this study serves as an avenue for advocacy as well as a way to gain more support and recognition of Filipina/o American students' struggles and successes.

With this in mind, it was necessary that the conceptual framework of this study be one that accounted for the roles that cultural and historical factors have in the lives of Filipina/o Americans as they navigate their way through higher education. It was also imperative that such a framework applied a critical lens to the issues that this particular

group experiences and how those experiences may have excluded them from the mainstream discourse on achievement and student persistence in higher education.

Cultural perspectives on student persistence. In response to Tinto's theory of student departure, scholars have further examined the impact of culture and interactions between cultures on minority student departure (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1999). In response, Kuh and Love (2000) argued that student decisions related to persistence and departure must be analyzed through a cultural lens. Kuh and Love posited that the interaction between cultures—that of the student and the institution—is what most impacts student persistence. They maintained that culture (both of the individual and the institution) is dynamic and constantly evolving; it is mediated through daily interactions and one's understanding and meaning attributed to those interactions. By using a cultural lens to look at student persistence and the reasons students decide to depart from the institution, scholars are able to recognize departure as a sociocultural phenomenon, rather than one that is simply an individual and internal experience. Through analysis of various cultural perspectives and studies on student departure and persistence, Kuh and Love developed eight cultural propositions about premature student departure:

1. The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.
2. One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.
3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed

to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.

4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.
5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.
6. The amount of time a student spends in one's cultures of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.
7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.
8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence (p. 201).

The utility of these cultural propositions for this study is that they acknowledge the significance of students' precollege cultures in their subsequent persistence in the university. It is especially important to recognize the notion that when a student perceives an incompatibility between their home or precollege culture and that of the dominant institution culture, they are less likely to be persistent and continue to work towards their degrees. The most effective way for students to combat feelings of incongruence or conflict between their home cultures and that of the institution is to find meaning and connections to individual agents (faculty members, fellow students, administrators) or enclaves and subcultures (ethnic/cultural clubs, religious groups,

service organizations, fraternities or sororities) that allow them to negotiate and bridge the space between their home culture and that of the college.

Numerous scholars have used Kuh and Love's (2000) postulations to study other minority student populations and acknowledged the utility of using it as a framework for discussing and understanding student persistence (Braxton et al., 2004; Guiffrida, 2006; Museus & Maramba, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Yeh, 2005). Museus and Quaye (2009) further developed and explored Kuh and Love's propositions about student departure by conducting a qualitative inquiry using the perspectives of students of color to create an intercultural perspective with which to analyze racial and ethnic minority student persistence. Their revised postulations include:

1. Minority students' college experiences are shaped by their cultural meaning-making systems.
2. Minority students' cultures of origin moderate the meanings that they attach to college attendance, engagement, and completion. Students' cultures of origin mediate the importance of college attendance and degree completion.
3. Knowledge of minority students' cultures of origin and immersion are required to understand those students' abilities to negotiate their respective campus cultural milieus.
4. Cultural dissonance is inversely related to minority students' persistence.
5. Minority students who experience a substantial amount of cultural dissonance must acclimate to the dominant campus culture or establish sufficient connections with cultural agents at their institution to persist.

6. The degree to which campus cultural agents validate minority students' cultures of origin is positively associated with reduced cultural dissonance and greater likelihood of persistence.
7. The quality and quantity of minority students' connections with various cultural agents on their respective campuses is positively associated with their likelihood of persistence.
8. Minority students are more likely to persist if the cultural agents to whom they are connected emphasize educational achievement, value educational attainment, and validate their traditional cultural heritages (pp. 77-88).

These reformulated propositions bolster Kuh and Love's (2000) overarching theory that a student's precollege culture and relationships critically inform their persistence in college. What Museus and Quaye offer in addition to Kuh and Love's propositions of student departure are propositions that underscore the importance of a student's cultural meaning-making system as well as the role of individual and cultural agents in helping students to adjust and integrate into the college environment. Further, cultural integrity, validation, and nourishment are viewed as significant aspects of students' persistence processes. These propositions are also more narrowly focused on the experiences and persistence of racial and ethnic minority students and the unique experiences such individuals have on predominantly White college campuses. The postulations destabilize Tinto's assertion that students must assimilate into the dominant culture of the institution in order to survive. Instead, like Kuh and Love's propositions, Museus and Quaye's intercultural perspective of racial and ethnic minority student persistence highlights the

importance of being able to develop deep, quality relationships and connections at college in addition to maintaining ties to the home culture and family as a source of support. Further, their intercultural concepts of minority student persistence reinforce the notion that through the maintenance of such ties to their home culture, students can develop a sense of belonging and find continual validation; consequently, they are able to find the meaning in continuing to persist and work towards their goals of obtaining a college degree.

Because of their recognition of the importance of cultural integrity and individual and collective cultural agents in the persistence of racial and ethnic minority students, Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspective was utilized as a major component of the theoretical framework for this study. This intercultural perspective was relevant to the study of the Filipina/o American undergraduate experience at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university for numerous reasons. First, this perspective underlined the significant role culture has in the lives of minority students as they work their way through higher education. Culture is viewed as the foundation for their meaning-making systems and ways of understandings. Individual cultural perspectives are also viewed as assets that bring students' a sense of validity and strength rather than being seen as a detrimental aspect of their precollege lives that they are expected to shed upon entering the institution. These propositions also offered an alternative conceptual framework and approach to Tinto's theory of student departure that could be applied to the study of student persistence, especially that of minority and underrepresented students. They reflected the importance of a sense of belonging to the minority college student

experience which can be developed by learning to function in multiple cultures and distinct sociocultural environments, effectively learning to operate as bicultural individuals. Finally, Museus and Quaye's theory elucidated the importance of understanding the challenges faced by the students and identifying ways to meet *their* needs so that students may be successful in college. The process of persistence is viewed as one that both the individual student and institution must endeavor to make a success.

I believe that Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspectives of racial and ethnic student persistence was applicable to the study of Filipina/o American undergraduate persistence because it supported garnering a deeper understanding of the challenges students face and whether they have employed the strategies outlined in the propositions in order to survive and navigate the university environment, culture, and structures. Additionally, these intercultural propositions about student departure underscored the need to interpret the impact of various affiliations on students' perceptions of their ability to graduate from college. This is perhaps most important to the exploration of the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in higher education. This framework acknowledges that factors outside of the university can shape students' ways of thinking about how they will navigate their university experience.

The use of Museus and Quaye's (2009) propositions as a framework also points to the necessity of problematizing and questioning the existing narratives on minority persistence in higher education. Their postulations recognize that experiences vary from person to person and, consequently, must be investigated more closely and cannot be limited to examination of groups in the most frequently aggregated categories (i.e. Black,

Latina/o, Asian American). This conceptual framework of student persistence underscored the need to develop nuanced understandings of students from underrepresented and underserved communities by capitalizing on students' voices to produce research, but also to improve practice.

Pinayism. This work was a process of reevaluating and reconstructing the current discourse of student persistence and experiences in higher education that has excluded the voice of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and specifically, Filipina/o Americans. Consequently, it was essential to include as part of the conceptual framework of this study a perspective that is focused on the Filipina/o American standpoint and concerned with bringing those voices to the center of the process of reevaluation and reconstruction. Pinayism was such a concept fit for this study.

Pinayism is a praxis that helps to “explore and create new forms and mechanisms to understand the Pinay/Pinoy [a woman of Filipina descent/a man of Filipino descent] experience in the United States” (Tintiango-Cubales, 2005, p. 140). Envisioned as a praxis of “transformative and transgressive agency that combines theory, practice, and personal reflection,” Pinayism was developed by Dr. Allyson Tintiango-Cubales, a Filipina American activist, scholar, and educator. In its nascent form Pinayism was her attempt to develop a theoretical framework that addressed the social, political, and economic struggles of Pinays and extensively, of the Filipina/o American community. Pinayism aims to look at “the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational state, age, place of birth, Diasporic migration, citizenship, and love cross” (Tintiango-Cubales, 2005, p. 141). This

emphasis on the intersectionality of the experiences of Filipina/o Americans roots Pinayism in a call to look at stories of “struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength” in order to engage in critical discussions about the lived experiences of the Filipina/o American community (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 180). Influenced by critical pedagogy (especially the work of Paulo Freire) and feminist theory, Pinayism as a praxis seeks to further involve and develop agency among Pinays (Filipinas), but does not exclude the Filipino male perspective or partnerships because Pinayism—and the cultural and scholarly works, teaching, and activism that is inspired by it—is ultimately meant to improve and bring awareness to the issues faced by the Filipina/o American community.

It is clear that while there is a growing body of research in various disciplines on the experiences of Filipina/o Americans, there is still a gap in the knowledgebase in the field of education on this group. From a Pinayist standpoint, this dearth is in large part a result of the perception that as a group, Filipina/o Americans are mostly successful and highly assimilated and therefore, not in need of special investigation or exploration beyond statistical data. As a Pinay educational researcher, my goal was to conduct research that looked beyond the numbers and shared the personal stories of eight Filipina/o American college students. This study sought to understand how Filipina/o American students persist in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White institution and how their “success” of graduation impacts the broader Filipina/o American community. Through this collaboration with Filipina/o American college students, I endeavored to make sense of their college journeys and show that the achievement of a degree is not as

an individual act, but one in which the entire community is engaged and exerts agency. This approach to research supports the notion that Pinayism “began in the community and has created community” and was a way to bring Filipinos together to dialogue and exert their agency in pursuit of social justice and change for the good of the community (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 181).

By applying Pinayism to this research, the Filipina/o American research participants became co-researchers and shared their own stories about their experiences in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university. Pinayists must “begin to engage in a discussion that should be a repetitive process of reevaluation, reconstruction, retransformation, re-transgression, and especially, for rellove for one another” (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2005, p. 147). This harkens back to the words of Paulo Freire (1970):

Dialogue cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people....Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself....Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others” (p. 89).

The participants and I conducted research that was rooted in this notion of dialogue as commitment to others and its transformative possibilities to enact change for the betterment of the Filipina/o American community. Pinayism was a way to frame the work we did together and let their voices to be heard and considered. Taking a Pinayist approach enables Filipina/os to be at the center of curriculum, dialogue, and pedagogy and in doing so “legitimiz[es] our existence in the world” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 186). This study was one that legitimized and humanized the experiences of Filipina/o American students whose stories of persistence had yet to be

recognized in the mainstream discourse on persistence in higher education. Together with Museus and Quaye's (2009) intercultural perspective of racial and ethnic minority student persistence, this work was focused on contributing to the existing research on student persistence—especially that concerning underrepresented and underserved groups—but also, rooted in sharing the diverse, multivocal perspectives of Filipina/o American college students and used these different experiences and stories to enhance our understanding of the challenges these young people encounter in college.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the existing literature on Filipina/o Americans in higher education, with a particular focus on the historical context of Filipina/o Americans in the United States and the significance of cultural values, identity development, and cultural and ethnic groups on Filipina/o American educational experiences. Additionally, because this study sought to understand factors that have impacted Filipina/o American student persistence in higher education, theories of student persistence were also reviewed. The final section of this chapter established the use of Museus and Quaye's intercultural perspectives of racial and ethnic minority student persistence and Pinayism as the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 3 explains the methodological approaches that were employed in this study, including the research paradigm, procedures, participants, site selection, and methods, as well as a section on the background of the researcher.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university in Los Angeles County and from their perspectives, identify the challenges they face as they work towards degree completion, as well as recognize the strategies they have utilized in order to overcome those barriers to persistence and graduation. This study employed the intercultural perspective of ethnic and racial minority student persistence put forth by Museus and Quaye (2009) to conceptually frame the discussion of student persistence in conjunction with Pinayism, which validates the necessity of critically analyzing the experiences of Filipina/o Americans from perspectives within the Filipina/o American community.

These concepts are connected by their core values; they put at the center of research the voices of marginalized and underrepresented students in order to improve practice and transform conditions that may be inequitable and unjust for these groups. The “voice” that emerges from research based in the critical standpoint is a voice that is “informed” and “fashioned to speak/write in the cause of social justice [and] egalitarian social change” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 121). Together these concepts provided a powerful, critical lens through which the critical consciousness of Filipina/o American students were raised in order to make them “better equipped to make conscious decisions about who they want to be” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 49).

Yet, it must still be made clear how this “voice” was able to emerge. What were the methods that allowed for this space to exist? Who was part of the research process? What were the assumptions and worldviews that underpinned and influenced the way in which the research was conducted and knowledge was constructed and gained? The following section discusses critical constructivism, the research paradigm that framed the study and the methods by which the research questions were pursued. Reviewing the basic tenets of critical constructivism makes more transparent what influenced the pursuit of this research and what it intended to accomplish.

Research Paradigm

Hatch (2002) maintained that research questions are essential to the inquiry process, “but they ought not be the starting point” and that researchers must not ignore the “belief systems that undergird our thinking” (p. 12). Research questions grow out of an individual’s conceptualization of social reality. While it is clear that there is a continuing need in the discourse and scholarship to conduct research on the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates in higher education, the impetus to engage in scholarly work *with* and *for* this group was influenced by my ontological and epistemological beliefs. The critical constructivist paradigm best describes my views on the purpose of research, the nature of reality, and the ways in which knowledge is known and gained.

Critical constructivism. According to Hatch (2002), constructivists are those who “assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality” (p. 15).

Researchers who operate under this paradigm believe that knowledge is subjective and constructed through experience and context. In a constructivist approach to research, knowledge and meaning of experience is co-constructed by the participant and researcher.

Within the critical paradigm it is thought that the “material world is made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals” (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). Knowledge is seen as subjective and inherently political. Scholars working from this epistemological standpoint believe their work to be a form of advocacy and seek to raise consciousness about the historically oppressed groups that are the central core of their research. By raising consciousness, critical scholars believe social change that will transform the material and metaphysical conditions of oppression will take place. Researchers in this paradigm typically focus on issues of structural oppression as they relate to gender, race, or socioeconomic status or class.

In my view, constructivism and the critical paradigm are linked because they fundamentally hold that knowledge is subjective, personal, and constructed based on experience and context. As a result, I believe that a blended paradigm of critical constructivism describes the overarching approach to this study. According to Taylor (1996), critical constructivism is a “social epistemology that addresses the sociocultural context of knowledge construction” and views the research participant as a “sociocultural being suspended historically in semiotic systems whose invisibility is potentially disempowering” (p. 159). Further, research influenced by critical constructivism seeks

the deconstruction of cultural myths that “distort social roles and discursive practices” (Taylor, 1996, p. 159).

In the case of the Filipina/o American students included in this study, their invisibility in the higher education system has been facilitated by existing cultural myths that seemingly give them a position of privilege through the myth of the model minority, but also marginalizes their actual experiences as a result of this perpetuated misconception. Critical constructivism maintains that the knowledge produced by research is “grounded on the assumption that the world is shaped by a complicated, web-like configuration of interacting forces” and that as a result, the “knower and known are inseparable” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 25). Moreover, critical constructivism maintains that the researcher with these ontological and epistemological beliefs cannot claim subjectivity, but rather, will see a “socially constructed world and ask what are the forces that construct consciousness, the ways of seeing of the actors who live in it?” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 34). Because this approach seeks to know what has been obscured, it bolsters my belief that the research I conducted with Filipina/o American undergraduate students is important because it has allowed a silenced collective voice to be heard.

The utility of a critical constructivist paradigm is its emphasis on the relationship between the construction of knowledge and the inquiry process. As students of color, Filipina/o American students in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university occupy a variety of spaces. They are at once part of a group that has historically been “successful” in their pursuits of higher education (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) as evidenced by a high percentage of degree holders (in comparison to the average for all

Americans), but they are also part of a minority population in the university as they do not fit into the category of “White.”

In the case of this study, the critical constructivist paradigm supported the purpose of this research, which was to explore the current discourse on undergraduate student persistence from the perspective of Filipina/o Americans, a group that has been typically viewed as a model minority. Critical constructivists are open to alternative meanings of prevailing narratives and work to destabilize and deconstruct those dominant discourses. This epistemological underpinning was important to this study because it underscored the need to continually reevaluate and reimagine the ways in which discourse around the subject of minority student persistence has excluded the voice of Filipina/o Americans, and as a result, this study aimed to rectify that disparity.

Research Questions

The research methods described were guided by this call to action and explored the following research questions:

1. What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?
2. What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?

Methodology

Research design. To explore these questions, I conducted a qualitative study. Merriam (1998) asserted that a basic or generic qualitative study is one that “[seeks] to

discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11). Qualitative studies endeavor to develop an understanding of “how individuals make sense of their everyday lives” and realities (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). Hatch (2002) argued that qualitative work is distinguished from other research approaches by the presence of certain characteristics, though depending on the type of study, some characteristics may be emphasized more than others. Among these defining aspects of qualitative research are the use of natural settings, participant perspectives, researcher as data gathering instrument, extended firsthand engagement, centrality of meaning, wholeness and complexity, subjectivity, emergent design, inductive data analysis, and reflexivity. These characteristics are connected by their emphasis on highlighting meaning through the perspectives of individuals and doing so in a way that acknowledges the presence of social contexts, history, and the nature and quality of human interactions.

In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research focuses on attempting to examine relationships by using primarily scales and instruments that garner numerical data and statistical information (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research is often viewed as being objective, unbiased, and intends to acquire generalizable findings. It represents a more positivist perspective on research and presumes that knowledge is fixed and can be tested and validated.

The present study aimed to be exploratory, open, and personal—values that are espoused in qualitative, not quantitative, research. While a survey was employed in this study, its main purpose was to acquire information that grounded the context for the

experiences of the participants explored through qualitative methods. It was not used to gather data to directly respond to the research questions. Though the inclusion of numbers is important to this study, the main focus and purpose of this research resided in using the voice and experiences of the participants to develop a deeper understanding of the process of persistence from the perspectives of Filipina/o American undergraduates. With this intention in mind, it was clear that engaging in qualitative inquiry was the most suitable approach to take to explore the research questions.

The qualitative design of this study also reflected the theoretical orientations guiding this research. My decision to use a qualitative approach was informed by the critical constructivist perspective that espouses subjectivity and a view that society is socially constructed and inherently unequal in its distribution of power and access. Hence, qualitative methods were the only research strategies that I believed could critically and effectively examine the processes of persistence that are experienced by a marginalized and historically invisible minority in higher education such as Filipina/o Americans. By using a qualitative approach, I was able to investigate the lived experiences of persistence in a more in-depth and holistic manner rather than simply testing singular and narrowly defined variables of persistence as has been done in most research on persistence in higher education, the majority of which has been quantitatively driven. To better understand the process of persistence and the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates, I used individual interviews and a focus group to gather data.

In the vein of Delgado Bernal (2002) who conducted research on the experiences of Chicana high school students, I believe that by using a qualitative approach and

sharing the stories of Filipina/o American undergraduate students, these participants served as “agents of knowledge” whose lived experiences enhanced the discourse and narrative on persistence of ethnic minorities in higher education (p. 113). Delgado Bernal called the narratives produced from her own research “counterstories” to the dominant perspective, that is, one that privileges a White, middle class, and typically heterosexual male perspective. Counterstories are ways to respond to the denial of voice and oppression that people of color in the United States have suffered from throughout their history. Thus, in this study, the purpose in using a qualitative approach to respond to the research questions was to create a counterstory and counternarrative of Filipina/o Americans in higher education, a story that contests their marginalization and invisibility in the discourse on persistence and graduation in higher education.

Setting. The research site was a medium-size, private, Catholic university in Los Angeles County. It was founded in the early 20th century. The school mission is rooted in the education of the whole person, the service of faith and the promotion of social justice, and encouragement of learning. The research site has an undergraduate program with nearly 60 undergraduate degree programs as well as dozens of graduate degrees including a doctoral program in education. According to the research site’s Office of Institutional Research, the historical average of students who finished their degree program in four years (cohorts from 1999-2007) is 67.2%. For Asian American and Pacific Islander students, the historical average of students (cohorts 1999-2007) who finished their degree program in four years is 70.6% (63.9% for males and 75.3% for females).

The research site, which is called Ignatian University in this study, primarily serves undergraduates. The total enrollment for the 2011-2012 academic year was 5,951 full-time undergraduates and 3,283 graduate students for a total of 9,234 students. The ethnic make-up of the student body is as follows: 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 5.6% African American, 9.6% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 20.7% Hispanic, 52.4% White/Non-Hispanic, 7.5% Multiracial, 3.5% International. Furthermore, 76% of the undergraduate students who attend the university are from the state of California; the remainder have geographic origins out-of-state or from other parts of the world. Ignatian University is a residential campus with facilities able to house more than 3,000 students. Finally, it is important to make note that the cost of attendance is about \$52,000 including room and board fees. Eighty-three percent of undergraduate students receive some kind of financial aid.

Despite the significant cost of attendance, the school prides itself in its support of diversity in higher education through their structural diversity—43.8% of students identify as ethnic and racial minorities (percentage excludes international students). To support students from these diverse backgrounds, the institution established the Ethnic and Intercultural Services office. This department includes individual offices that provide services for students from racial and cultural minority groups such as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Chicano and Latino students, Black students, Jewish students, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and questioning students (LGBTQ). The LGBTQ support office is only one of two in the American Jesuit university network. Some of the programs and services provided by the Ethnic and

Intercultural Services include a Cultural Welcome for Black students, ethnic and cultural heritage celebrations and programming, overnight visits for prospective students of color, a peer mentorship program, and graduation celebrations for Latino, Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and LGBTQ students. Overall, the school has publicized a focus on interculturalism and social justice as it relates to access to higher education and the successful completion of a degree by students of color. The institution has been recognized with “exemplary leadership” for promoting the success of Latino students and is viewed as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution. In 2010, it was ranked by The Education Trust as one of the most successful universities in the nation at graduating African-American and Hispanic students.

With this emphasis on diversity, social justice, inclusion, and the success of underrepresented students, Ignatian University appears to be ideal place for students of color to pursue their degrees. Scholars have emphasized the importance of diversity in institutions for students of color’s adjustment, persistence, and eventual degree completion (Hurtado et al., 1996; Museus, 2008a). Diversity is also seen as an important factor in developing an informed citizenry and therefore, impacts all students in an institution. By creating a structurally diverse college environment, there is an increased possibility for interactions between students from diverse backgrounds, and peers are able to learn from one another and challenge one another to think and act in new ways (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). The structural diversity at Ignatian University is recognized and touted as one of its greatest assets and often used as a major selling point to prospective students.

Site selection. This site was chosen for several reasons. The site was chosen as a result of convenience for the researcher. The site was also selected because of the presence of a noticeable Filipina/o American student population. California has the largest population of Filipinos in the United States (1.2 million); moreover, Los Angeles County is home to about 355,010 Filipina/os, the largest concentration of Filipinos in a metropolitan area (Dela Cruz-Viesca, 2008). Therefore, it seemed plausible that a measurable population of Filipina/o American students would exist in a Los Angeles-area college. The selection of this site is also significant since most studies on Filipina/o Americans in higher education have been conducted at large, public universities. Hence, this research adds to the literature and provides a new perspective, that of Filipina/o American students in a private and religiously affiliated institution.

Participants. Participants in this study were Filipina/o American undergraduate students at Ignatian University. According to the institution's Office of Institutional Research, in Fall 2011, 291 students self-identified as being at least part Filipino (171 females, 120 males); however, not all students who self-identified as such would necessarily be categorized in institutional reporting as "Asian." For example, if a student identified themselves as Hispanic and Filipino, that student would be included in the "Hispanic" category. A student who identified as African American and Filipino would be included in the "Multiracial" demographic. At the commencement of the research study, information was not available that would enable the researcher to individually contact students who self-identified at least in some part as Filipino. Because of this limitation, I utilized a purposive sample and targeted recruitment through an avenue that

was likely to attract those who are of Filipino descent and self-identify as Filipina/o American—Ignatian University’s Filipina/o American student organization.

In addition to a student’s self-identification as Filipina/o American, because this study examined the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students at Ignatian University, the challenges they have faced as they pursue their degrees students, and the factors that have contributed to their persistence (continued enrollment), the participants were of sophomore, junior or senior status. These standings were important criteria because they implied that the student had (a) already been part of the college setting for at least two semesters and (b) had either declared or was in the process of declaring their major choice, an indication that they had thought about graduation and in a sense, committed to that goal by completing a certain number of requirements.

Research has also shown that student departure from four-year colleges occurs most frequently between a student’s first and second year, with 30% of students not returning for their second year. Therefore, to include students of sophomore, junior, and senior standing was to include the voices of those who had survived the initial period in which they were most vulnerable to leaving the university and are now progressing on the path to graduation.

The selected participants were part of a purposive sample because not all students who identified as Filipina/o American at Ignatian University could be included, just those whose college year status was one of those listed. Sophomore, junior, and senior students of all gender identifications, sexual orientations, religious backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and other significant markers of identity were encouraged to participate in the

survey in order to illustrate the character—whether diverse or homogenous—of the Filipina/o American population at the research site. Table 1 provides details on sampling size and methods for each phase of the study.

Building context: demographics. Because the purpose of this work was to explore the challenges experienced by a marginalized group in higher education—Filipina/o Americans—a survey was used to gather descriptive information about the population under examination, to produce data that allowed me to generalize about their overall experience at Ignatian University, and to identify participants who would be willing to share their stories.

Table 1

Research Methods and Sampling

Research Question/Research Purpose	Data Collection	Sample Size	Type of Sampling
1. What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?	In-depth Interviews (1-2 per participant) Focus Group (1)	n= 8 (2 Sophomores; 3 juniors; 3 seniors) n=4	Purposive
2. What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?	In-depth Interviews (1-2 per participant) Focus Group (1)	n =8 (2 Sophomores; 3 juniors; 3 seniors) n=4	Purposive

The survey consisted of two sections. The first section included a series of demographic questions such as age, gender, immigration generation, parents' educational levels, major choice, and GPA. The second section intended to gain a general picture of Filipina/o American students' experiences at Ignatian University. This seven-item scale was adapted from a scale utilized by Maramba (2003) who also examined the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students (at a public university). These particular questions prompted students to reflect on the quality of their college experience. Additionally, this survey was used to create a sample from which the smaller qualitative sample could be derived. Interested students completed the "Interview Form" to volunteer for the interview and focus group phases of the project.

The survey was administered in September 2011 at the first meeting of the school year of Ignatian University's Filipina/o American student club, which I will refer to as the Filipino Club throughout this paper. I utilized an in-person approach in order to increase the likelihood of survey completion as well as to introduce myself to the students as the researcher and solicit their support and participation. Because I was only allotted about fifteen minutes to provide instructions, distribute, and have students complete the survey, the survey was passed out to every student present including first-year students and individuals who did not identify as Filipina/o American. Participants received an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) and a letter that described the purpose of the survey and assured participant confidentiality (Appendix B).

Though most questions were worded with specifically Filipina/o American students in mind, I asked students to complete the survey to the best of their ability. I

chose to take this approach because I did not want students who were not of Filipina/o descent to feel excluded from participation or that their experiences as ethnic minority students were not valued. I did make it clear, however, that I was specifically interested in interviewing Filipina/o American students for the qualitative phase. In total, 65 students completed the survey, 50 of whom were Filipina/o Americans. For data analysis, thirty-four responses were utilized (students of sophomore, junior, and senior status).

Completed surveys were scanned and processed using a Remark Office OMR machine. Using a template, survey responses were imported and recorded by the machine using the Optical Character Recognition feature. Responses were then converted into an Excel worksheet. I then reviewed and cleaned up the data, assigning codes to the responses in order to prepare for entry and analysis into SPSS. Once the data was imported into SPSS, I ran descriptive statistics to obtain demographic information about the sample. The next step included garnering inferential statistics to identify trends and patterns in the data. To see a complete version of the instrument, refer to Appendix C.

The demographic results are presented here in order to provide context for the study's findings and create a picture of the Filipina/o American community at Ignatian University. This information helped to frame the responses of the research participants within those of the broader Filipina/o American community at the research site.

Gender. Of the 34 sophomore, junior, and senior Filipina/o American students, 27 females and seven males completed the survey.

Age. All students were in the age range of 18 to 21. The average age of the participants was 19. Based on their age range, students in this sample are considered to be traditional college students.

Student type. All respondents were full-time students; 94.1% were traditional, freshman-entry students; 5.9% (n=2) were transfer students.

Class year. Student demographics were based on the number of academic credits completed: 21 sophomores, eight juniors, and five seniors.

Geographic origins. Students were primarily from the state of California and specifically, southern California: 52.9% (n=18) students grew up within fifty miles of the university; 11.8% (n=4) students grew up 51-100 miles from the university; 26.5% (n=9) were from communities 101-500 miles away from the university and 8.8% (n=3) were from communities more than 500 miles away.

Communities of origin. Respondents' communities of origin varied in nature. 47.1% (n=16) of respondents grew up in communities that were a mix of ethnic backgrounds, 20.6% (n=7) in communities that were mostly Asian American, 11.8% (n=4) in communities that were mostly Caucasian, 11.8% (n=4) in communities that were mostly Hispanic/Latino. One student (2.9%) grew up in a community that was mostly African American/Black, one student (2.9%) grew up in a community that was mostly Native Hawaiian/Pacific, and one student (2.9%) described that she lived in a community that was mostly White, but her schooling experiences consisted of a mixture of Asian American and White students.

High school type. Respondents attended various types of high schools. Five attended private or independent high schools, seven attended traditional public high schools, one attended a public charter high school. The majority of students—61.8% (n=21)—attended Catholic high schools. This data is not surprising given that the research site is a Roman Catholic institution and heavily recruits from Roman Catholic secondary schools.

Family structure. Most respondents (n=30) were raised in two-parent households (88.2%). Four students were raised by a single parent (11.8%).

Generation status. Most students who completed the survey identified as American-born. One student identified as first generation (born outside of U.S., immigrated after age 12), one as 1.5 generation (arrived in U.S. before age 12), 30 as second generation (born and raised in the U.S. or born outside of U.S. and immigrated to U.S. before the age of 5), and two were third generation (parents are U.S. born). None of the respondents were fourth generation or beyond.

Religious affiliation. The majority of participants—94.1% (n=32)—identified themselves as Roman Catholics; one as a Muslim, and one as having no religious affiliation. This demographic was not surprising given that Catholicism is known to be a significant aspect of Filipino society and culture; 85% of Filipinos in the United States identify as Roman Catholics (Gonzalez, 2009) and the research site is a Roman Catholic university.

Filipino language proficiency. Nearly half (47.1%) of participants reported that they spoke a Filipino language; 52.9% reported that they do not speak a Filipino

language. Of the seventeen students who stated they speak a Filipino language, 29.5% (n=5) speak the language often, 58.8% (n=10) speak the language sometimes, 11.8% (n=2) speak rarely speak the language.

Parental educational levels. Students reported that their parents had high levels of educational attainment. Twenty-six responded that their mother had finished a bachelor's degree or higher; two had mothers who completed associate's degrees, four had completed some college, one was a high school graduate, and one mother had less than a high school education. The majority of mothers (79.4%) had completed their education outside of the United States. As for the educational levels of respondents' fathers, 26 fathers had finished a bachelor degree or higher, three an associate's degree, four some college, and one had completed high school. Similarly, 73.5% of fathers had completed their education outside of the U.S.

Socioeconomic status. Of the students who responded to this question (n= 25), most students reported their parents' combined income to be in the \$60,000-\$99,999 range. Sixty-percent of students (n=15) reported that their parents made over \$80,000 a year. Forty-percent of respondents (n=10) stated that their parents made below \$80,000 a year in combined income.

Academic performance. Students' academic performance was measured through self-reported GPAs. A third of students (n=11) reported GPAs in the 3.5-4.0 range; 54% (n=18) of students reported GPAs of 3.0-3.49; 12.1% of students (n=4) reported GPAs between 2.0–2.99. Additionally, several students reported receiving Dean's List recognition.

Academic fields of study. Students reported individual majors and for the purposes of data analysis, majors were coded based on the college to which it belonged. Each college within the university was represented by the students' responses: 23.5% (n=8) were pursuing degrees in the College of Liberal Arts; 26.5% (n=9) in the College of Business Administration; 29.4% (n=10) are in the College of Science and Engineering; 8.8% (n=3) in the College of Communication & Fine Arts; 8.8% (n=3) in the School of Film & Television; and one student (2.9%) was undecided.

Use of financial aid. Eighty-eight percent (n=30) of respondents reported that they received some form of financial aid (aid which need not be repaid, aid which must be repaid such as loans, or a combination of both). Only three students stated that they did not use financial aid to fund their education. One student did not respond to the question. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents expressed that they had at least some concerns about having sufficient funding to pay for their education.

Educational aspirations. When asked what the highest degree they expected to obtain, 47.1% (16) responded a bachelor's degree, 41.2% (n=14) a master's degree, and 11.8% (4) a doctoral or professional degree.

College choice. For the majority of respondents (29.4%, n=10), Ignatian University was their first choice, whereas 58.8% (n=20) stated it was one of their top choices, 8.8% (n=3) said it was one of their last choices; 2.9% (n=1) said it was not their choice.

The demographic information here provided a more detailed picture of a portion of the Filipina/o American undergraduate community at Ignatian University. Though it

was not possible to get information from all 291 students who identified as Filipina/o American, this data created a base to contextualize the more specific experiences of the qualitative research participants.

Based on these responses, Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University have some shared characteristics: they are mostly Roman Catholic, second generation, middle class, fairly successful academically at Ignatian, and have educational aspirations beyond their baccalaureate degrees. This information painted a picture also of a fairly diverse community—based on their various fields of study—as well as their precollege communities and cultures of reference, most having grown up in racially and ethnically diverse communities.

Building context: Filipina/o American reflections on their experiences at Ignatian University. In order to better situate the findings of the study, I also used the survey to get insight from Filipina/o American students about their general perspectives on the university itself. Using a four-point Likert scale (1=Not Satisfied, 2=Somewhat Satisfied, 3=Satisfied, 4=Very Satisfied) participants were asked to reflect and share their level of satisfaction about seven specific aspects of the Ignatian University. The responses were from the 33 students from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes who completed the scale. Cronbach's Alpha for this seven-item scale was .763. To see the full results, consult Table 2.

The questionnaire results revealed that the 33 Filipina/o American sophomore, junior, and senior students who completed the scale were generally satisfied with their overall experience at Ignatian University. In particular, students reported that they were

satisfied or very satisfied with the academic aspects of their university experience, citing high levels of satisfaction with the quality of instruction ($M=3.00$, $SD=.500$), quality of the professors ($M=2.97$, $SD=.467$), and quality of education ($m=3.18$, $SD=.584$).

However, when reviewing students' views on their levels of satisfaction with the social realm of the university, results showed that not all students were satisfied with their experience ($M=2.85$, $SD=.834$). When asked, "How satisfied are you with the overall sense of campus community?" 6.1% ($n=2$) respondents indicated that they were "not satisfied" with the overall sense of campus community, 24.2% ($n=8$) said they were only somewhat satisfied with the sense of campus community. Moreover, this was the only question in which any respondents indicated a "not satisfied" response.

Students also indicated that they felt there was room for improvement in the quality of student services ($M=2.85$, $SD=.834$). Nearly 37% of students responded that they were "somewhat satisfied" with the quality of student services. While 75.8% of responses pointed to a general satisfaction with the support services at the university, the percentage of "somewhat satisfied" responses raised the question not only about the quality of services available to students, but also how students perceived the utility and relevance of those services. This also showed a gap in the range of differences in experience between academic affairs and student support services. Keeping this finding in mind, I was able to later address the issue of availability and quality of student services in comparison to academic affairs with the interview participants. Their responses and further exploration of this issue are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 2

Results of Satisfaction Scale

	M	SD
How satisfied are you with the quality of instruction at the university?	3.00	.500
How satisfied are you with the quality of the professors at the university?	2.97	.467
How satisfied are you with the quality of education you receive at the university?	3.18	.584
How satisfied are you with the quality of student services?	2.88	.781
How satisfied are you with the overall sense of campus community?	2.85	.834
How satisfied are you with your overall campus experience?	3.24	.663
How satisfied are you with the your decision to attend this university?	3.30	.585

The data from this part of the survey are important for several reasons. First, the data showed that the Filipina/o American students who completed the questionnaire were generally satisfied with their overall campus experience, the quality of their professors and education, and their decision to attend the university. Research has illustrated the importance of college choice as well as cultural fit to minority student persistence and college success (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Maramba, 2003). While the 33 respondents who completed the scale were not representative of the all 291 students identified as Filipina/o American at Ignatian University, the data supplied from this sample illustrated

that the students felt that the university itself seemed to be a place students found met their needs as well as what the university's strengths were in their view—the quality of instruction, education, and faculty. Additionally, because these students were engaged in some activity—in this case, the Filipina/o student association, which I will call the Filipino Club in this dissertation—they had some level of involvement and possibly attachment to the university. This is important to note because Ignatian prides itself on its service to undergraduates, especially to the successful graduation of underrepresented ethnic minority students. This data supports the importance of college choice, match, and fit to ensure the persistence of students from ethnic minority groups (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996). Tellingly, 94% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their decision to attend the university.

This overall sense of satisfaction raised interesting questions about what the both the institution, as well as the students, have done to cultivate this level of satisfaction with their experiences at Ignatian. These results are also noteworthy because they counter existing research about the Asian American and Pacific Islander college experience that has shown Asian American and Pacific Islander students to be particularly aware of negative racial climates at their institutions or have difficulty finding attachment and membership to the university (Inkelas, 2004; Museus, 2008b). These findings provided a foundation from which to explore the research findings and develop a rich and nuanced understanding of the Filipina/o American experience at Ignatian University.

Methods

Data collection took place sequentially and in three phases of qualitative inquiry. Since the end product was intended to be a rich, narrative description of the students' experiences in the university context, using a qualitative approach facilitated that process by employing the following forms of data collection: in-depth interviews and a focus group.

After I had gathered the demographic and contextual information for this study and identified volunteers, the qualitative inquiry commenced. The purpose of the study was to bring attention to the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students as they worked towards their college degrees in hopes of bringing increased support to them on their journeys of persistence. Thus, this work heavily stressed and privileged *their* voice and *their* stories and necessitated gathering in-depth and detailed data about their experiences. In order to do this, participants had to be directly engaged in the research process. This was made possible through individual interviews and a focus group.

Qualitative research participants. Creswell (2007) stated that participants in qualitative studies, especially those that rely on interviews, should be chosen because they can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (p. 125). Participants should also be “experienced and knowledgeable” as well as provide a variety of experiences in the area of research interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64). With this in mind, a purposeful sampling strategy garnered eight student participants based on several factors.

Though I initially proposed interviewing six participants—one female and one male of each year of study (sophomore, junior, and senior status)—once the study was underway I altered my approach based on the available pool of volunteers. A total of sixteen individuals volunteered for this portion. Ultimately, eight students were chosen based on several factors. The first criterion for selection was their availability and willingness to participate. Participants were contacted to determine their willingness to participate and confirm a first interview date. Seven replied and set up their first interview; the eighth participant finally agreed to participate after discussing the process with another student involved in the study. Participants were also selected to reflect the diversity of backgrounds represented within the Filipina/o American community at Ignatian University. This included diversity in major choice, socioeconomic status, gender identifications, and parents' level of education. Because a majority of the interview volunteers were from California, Catholic high schools, identified as Roman Catholics, and were second generation Filipina/o Americans, the final interview sample closely mirrored these demographics. All of the participants were full-time undergraduate students.

Despite some limitations in the variance of their backgrounds, it was clear from their responses to the quantitative portion of the study that these students represented a variety of perspectives on their experiences at Ignatian University. The diversity of their experiences and points of view enhanced the credibility of my findings to show the complexity of reality by gathering “contradictory or overlapping perceptions” of the experience under investigation. Their multifarious nature of their perspectives affirmed

the multiple and diverse ways of viewing and experiencing the world (Rubin & Rubin, p. 67). Though it may have been possible to interview all sixteen volunteers, due to the limited time available to conduct the study, I determined it was best to restrict participation to eight students. Because I focused on a finite number of students and their experiences, I was able to delve more deeply into their stories and their nuanced understandings of their experiences. The limited number of student participants for this qualitative study allowed each to become more involved in the research process and develop their positions as co-researchers. More specific information about each participant is shared in Appendix D.

Individual entrance interviews (phase one). In qualitative research, an interview is a conversation with a purpose (Merriam, 1998). Interviews are used to gather information about feelings and attitudes in a way that cannot be done through quantitative data means (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Interviews are also pragmatic because they allow the researcher to “understand experiences and reconstruct events in which [the researcher] did not participate” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, interviewing is a way for researchers to evaluate the “meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Interviews are conducted in order to understand “how and why things actually happen in a complex world” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 39).

My intention as a researcher was to allow these students to share their experiences and their truths rather than to allow for their stories to remain invisible and marginalized in the discourse of undergraduate persistence in higher education. In this study, in-depth

interviews were utilized in order to allow participants to reflect upon and reconstruct their experiences about the research topic. Open-ended questions were employed in order for us to engage in purposeful conversations. These types of questions allowed for the research participants to explore and expound upon the issue of Filipina/o American student persistence in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university. From their responses, I was able to obtain detailed and rich data to create thick descriptions based on their experiences and their understanding of those experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interviews provided a space for students to share their stories and construct knowledge. Interviews allowed participants to be valued as experienced and knowledgeable in the field of interest; on the recommendation of Hatch (2002), I made sure to remind participants repeatedly that “there are no right or wrong answers” and that by speaking from their own perspectives and experiences, they were furthering understanding on the topic being researched (Hatch, 2002, p. 102). With this in mind, I used the interview space to gather data about informants’ experiences and the meanings they attributed to those experiences. Their stories helped me as the researcher to better understand how they have and continue to make sense of their worlds. Further, the interview space allowed for us to engage in inquiry together and became “opportunities to engage in transformative dialogues” (Hatch, 2002, p. 93). Dialogue is a tenet of both critical constructivism and Pinayist praxis and therefore, essential to the success of the study as a way to advocate for this group. Through this process of dialogue, participants

were able to share their unique perspectives on what has impacted their persistence in an institution of higher education and thus, gave voice to their own struggles and successes.

Using an in-depth approach, questions covered themes such as background and biographical information, pre-college experiences, challenges of their experience in college, the methods by which they overcame those challenges, and their aspirations for their life beyond college. The in-depth nature of the interviews allowed for us to have a purposeful conversation that focused on responding to the research question, but in such a way that did not “presume an answer” (Seidman, 2006). The main purpose of the interviews was to give the research participants the space to reconstruct their experiences and the meanings they have attributed to those experiences in a rich, exploratory manner. Because each person had different stories to share and therefore different responses to the prompts, flexibility was key. I was aware that new questions would develop as the conversations progressed and I addressed those with the participants at the appropriate times.

The entrance interviews took place in October 2011. Each of the interviews took place on the Ignatian University campus in a private room. This provided us with a convenient, but isolated space to meet and have our conversations. First interviews ranged from 75 minutes to two hours in length. The purpose of these initial interviews was to gather detailed information about each student’s experiences at Ignatian University. The focus of the entrance interview was to get detailed insight into the experiences of the individual student at Ignatian University. During this interview, participants were asked to respond to open-ended queries intended to elicit detailed

accounts as well as the personal meanings the participants attributed to their experiences as Filipina/o American college students. Because I used an in-depth interview approach, I had a number of guiding, open-ended questions that could be employed in the interviews, but the order and use of such questions ultimately depended on the individual responses, stories and themes that those inquiries elicited. The interviews progressed in such a way as to build and follow up on what the research participant shared.

Flexibility in the interview was essential because each participant's experience was different; each person's experiences and stories had specific histories and meanings. A flexible and responsive interview approach allowed for the interview process to be adaptive to those individual nuances and a reflective experience for both the interviewer and research participant (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005); a standardized approach to the interview, on the other hand, would have left little room to explore the unique aspects of each informant's worldview and experience (Hatch, 2002). Being flexible was also a way to build the trustworthiness of the data collected. Flexibility allows the researcher to become a research instrument and enabled me to build upon "tacit knowledge" that was shared in the qualitative research process (Guba, 1981). This flexibility was necessary because of the awareness I had of my role as the researcher in a qualitative research process: the researcher and the subject of inquiry cannot be independent of one another and are instead, interrelated and bear influence upon each other (Guba, 1981). My intention was to remain flexible, while still using an interview protocol to guide the conversation and obtain the information needed to support the purpose of the inquiry and explore the research questions. To view a sample entrance interview protocol, refer to

Appendix E. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Interview transcripts were then reviewed, coded, and themed. Through an inductive and interpretive analysis process, I analyzed these codes and themes as well as the findings of the survey to determine the common threads between the two sets of data and what these findings meant as they related to the research topic.

Focus group (phase two). In addition to interviews, participants were able to share their experiences as undergraduates at a private, Catholic and predominantly White university through a group interview. A single focus group was held in November 2011 after the all eight participants had conducted their individual entrance interviews. It was hoped that all eight participants would be part of the focus group, but due to multiple scheduling conflicts, I chose to plan a focus group based on a date and time when at least half of the participants were available. As a result, only four participants were able to be part of the focus group.

Focus groups, also known as group interviews, are appropriate for qualitative data collection because they focus on a specific topic or topics and this focal point of discussion can “generate a lot of data in a relatively short period of time” (Hatch, 2002, p. 132). Focus groups allow for the researcher to observe and capture group dynamics and how the participants construct meanings and respond to the questions based on that dynamic. Hatch (2002) stated that this method has the possibility to produce “powerful data” since recording how “meaning is negotiated in groups” is difficult to garner using different strategies (p. 132). It was my hope that in a focus group, participants would be more open to sharing their experiences as part of a collective and that that group dynamic

gave them a sense of solidarity and their experiences belonged to a larger and shared narrative about the experiences of Filipina/o Americans at Ignatian University.

The focus group setting allowed these individual Filipina/o American students to engage in dialogue with one another about the various themes and patterns that had been initially revealed in the research process. Using a semi-structured process, I posed guiding questions to these participants that prompted them to reflect on and try to come to shared understandings of their experiences as revealed through the individual interview process. Madriz (1998) called focus groups “a form of collective testimony” (p. 116). Using focus groups to bring voice to the experiences of Latina women and in a marginalized urban community, Madriz employed group interviews as a way to break “the wall of silence” that may have prevented these women from sharing their stories. Madriz (1998) further argued that focus groups are an important data collection method to use when working with marginalized populations because focus groups generate a sense of empathy, the common ground of their experiences, and “fosters self-disclosure and self-validation” (p. 116).

As a group that has been historically marginalized and effectively rendered invisible in higher education research as a result of the myth of the model minority, the focus group allowed these Filipina/o American students to dialogue with each other as well as the researcher about their experiences. This dialogical exchange was transformative and consciousness-raising. Through dialogue, students and the researcher developed critical awareness about issues that they have faced as individuals and as a Filipina/o American community. The findings shared in Chapter 4 corroborated this

assertion and showed the utility of the focus group setting for students to deconstruct and recreate the narrative about their experiences as Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian University.

Individual exit interviews (phase 3). The final stage of research was an in-depth, exit interview with individual participants. Six of the eight participants completed the exit interviews in person at a private office on campus. Due to their limited availability, two of the participants completed their participation through alternative methods—one through several email exchanges and another in an informal conversation that was not audio recorded. This series of data collection tasks took place in November and December 2011. In-person interviews lasted between thirty and 90 minutes and provided participants with the opportunity to pose follow-up questions based on issues that emerged from the previous stages of research. Hence, the final exit interview protocol was not constructed until the initial interviews had been performed and analyzed; the protocol varied based on the individual participant's previous responses. In addition to obtaining any supplemental information needed to expound on the previous interview and focus group, participants had the chance to ask any follow up questions of their own that they had about the research. This opportunity for exchange about the research process and the initial findings was important because it provided transparency and clarity about the research process and what had been discussed. Also, it gave the researcher and the participants the space to reflect and coconstruct meaning about the research, not just for the immediate project, but also for the community in which it

intended to raise a critical awareness about issues facing Filipina/o American college students. The research timeline for this study is shown in Appendix F.

Research journal. Throughout the process, I maintained a research journal. In this journal, I took notes during the interviews and focus group. I also used this journal to compose post-interview reflections summarizing both the content of the conversations, but also my immediate reactions and observations. Additionally, I utilized this journal to document other related experiences in the field, such as informal conversations and interactions with the participants. These reflections were used later to help synthesize the data gathered from the formal research conversations.

Keeping a research journal also provided for transparency and reflexivity about the research process; maintaining a research journal enabled me to recognize my own biases, assumptions, and complications that arose during the research process and consequently, how such factors may have ultimately influenced my interpretation of the data. Maintaining a research journal gave me the opportunity to document how the research design actually materialized and in some case, evolved during the process. Using salient observations, I was able to make necessary adjustments to the approach of the study as well as my approach as the researcher. As Ortlipp (2008) noted:

Keeping and using reflective research journals can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those who read the research and thus avoid producing, reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear process (p. 704).

Validity

Because this study aimed to provide Filipina/o American students with a venue to add their own voice and story to the discourse on student persistence in higher education,

it was imperative that participants were able to take an active role to ensuring that what had been uncovered through the research process was authentic, accurate, and credible. To make certain that this was done, member checks were utilized. Member checks are a critical aspect of qualitative data collection and to ensuring the validity of research. According to Maxwell (1996), the process of a member check is necessary to “[rule] out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what they say and the perspective that have on what is going on” (p. 94). Additionally, Guba (1981) noted that the process of member checks is “the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” of qualitative research (p. 85).

First, participants were each provided with a transcript of our entrance interview for their review. They were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy; this also gave them a chance to reflect on what we had discussed so that they could keep our previous conversations in mind during future conversations. Research participants also had the opportunity to conduct an initial member check at the focus group where themes and patterns initially identified in the individual interviews were shared and collectively reflected upon. Additionally, once the initial narrative of the findings was completed, participants received a summary of the main points of their own experiences and stories that were included in the findings to ensure clarity and accuracy. It was imperative to have the students read these overviews for factual accuracy as well to verify that their anonymity has been protected. The development of the qualitative narrative is a collaborative process between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the validity of this study was rooted on the presentation of the participants’

experiences as being truly their perspectives and truths; the validity was also rooted in the acknowledgment that I was actively aware of my own interpretations of the stories shared and the way my personal and political background informed the final presentation of the data.

Background of the Researcher

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, my positionality was a critical aspect of this research process that must be addressed because it strongly influenced my motivations and approach to this study. I am the U.S.-born daughter of first-generation Filipino immigrants. I was raised in a mostly Latina/o-populated suburb of Los Angeles, but had frequent interaction with other Filipinos, including a large extended family. I was taught to speak English as my primary language—as a way to “guarantee” my academic and social success—though I was surrounded by *Tagalog* (a Philippine language) my entire life. I now only possess auditory proficiency and have limited speaking ability in Tagalog. I began attending Catholic schools in kindergarten and have conducted my entire educational career in Catholic institutions. I believe that being surrounded by people “like me,” that is, primarily Catholic or Christian and people of color (Latino, Asian, Black) strongly influenced my outlook on the world. While I held the belief that education was the great equalizer and a means of social mobility, I also saw the inequities that people of color often endured under systematic forms of discrimination and oppression.

I developed my critical consciousness about how pervasive these problems were in American society while I was attending a Catholic and predominantly White university

in New York. There, I came to a new understanding and ontological and epistemological ways of looking at the world. Being Filipina had always been very *normative* in the context in which I was raised; we never discussed or believed ourselves to be marginalized, nor to be of “minority” status. But in this new context, I realized that in many ways, I was being oppressed and coerced through both subtle and overt means to conform to the dominant culture which privileged a White, middle class point of view. There were very few Filipina/os at my university, and at that, very few students of color. My classes were taught from very Anglo/Euro-centric points of view. Other students of color who were opposed to this form of schooling found refuge in majors such as African American Studies, Latina/o and Latin American Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. Unfortunately, Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies did not exist—and still does not at that institution. Moreover, only a handful of courses focused on Asians or Asian Americans, most of which dealt with histories of China and Japan and their American-born descendants.

I found the lack of inclusion of not just Filipina/os but other Asian groups unjust and inequitable. This inequity, coupled with a lack of support for students of color and a dearth of faculty of color, led me to pursue a career in academia as an (broadly put) ethnic studies scholar and educational advocate for students of color. In the end, I created my own “Asian American Studies” presence on campus by being one of the few Asian American and one of the few Filipina/o American students to complete a graduate degree in History at the school. I wrote my graduate thesis on the role of religion in the lives of Filipina/o immigrants in New York.

My personal history directly informed my research from conception to execution. I cannot claim subjectivity nor do I intend to. I understand that because of my deep connection and affiliation with the ethnic group I conducted research with and my experiences as a woman of color in higher education that reflexivity was of utmost importance. Hatch (2002) stated that the “capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one’s influence on a setting, to bracket one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses” are what allow researchers to build intimacy with their subjects and become part of the action they are attempting to observe and make sense of (p. 10). Therefore, I was vigilant about reflection and understanding the ways in which my positionality as a second-generation, college and graduate school-educated Filipina-American gave me a level of “insider” status and privilege.

I am part of an expanding group of scholars who self-identify as Filipina/o American and have conducted research on Filipina/o Americans (Adefuin, 2002; Basa, 2004; Besnard, 2003; Buenavista, 2006; Castillo, 2002; Cordova, 2003; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Gonzalez, 2007; Jacinto, 2001; Litton, 1999; Maramba, 2008a; Oliveros, 2009; Tintiango-Cubales, 2005, 2009). Like many of them, I realized that it was impossible to engage in research in the Filipina/o community as a Filipina and *not* become a participant if one is not already involved in a more intimate way with the group. Additionally, Filipina/o culture emphasizes the importance of close-knit relationships. Nadal (2009) observed that Filipina/os pride themselves in the closeness of their relationships. This cultural value is reinforced by the notion of *kapwa* (fellow being or shared identity), a concept similar to collectivism. *Kapwa* “implies Filipinos will feel intrinsically

connected to each other interpersonally, spiritually, and emotionally; this connection may be with their family members, friends, acquaintances, or even Filipino strangers who they do not even know” (Nadal, 2009, p. 43). Acknowledging this as a significant cultural value that may be fostered in the Filipina/o families and communities from which the research participants originated, it was highly likely that when I entered the field of research as a Filipina/o scholar and began my research with other Filipina/os, this sense of *kapwa* was present and thus, allowed me to forge ties—almost organically and immediately—with my research participants. As the research process took place over the course of several months, this became even more apparent. As I got to know and interact with the research participants on a regular basis, in formal research settings and informal social settings, I observed that while participants were initially nervous in the research context, this anxiety had more to do with the topic matter—one that many of them had not discussed at length with even their closest friends—than it did with feeling a sense of unease with me as a researcher. By the end of the process, several of the participants had become comfortable enough with me to extend invitations to various events they had organized on campus or talk with me about issues that were both relevant and irrelevant to the research itself. This sense of *kapwa* emerged as the research progressed and ultimately, I believe that it allowed students to be candid and critical of their own experiences. This was an asset to the research and to the findings as they reflected on perspectives that were shared with a sense of trust and understanding. Participants came to realize that by sharing their experiences, they were giving voice to their individual stories, but also to the communities they represented.

Finally, for me, the line between scholar/theorist and advocate/practitioner was a thin one; I saw myself as embodying both. Hence, for me this scholarship was an activism; it was and is inherently political and subjective. My ultimate purpose in undertaking this work was to facilitate Filipina/o American college students with an opportunity to be activists for themselves and their communities, to prevent Filipina/os from becoming invisible and neglected in their university because they were perceived as persisting and thus, as model minorities who do not need support, attention, or resources. Such inequality and competition for resources should be identified and rectified to ensure that all students have the opportunity to persist and thrive in their institutions of higher education.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the rationale behind using a qualitative approach to explore the research questions. I also reviewed the ways in which the research site and participants were selected and provided essential contextual information about this study. Further, I detailed the research process and the qualitative methods I utilized to acquire data—interviews and a focus group—and reflected on my experiences as a researcher. I also shared how my own positionality and background influenced my approach to this study and its impact on my interactions with the research participants. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduate students in a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university, a group that has been overlooked in educational research about minority student persistence in higher education. The collective voice of the Filipina/o American college student participants in this research is a testament to the need to continue to question and critically examine the ways in which existing perceptions and assumptions about Filipina/o Americans, and by extension Asian American and Pacific Islanders as members of a model minority, have perpetuated their invisibility not only in scholarship, but in their own institutions. Through the inclusion of their stories and standpoints here, these Filipina/o American college students have created a counternarrative to demonstrate that though Filipina/o Americans overall have relatively high rates of educational attainment, the journey towards that degree is not one without struggle or hardship. This chapter is dedicated to sharing the findings of this research and how the participants directly responded to the research questions. The questions that guided this study were:

1. What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?

2. What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?

Findings for Research Question One: What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?

To explore these research questions, a qualitative approach using interviews and a focus group was utilized. This included a total of 14 in-depth, individual interviews with eight participants and a focus group with four of the participants. Using an in-depth approach allowed me to ask participants a common set of questions in order to garner direct responses to the research questions, but also left room for exploration to investigate their own particular experiences at Ignatian University. In addition to the formal research meetings between the participants and myself, data acquired in informal settings such as club meetings and other campus events were included. Some document review was also performed on data provided by the participants, which included their own research papers and writings that related to this study as well as information from social media sources such as Facebook. Findings were determined by repeatedly and carefully reviewing interview and focus group data, and assigning codes to data to then create common domains and themes for analysis.

However, before reviewing the main findings of this research, it is important first to understand the research participants' backgrounds and personal college choice processes. Doing so recognizes the importance of the participants' precollege

experiences and cultures in cultivating their college-going competencies and their decisions to enroll in college. Though the data points to a high level of educational attainment of first generation Filipina/o Americans, research has shown that there are growing challenges and barriers faced by second generation Filipina/o Americans in accessing higher education (Buenvista, 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007). Many of these barriers are produced due in part to the conceptualization of Filipina/o Americans as members of a model minority and the view that Filipina/o American youth have the social and cultural capital necessary to successfully navigate the college access process. Therefore, before exploring the challenges that students encountered once in the university setting, we must first understand how they came to the university and the concepts and perceptions about college that shaped their decisions to pursue a college education and ultimately, the choice to pursue their degrees at Ignatian University.

Profiles of participants. The following are narratives of the eight research participants and their paths to Ignatian University.

Cora. Cora was senior at Ignatian and who completed her degree in psychology in spring 2012. She is a second generation Filipina American and grew up in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. Both of her parents completed college—her mother in the Philippines; her father began college in the Philippines and eventually completed his degree at Ignatian University. Both of Cora’s older brothers completed their undergraduate education at large public universities in California.

Cora shared that the coeducational, Catholic high school she attended was “college prep so it was kind of implied that you go to college. Like I think almost my whole entire graduating class went to a four year.” This college-going culture was further facilitated by the presence of college counselors who were available to assist students with their postsecondary school searches. Of her own college search process, Cora said:

I didn’t really know what I wanted, to be honest. I tell everyone that I kind of just applied everywhere. I applied to UCs...then I applied here, USC, and then St. Mary’s College, which was like...the extension of our high school.

Cora’s decision to attend Ignatian was due primarily to familial influence and circumstance—her father and a cousin who had attended Ignatian both had seemingly positive experiences. Additionally, Cora’s parents did not want her to attend a California State University, so those were not schools she ever seriously considered. When admissions decisions arrived, she did not receive the offers she had expected and going to one of her University of California options (the less selective Riverside and Merced) would have made her feel “like a failure...I ended up going here because no one else wanted me.” In the end she chose Ignatian because of its location and the opportunity it offered to be away from home. She reflected, “I just felt like college was my time to be on my own.”

Mary. Mary, a sophomore and graphic design major, was also part of a community and family who fostered her college-going aspirations. She had considered art school for a time, and she eventually settled on a liberal arts education because, as she described, “I didn’t think I’d really grow as a person just going to art classes.” Though

neither her first generation Filipina mother nor second generation Mexican American father had completed college, they had always encouraged her as well as her older sister, Rachel, a junior at Ignatian, to make sure to get a university education. Mary grew up in Irvine, California and attended a public high school that she characterized as high achieving and where most students went to college, so the college-going culture was all around her: “Everyone was overachievers there; everyone was basically going to college. Like the natural thing to do is that you have to go to college. I didn’t know anyone who didn’t go to college.”

Most of Mary’s friends went to University of California campuses or private colleges; a few even made it to the East Coast. But it was her sister Rachel who was perhaps the most influential factor in Mary’s decision to attend Ignatian. Their parents were already familiar with Ignatian and wanted the sisters to be together, despite the significant cost of attendance. She said, “They really wanted me to go here because my sister’s here...this was their top choice for me. And they really wanted us to live on campus and have that college experience.”

In fact, Mary revealed that if her sister had not already been attending Ignatian, “I probably wouldn’t have even heard about it.” Acknowledging the significant role of her family in her life, Mary admitted that she also chose Ignatian because she thought it would be “nice” to have her sister around and because the campus was fairly close to home. She surmised, “I wanted to go somewhere close so that I could visit sometimes, because I did get homesick. So I thought this was a good distance.”

Michael. Michael, a marketing major in his junior year, grew up just 45 miles away from Ignatian University in the city of Pomona and attended public schools before entering the realm of private education as a college student. His mother finished her college education at a California State University, while his father received some college-level education and then went straight into employment as a computer engineer. His older sister graduated from another private university in Los Angeles County, but because of its proximity to the family home, she commuted to school each day.

Michael described himself as a highly involved and motivated student who finished in the top ten percent of his class. When it came to looking at colleges, he first responded with laughter and then clarified that he was adamant about not going to college anywhere close to home, despite his father's desire for him to commute and go to the California State University located just a few minutes away from their family residence. Michael's sister advised him to go to a residential college and live on-campus because going to a college close to home and commuting was "the worst decision of her life." After looking at some schools in the Los Angeles region with strong business programs, Michael determined that he liked Ignatian and another private, religiously affiliated university, but in his mind, Ignatian had a better campus life and seemed more diverse. Diversity was important to Michael because, "I really didn't want to go to a majority White school." He also received more financial aid from Ignatian than the other option and felt that as a practicing Catholic, Ignatian would be a better fit, not just because it was Catholic, but also because it seemed more open to other faiths. From his perspective, the other university was too "hardcore Christian. I heard that you have mandatory

sermons or chapel three times a week.” Ignatian, on the other hand, seemed to embrace Catholic tradition and espouse certain tenets such as social justice and service, but did so in a way that allowed students from diverse faith traditions to feel welcome and part of the community.

John. John came to Ignatian University under different circumstances than all of the other participants. Now a junior and double major in Political Science and Asian Pacific Studies, he transferred to the university last year after one semester at a private university in Washington, D.C. and another term at a Los Angeles-area community college. According to John, his initial college choice was made based on two factors—cost and location. He wanted to attend an East Coast college and applied to only private schools because he deduced that the costs to attend a private institution would be comparable to the out-of-state tuition he would have had to pay at an East Coast public university. Wanting to major in international relations, he decided the nation’s capitol would be the best place in which to pursue his academic and professional aspirations.

However, John’s experience at his first college was, as he put it, “moderate to bad.” He experienced a major health issue within the first few weeks of the semester and said that the university’s policies and execution of those policies was “a bad experience for my family” adding more stress to an already difficult situation. He left before taking his final exams and once back in Los Angeles with his family, enrolled in community college to continue his education. However, John “didn’t like [community college] at all” mostly due to what he perceived to be a transient student population and lack of campus life compared to the one he had at the four-year university in D.C. Eventually,

John looked forward to the following school year and began applying to schools, but due to his health condition wanted to remain in Los Angeles where he grew up and where his family still lived. Due to the timing of his second college search, John was not able to apply to the University of California schools and did not want to attend a California State University campus. Because Ignatian had a rolling admissions calendar, it became his primary choice. Despite the limited choices during this second round of college applications, John remarked, “Ignatian kind of had the things I was looking for in my college life that the other university didn’t really have” including Asian American and Pacific Islander-centered student organizations; he also got the feeling that he was at “home” at Ignatian. Because John grew up in a predominantly Asian American community and attended public schools populated by mostly Asian American students, having Asian American representation in his college community was important to him, especially in the face of his first college experience on the East Coast and at a college that he described as predominantly White. Both of John’s parents, as well as his older sister, hold college degrees.

Kate. Kate grew up in a suburb on the San Francisco Peninsula and described it as a “densely populated Filipino town.” The youngest of three girls, Kate asserted on multiple occasions that the notion of going to college was very “normal” to her. “It is just something I grew up with knowing...I’m not first generation Filipino to go...my sisters went to college, it’s just normal to me. It wasn’t a huge impact. It was just another chapter in my life,” Kate shared.

Still, her mother completed the equivalent of an associate's degree in the Philippines and her father only took some college level coursework. Because of this, her parents persistently emphasized the need to get a good college education in order to ultimately, get a good job. Kate, now a junior and physics major, attended an all-girls, college-preparatory Catholic high school that she called "a good resource" in helping her to conduct her college search and application. Kate knew that because she had attended fairly small private schools her entire life that she wanted to be in a "smaller setting" that had certain qualities:

Intimacy as far as what the campus can offer me...intimate class settings, I get to know my professors...I'm always waving at them down the hall...I felt like it would be easier because it is a smaller population, you get to know more people...so just things like that.

Though only two other students from her graduating class chose to attend Ignatian, Kate did not see moving to Southern California as a significant transition because she had family in the area that she visited from time to time and felt fairly comfortable knowing she had somewhere else to go. Still, Kate surmised, "I don't know what it would have been like if I went to a city that I had never set foot in."

Joy. Joy, a Los Angeles native in her senior year at Ignatian University, was majoring in business administration and information management systems. She described having attended private schools her whole life including a small, all-girls, Catholic high school nearby. An only child, her immediate family consists of just her and her mother since her father passed away five years ago.

For Joy, her college choice process was largely shaped by her need to remain in close proximity to her mother. Throughout the process, however, she did not feel like she

had much support as to how to determine where to apply because she felt that her school counselors put emphasis on grades and scores; her mother did not attend college in the U.S. so she “didn’t really know what was going on.” Instead, Joy relied on outside sources such as friends and word of mouth. Despite being at a secondary school with college guidance resources, Joy felt “blindsided. I didn’t really know what to look for. Like what’s a good school...what’s best fit for me. It was all really by luck that I ended up at Ignatian and I ended up liking it.” An overnight visit to Ignatian targeted at increasing Asian American and Pacific Islander student enrollment cemented her choice to matriculate at Ignatian. The small class sizes, sense of community, and quality of the business school (her intended program) were all on display at the overnight and “there was something about [it] where everything just seemed right to me.” Despite some concerns about the costs of attending Ignatian, Joy’s mother reassured her that it was not about the price, but the quality of the experience she would have that mattered most in making their decision. Joy reflected, “She was like, ‘Don’t worry about the price tag, we can make it work, no matter what.’ I trusted her with that and I knew she wouldn’t tell me that if we couldn’t afford it.”

Andy. Andy grew up in the San Francisco Peninsula and attended Catholic schools his entire life. Andy, a sophomore and political science major, characterized his high school experience as a positive one. He was very involved in community service, received academic and leadership awards, and was even chosen as Homecoming King. The youngest of two, Andy was familiar with the college going process as a result of witnessing his older sister go through it and learning about her experiences attending a

private university in northern California. Neither of his parents had received their college degrees from U.S. institutions. Despite being somewhat familiar with the college application process, his own approach seemed to be very happenstance—he applied to UCs as a biochemistry major assuming that is what his parents wanted him to do, but later applied to liberal arts schools so that he could focus on liberal arts and be in an environment that would “allow me to grow as person through the service of others.” He applied to liberal arts institutions in Los Angeles and New York, as well as the university his sister attended. While Ignatian was one of his last choices—mostly due to his own lack of knowledge about the school—Andy eventually selected Ignatian because of its emphasis on social justice and service for others, as well as its Catholic affiliation, since he himself identified as a Catholic.

Leah. Leah was a senior at Ignatian and majored in sociology. When she was eight years old, her father passed away and her mother has raised her as a single parent from that point forward. Leah was the only participant who was not born in the United States; she and her mother immigrated from the Philippines when Leah was only six months old. As a consequence, Leah saw herself as very much embodying a hybrid of first and second generation Filipina American experiences, especially because she is the eldest grandchild in her family and the first person in her family to go to college in America. Leah shared, “[My mother] basically left everything just to be here in America and give me that opportunity to go to school here.” Despite being just an infant when she left the Philippines, Leah self-identifies as a first generation Filipina American. As though to declare the transnational connection she feels to her homeland, Leah has

maintained her Philippine citizenship and resides here in the U.S. as a permanent resident.

Leah attended to an all-girls Catholic high school in the San Gabriel Valley region of Los Angeles County. She described being treated like “a star” in high school and was salutatorian of her class of sixty. Because she was perceived by teachers as an exceptional student and was a self-described overachiever in high school, Leah was provided with a lot of direction and support with her college application and choice process from her school counselors. She applied to public and private universities and considered both Ignatian and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), a highly selective University of California campus, but ultimately decided on Ignatian because it “just had all the components that I wanted. I wanted a small school and UCSD is not a small school.” She felt this was particularly important because she entered college as a pre-medical student and Ignatian was in a position to offer her more individual attention, though she conceded that “if I had gone to UCSD I think I would have stuck with it because I feel like UCSD has that focus of med school or some graduate school in the medical field.”

Leah also considered going to a community college in order to save money. In the end, Leah remarked that what finally pushed her away from community colleges and California State University campuses and towards Ignatian was her mother’s support of Catholic schools as well as input from a school counselor. “They definitely steered me away. They said, ‘You’ve been working hard all of your years here...why are you just going to settle?’” Additionally, they raised the point that by going to the university as a

freshman, Leah would have a higher likelihood of graduating on time and that as an only child, Leah would be the only college education that her mother would have to help finance.

College choice: the beginning of the journey. As evidenced by these narratives, all of the participants commonly shared that going to college was an expectation held by both themselves and their parents. For many it was an expectation rather than a choice. Their extended family members and other significant agents such as high school teachers and counselors further encouraged these aspirations. Yet, familial support, specifically parental input, was often limited to parental expressions of personal preferences for their child's college choice (largely based on location or cost), providing encouragement of their educational aspirations, and financial support. Furthermore, for these participants, college was often situated as a definitive next step in their journey towards professional and economic success and ultimately, a validation of their parents' immigrant aspirations.

Though the notion of going to college was one all of the participants described as being highly valued in their families, the participants shared stories of the struggles of understanding and making sense of the entire college going process. This is in line with research that has explored the postsecondary options and aspirations of Filipina/o Americans, especially first and second generation students. It is largely unrecognized that many Filipina/o American college students are "in the middle" that is, they occupy a contradictory space with regards to their educational status; while their parents may possess college degrees, many of those degrees were obtained in the Philippines and consequently, Filipina/o parents may not have the same type of knowledge or insight

about the college-going process in the U.S. that those who completed their college education in the United States may have (Buenavista, 2009; Buenavista et al., 2009). Further, parents' occupational status and income may not match their educational attainment. The specific experiences of the eight participants provided insight about how being "in the middle" impacted their choice to attend college and notions about the college experience.

For example, with the exception of Cora, all of the participants' parents either completed their college education outside of the U.S. or did not complete their college education. But as Buenavista (2010) pointed out, the structure and conceptualization of many institutional policies and programs meant to benefit first generation college students would not "necessarily be recognized as first generation, low-income, or historically underrepresented college students in the literal meaning of these constructs" (p. 117). The argument could be made that based on the socioeconomic profile of several of these students (primarily middle class) their barriers to accessing higher education might be less severe than those from low-income backgrounds. However, the experiences of these students illustrated that the process of selecting a college was one characterized by a mixture of circumstance (available options), convenience (with particular significance paid to location), and financial considerations and/or constraints, rather than truly having open "choice" or being supported by the expected benefits such as cultural and social capital connected with higher socioeconomic statuses or having college-educated parents.

Moreover, five of the eight participants' permanent family residences were within a one-hour drive of the university. Their experiences echo findings that showed Filipina/o Americans from both low and high socioeconomic backgrounds were the most likely to choose a school near home and less likely to attend highly selective colleges compared to other Asian American students such as Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese Americans (Maramba, 2008a; Teranishi, 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004). These students' experiences also underscore what has been found in quantitative research regarding access to choice and college selectivity. Though Ignatian University is considered a more selective university (54% of students who applied for Fall 2011 were admitted), the students' college choice narratives revealed that only two of the eight students were admitted to what are considered highly selective universities (University of California, Berkeley and University of California, San Diego). The lack of admissions to highly selective universities counters the dominant narrative that Asian American and Pacific Islander students are "taking over" universities and colleges, specifically highly selective institutions (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010).

These participants' experiences in accessing higher education illustrated that while these individuals were considered academically high achieving students in their high school contexts, the reality is that they seemingly occupied various levels of eligibility and competitive viability in universities with selective admissions. This raises questions about how perceptions of Asian American and Pacific Islander students as members of a model minority may have influenced the way in which students were

guided through their college searches both by their school administrators and their own parents.

Students also had to face the challenge of dealing with their parents' lack of knowledge about the process of applying for admissions to universities in the United States as well as general knowledge about the U.S. higher education system. Similar to the students included in Buenavista's study of Filipina/o American college students at a large, public university, the participants from Ignatian University had to confront the "gap between their parents' educational attainment and inability to translate their higher education experience into tangible assistance for their children" (Buenavista, 2007, p. 128). The gap did not just permeate the college choice process, but as is demonstrated later in this chapter, it impacted the way in which students and their parents managed the transition and adjustment to college life at Ignatian.

These college choice narratives explicate that the process of persistence actually begins in the pre-college stage. The pre-college culture and context under which a student makes the choice to apply and potentially enroll in a postsecondary educational institution were important to understanding the way in which they perceived the importance of pursuing higher education and their initial level of commitment to working towards and completing a college degree (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). It is the cultural meaning-making system students developed from their cultures of origins that they utilized to make their college choice, but also how they would participate in college both academically and socially (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Through these narratives, Filipina/o American college students from

diverse backgrounds and experiences showed that they shared a common perception of what the pursuit of higher education in the United States was meant to be—a way to secure employment in an increasingly competitive job market, but also, an experience that had special meanings for them and their families, especially those whose own parents had not attained college degrees.

In the next section, the experiences of Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University will be reviewed. I examine the challenges these students have gone through since entering the world of higher education. The Filipina/o American students who participated in this study identified the challenges they experienced in three specific areas: difficult transitions and adjustments to college community and campus life due to cultural dissonance; ongoing feelings of cultural dissonance, isolation, and invisibility due to a lack of structural, interactional, and classroom diversity; and struggles in academic performance.

Making connections: transition, adjustment, and belonging. Scholars of student persistence agree: “getting in” to college is just the first step in a long, arduous process of persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1996; Museus, 2008b; Teranishi et al., 2004). Along the way, students experience a plethora of challenges that test their commitment to graduation. In reviewing the factors leading to student departure, several theories have argued that students are most likely to leave during their first year (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993). Student departure during the first year is due largely to several factors including difficulty of transition from high school to the college setting, feelings of cultural dissonance, and an inability to find a sense of

belonging to the college, whether it be socially or academically (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salmone, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The first year and arguably, the first few weeks of college, are a crucial adjustment period for new college students and can often determine a student's future outlook on the importance and meaning of college. As a result, this time of transition and adjustment for minority students is especially important to understand. Most research in this area has been conducted with specific focus on the Black and Latino student populations as well as nontraditional entry, first-time college students. As students perceived to be part of a model minority and conceptualized as second generation college students with certain levels of social and cultural capital, the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates transitioning into life as college students is often overlooked.

Cultural dissonance and the university setting. The transition to college requires a significant amount of adjustment for any student, even those with the highest potential for success (Hurtado et al., 1996). Students entering college for the first time must learn to navigate and make sense of the academic, cultural, and social worlds they have entered (Tinto, 1993). For racial and ethnic minority students whose home communities consist of mostly people from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, this transition can be particularly stressful. For students entering predominantly White institutions, this stress can be exacerbated by perceived differences between themselves and their White peers and feelings of difference and marginality.

All of the eight research participants described their home communities as being composed of a mix of different ethnic groups including White individuals, but mostly of

people of color and in some cases, they were predominantly Asian American and Pacific Islander. Several of the participants described their high school settings as sites in which they also interacted with mostly people of color and further, with many other Filipina/o Americans. Consequently, for many participants their entry into a predominantly White university setting was one that caused feelings of confusion, isolation, and cultural dissonance. The cultural dissonance experienced by students is defined as the tension that results from incongruence between a student's home culture and the campus culture (Museus, 2008a; Museus & Quaye, 2009). This tension arises when the cultural-meaning making system utilized by an individual does not match with the new cultural information that they are encountering in their new context. In this study, the cultural dissonance experience by these students often centered around two major areas: confrontations with a dominant White culture on campus and feelings of cultural incongruity in the social environment at Ignatian.

Cultural shock and dissonance: Whiteness, wealth, and racial tension. Cora grew up in a city in the East Bay of San Francisco with a population of nearly 20,000 that is 43% Asian American. Cora observed that the city had a significant Filipino population. In her home life, she asserted that she was very much raised “with Filipino values and tradition” and with an emphasis on Catholicism and family. Her social circle included a racially diverse group of friends; her two closest friends were also Filipina, though she made it clear they were friends not simply because of their shared ethnic background. As for her high school context, she described it as “very diverse and so it wasn't predominantly White or predominantly Black or Mexican or Asian. It was just

like a fairly good mix of people.” The lack of predominance of one culture or group in her school setting caused her to “never really acknowledge my Filipino-ness” because “I don’t think I was really forced to because it was so diverse.”

Michael described his hometown of Pomona, located in the eastern Los Angeles County, as “not the greatest area, you know it’s kind of, I guess one of the lower income areas” but that his public high school was in a “nicer” part of town and had a diverse population of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. As a result of this ethnic and cultural diversity in his immediate surroundings, Michael always had friends from different backgrounds, but in high school, began to gravitate more towards people who were of Filipino or Asian descent. He reflected, “I guess I felt I had more in common with them and could relate more to them. I still had all my other friends...but I guess my main group...I started gravitating towards Filipinos.” Michael shared that he was proud of his Filipino heritage and expressed it in different ways, but never really had the chance to learn in-depth about his Filipino history and culture other than from his family.

Other participants relayed similar experiences in their home communities and schools. Both Andy and Kate grew up in cities on the San Francisco Peninsula. Kate described her hometown as a place known for having a “fairly large amount” of Filipinos while Andy’s family lived in a city that has a “very Asian community.” They both attended Catholic high schools with fairly diverse populations, but had significant numbers of White students. John and Leah had similar communities of origin to one another as they were raised in neighboring towns in the San Gabriel Valley of Los

Angeles, both of which have predominantly Asian American and Latino populations. Joy and Mary described growing up in communities that had significant Asian American populations, but attended high schools with sizable White student populations, and thus had familiarly interacting regularly with White peers.

Though the participants shared that they grew up in diverse communities and were accustomed to interacting with non-Filipino or non-Asian American or Pacific Islander individuals, they still found their experience of transitioning into a university setting a jarring one, primarily due to a perceived predominance of White students in the makeup of the student body. Kate reflected that based on her community of origin she felt uneasy in her new college environment:

I came here and I was like, “Wow, there’s a lot of White people,” which is fine, but at the same time I feel *off* [emphasis added]...Coming here and walking around this place...I really feel like the minority here as opposed to where I was growing up where it is a majority of Filipinos.

Cora responded similarly, noting that coming from a diverse home community and high school, being around mostly White peers was difficult for her to process and manage. When I asked Cora if this seeming predominance of White students was something she noticed right away, she responded, “Yeah. Well, people in my dorm, people in my class and looking around and being like the only Asian girl in this class, or the only minority even. It was a very big turn off to me.” Having coming from a public high school that was in his words “73% Asian” and in a predominantly Asian American city, John offered a similar perspective. He situated his experience at Ignatian as an extension of the semester he had spent at a private and predominantly White university in Washington, D.C. and from which he transferred:

AB [Researcher]: So were you culture shocked when you came here and most people were not Asian?

John: No. I was used to it because I was culture shocked at [university in Washington, D.C.] first.

AB: Did that have an impact on you at all, going to a college that was mostly White?

John: Yeah.

AB: And what would you say that impact was?

John: It's kind of [long pause] like a negative impact. Because it makes you feel extremely like a minority.

AB: Had you felt like that before?

John: No, because I was the majority before [laughs].

Kate, Cora, and John's reflections illustrated what many students of color entering predominantly White institutions experience—the cultural dissonance and realization of their status as “minority” students. This newfound consciousness created feelings of isolation and marginality, which several participants frequently referred to as a “disconnect” from the larger, predominantly White student body. As Museus (2008a) found, students in predominantly White institutions often feel cultural dissonance when they are in situations where they may be one of the few students of color. In this new environment, students struggled to make sense of their new “identities” as minorities. However, from these student perspectives, despite Ignatian's fairly large student of color population (43.8%), they still perceived that the university consisted of primarily White students and those associated perspectives in multiple spaces and circumstances.

This initial culture shock of being surrounded by mostly White peers and White perspectives was only augmented by a seeming lack of socioeconomic diversity. Despite describing himself as friendly, outgoing, and receptive to new experiences, Michael shared that his transition and adjustment to Ignatian was difficult. Despite knowing that the school was predominantly White before enrolling, Michael did not realize how pervasive the sense of privilege, primarily due to economic affluence, would be among his fellow students of all racial backgrounds:

I didn't have a hard time making friends, but I feel like every freshman goes through this. You start to have a hard time making it like home. 'Cause a lot of people that I was surrounded by were really rich or really privileged students who were very materialistic. All around me people were talking about like, "My Benz this" or "I got a few extra thousand so I'm going to go buy this" and it's like, I'm from Pomona, you know? I'm not used to all that stuff.

Later on, Michael further elaborated on his difficulty managing relationships with peers from "privileged" backgrounds:

I had to work really hard to even get into college and work for scholarships and all that stuff. I mean money is definitely not easy. I'm not going to throw around \$5,000 or \$7,000 on my car. That was their complaints. It was just really weird. I wasn't comfortable with it. It annoyed me a lot too.

Kate expressed complementary views. She discussed over the course of several meetings her discomfort at other students' displays of status through material symbols and her inability to connect significantly with peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Kate found that it was especially hard to find common ground with these students as a result of an omnipresent and very real concern for her and other research participants—their ability to pay for their college education. Kate shared, "I would see these crazy cars

that these students drive and I'm like, 'Well, you can afford to go here without any kind of financial hardship.'”

During the focus group with other participants, Kate again commented on this issue of ability to pay and how it impacted her ability to relate to and build connections with peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds:

I have met White people who don't have that problem; and it isn't just because they're White but because they're wealthy, you know? It is just weird talking to them about [financial hardships] because they don't have any concept whatsoever when it is constantly on my mind.

Mary shared Michael and Kate's concerns:

Everyone is pretty wealthy here...so it is kind of an adjustment to hear people talk about their vacations and stuff. Comparing that with my own life. It doesn't hinder my ability [to have friends of that background]. But it makes me uncomfortable sometimes.

Mary's discomfort was evident in her body language and tone when discussing this topic. She further explained that being surrounded by people who were in her view “pretty wealthy” only exacerbated her own concerns about the financial impact of attending a private university was having on her and her family, an issue she raised multiple times throughout our conversations. Instead of being able to feel at ease about pursuing her college degree at Ignatian, these frequent reminders of economic disparity between her and other students caused her to question what type of community of students attended Ignatian and whether she “fit in” with a community that seemed to value and give privilege to symbols of material wealth. The experiences of Michael, Kate, and Mary reinforce research findings that have shown a negative impact on a student's adjustment to an institution based on their ability to pay and financial concerns (St. John, Cabrera,

Nora, & Asker, 2000). In this case, it was not simply their concerns over an ability to pay that caused these students to doubt their commitment to Ignatian University, but rather how it also affected their interactions with peers.

This was also true in Joy's experience. Joy attended a high school that was 40% White and cost nearly \$13,000 in tuition, thus enrolling students with a mixture of socioeconomic statuses, but primarily those of middle to upper middle class backgrounds. As a consequence of her high school environment, Joy described herself as being comfortable interacting with people of different backgrounds. Kate was drawn to Ignatian by the sense of community she observed as a prospective student during an overnight program for AAPI students. But once she started to settle in at Ignatian as an enrolled student, she did not necessarily see that sense of community nor feel particularly attached to the community. Joy explained:

My freshman year was kind of hard. I just couldn't connect with the people on campus. There weren't that many Asians on campus, or at least not a big Asian presence. I just couldn't connect with the other people on campus. I don't know. Probably people within my own hall, they were all predominantly Caucasian. They just had a different upbringing. I couldn't connect with them at any level. And in classes it was just so obvious. I came from a very diverse background and I didn't like how it was just a very sheltered bubble. A lot of people were very well off and it wasn't the type of scene I wanted to be involved in.

When asked to explain further how people exhibited their "different upbringing," Joy replied:

Subtle things; like just, "Oh, Daddy will pay for that" or something [pauses] like random things. Just their mannerisms and attitudes. I don't know; the way they think about things is very different than the way we think about things. There shouldn't be that division, but I can't help but I see it.

Students' overt and subtle attitudes and behaviors with regards to wealth and material possessions made Joy feel alienated and unable to develop relationships with certain individuals. It caused her to question her decision to attend Ignatian and whether she "fit in" with the other people on campus. Cora made a similar observation about the "lack" of connection and community with other students and a division and disparity in student behavior. She noted that affluence was often put on display and seemed to be a primary source of identification for some students which created unspoken divisions among students. Cora also reflected that because of the high cost to attend Ignatian, it was not surprising that there would be a significant presence of people with higher socioeconomic backgrounds, but didn't expect that it would be so trenchant and obvious in daily interactions.

Cora: Because it is so expensive to go here, you kind of cut out a whole chunk of people who could go here.

AB: So, was that noticeable to you right away—that there were wealthy students on campus?

Cora: [Assertively] Yeah!

AB: And that wasn't something you were used to?

Cora: [shakes head] No.

AB: Would people kind of throw it around?

Cora: Yeah. I think people kind of flaunt it unintentionally. Just the way people dress and the way they carry themselves. Like I befriended this one girl who I thought was totally different, but the more I got to know her...and just living with her, it became very evident that her home like [pauses] was very well off.

AB: And there were a lot of other people that you encountered that had similar backgrounds or home cultures?

Cora: Yeah, which I mean I know I come from a well-off family too, but I just feel like other people here are [pauses] what's the word [pauses] it's just more *evident* in them and it matters to them that they come from money.

During this exchange with Cora, it became clear that the reason having affluent peers made her feel a sense of dissonance was because students seemed to be more blatant with their displays of their economic status. Further, even for a student like Cora who considered herself to be “well-off,” (an assessment she made largely because her family has not utilized financial aid to fund her education) and other participants who identified as coming from middle class backgrounds, being confronted with obvious and at times brazen displays of wealth often created a sense of exclusion and dissonance between these Filipina/o American students and their more “privileged” peers. For multiple students, these displays of economic status were not just off putting—they were seen as representative of a contradictory sets of values and by extension, signs of cultural dissimilarity between themselves as Filipina/o Americans and more affluent and predominantly White students.

Cultural shock and dissonance: The “college lifestyle.” Participants also expressed discomfort and difficulty making sense of what they routinely called the “college lifestyle” at Ignatian University. After some probing, participants identified that along with becoming acclimated to living on a residential campus and having constant contact with peers, the “college lifestyle” included drinking, partying, and “hooking up.” (Participants defined this as being inclusive of varying degrees of sexual activity).

As stated previously, college students utilize their cultural meaning-making systems to make sense of the college environment, social norms, and accepted behaviors.

Many of the participants commented that their perceptions of college and in particular, what the social realm of college would be like, was based on information they had received from friends and family who had attended college as well as the media such as television and film. Participants talked about how they anticipated that college would be a time to engage in a lot of social activity, and that a lot of social engagement would be centered around attending parties. Kate shared:

I honestly thought there was going to be parties like every day. Like when you watch movies about college. So I thought college would be like party time. I'm down to party, but that wasn't what I was looking forward to, but it was something that would happen regularly.

Cora's notions of college life were highly influenced by her brothers who told her, "College is the best time of your life." Knowing only a handful of other entering freshman at Ignatian:

I really thought college was my time to start over. I wanted to do everything, be involved in everything. I think I had a very stereotypical image of what college should be. I thought I was going to hang out with everyone on my floor and be BFF with my roommate and be school spirited. And um [pauses] that did not happen.

Cora remembered that the first few weeks were filled with a lot of "random parties" with "random people" and being in these situations made her feel uncomfortable and out of place. Though she had experimented with drinking in high school, Cora pointed out that she did so only with a close group of friends whom she trusted whereas in this new college environment she felt "on-guard" being surrounded by strangers in social situations. Cora shared that though she had looked forward to going to parties and socializing with other students, after the first few weeks she had already grown tired of it and the scene had not helped her to develop any deeper connections or friendships. Cora

said, “I felt very out of place. It wasn’t as glamorous as I thought it would be, the whole hanging out with random people, going to random parties, drinking. It was all very cliché.”

Three participants found this transition into the “college lifestyle” difficult, due in good part to their own views and the influence of their upbringing and parental views on such social activity, perspectives that ranged from fairly to very conservative. During the focus group, participants engaged in an extended exchange about this very point. When I asked participants how their Filipino family values or upbringing influenced some of their decisions, they quickly pointed to how conflicts between value systems played out in the social scene:

Leah: I feel that another component is the moral principle of other individuals. I experienced this the majority of freshman year when I was just trying to find where I belonged. Like not belonged, but who I felt more connected with. But I felt that there were a lot of people that didn’t really have the same moral standing as I do because I’m Filipino, because I was raised in a very traditional Filipino culture that it really did [pauses] it had a deciding factor in what decisions I would make in certain situations. Whether that be in a party or a kick-back, anything. But I feel that yes, there are some things that the White culture does accept whereas in Filipino culture you would never, ever think of doing.

AB: What are you thinking of?

Leah: I think the whole concept of hooking up was a big [pauses] it was like, “Oh you do that?” And they’d be like, “Yeah, all the time.” “Oh okay!” I think, everyone has a different definition of what hooking up is and I guess from where I grew up it’s just not [pauses] not something that was socially accepted. And I don’t know. It’s just not what I’m into. But there were times when my friends would talk about it and I wouldn’t really know how to respond especially in regards to the event and what happened the night before. And I’d be like, “I don’t know what to tell you because I’ve never experienced that before.” So yeah, that kind of caught me off guard the whole freshman year.

AB: Okay. Across the individual interviews, you all mentioned drinking and going to parties. Did that have any impact on, when you came to college, how you socially interacted with students?

Michael: [Nodding] That was definitely a huge factor. In high school I was completely straight edge, no drugs or drinking, nothing like that...in high school I mean I would go to parties and stuff, but I had a curfew so I had to go home.

Kate: I don't know if this goes in line with your question, but like my mom still doesn't know that I drink. I mean I don't drink a lot anyways, so I don't think it matters. But she's always like [in Filipino-accented English], "Don't drink, don't smoke" [laughs]. I'm like, "Okay!" [everyone laughs]...So like as far as the partying goes, I can't do big parties. I know there are people who are like, "Yeah, let's party! It's Thirsty Thursday! Let's go out and meet some girls." And I'm like, that's not for me. Maybe it's my upbringing, but it's just like my personal choice that [pauses] not my choice, I just know it's my preference...

Mary: Yeah, same for me. I'd never go crazy or wild. I'm still straight edge so that is kind of like a struggle for me; I kind of feel out of place in this college environment.

AB: Well, it seems like from what has been described it's such a big aspect of this college.

Leah: Yeah, it's *such* an influence.

As Leah intimated, this sudden and immersive interface with the "college lifestyle" caused not only cultural dissonance, but barriers to belonging for several of the students. For Mary, her choice not to participate in drinking at all did not prevent her from making friends, but rather made her feel "out of place" at Ignatian.

Andy remarked that his participation in the "college lifestyle" caused quite a bit of dissonance and confusion within himself as well as created challenges to building relationships with other students. Andy shared, "[People] would call me the 'crazy freshman' because I'd go to parties and be wild or I'd be very out there. Very not grounded. And they'd think [pauses] they thought I was a joke in many regards." For

Andy, engaging in activities related to the “college lifestyle” caused personal and relational strife. He further remarked being viewed as a “joke” impacted his self-confidence. More significantly, others’ unfavorable perceptions of him caused Andy to question his commitment to being at Ignatian:

I was that kind of person that was kind of really hurt by what other people thought. And they’d be like, ‘Oh crazy, doesn’t do shit.’ A lot of people thought I was a joke. So with me, I kind of created that mentality for myself that everyone’s opinions really mattered and I really wanted to leave.

These perspectives support the notion put forth by existing research that racial and ethnic minority students’ college experiences are shaped by their cultural meaning-making systems. For these students, their initial perceptions of Ignatian were that it would be a place where they could thrive and had earned their right to belong. In their minds, their pursuance of a college degree at Ignatian was the representative of not only the work they had undertaken to get to higher education, but the hard work of their families. College represented the culmination of both struggle and achievement; participants viewed college as a time to pursue their academic and social interests. They believed that by getting into college, most of their struggles were already behind them.

For many students, the “college lifestyle” they were confronted with at Ignatian created a campus climate and environment that impacted their ability to belong and most importantly, be happy at college. Even for participants who are now in their junior and seniors years, the “college lifestyle” was something they had become used to being around, but did not necessarily fully agreed with or actively participated in. Some chose not to engage in the “college lifestyle” as a matter of personal preference and interest; for others, the “college lifestyle” directly contradicted their value systems. They found the

social climate at the school to be antithetical to their persistence. As several scholars have found, student perceptions of climate and environment are highly significant to their persistence (Astin, 1993; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In the case of these Filipina/o American participants, difficulty finding their place in the college environment and in the “college lifestyle” caused them to question their “fit” and belonging, and by extension their ability to survive at Ignatian.

The stories shared by these Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University demonstrate that students developed feelings of cultural dissonance through their interactions with peers who they believed represented the majority of the college campus—White and affluent students. Whether those interactions were in social or academic settings, students relayed feelings of both frustration and confusion as to how to deal with behaviors and values that they found to be in direct opposition to their own. Students also recognized that a lack of diversity at the school contributed to their feelings of isolation and dissonance. Viewing the student population as predominantly White and espousing predominantly “White values,” participants realized that the structural diversity Ignatian touted publicly did not translate into meaningful interactions with diverse sets of people on a daily basis. For these Filipina/o American students, the lack of interactional, cocurricular, and curricular diversity resulted in feelings of invisibility and isolation.

Invisibility and marginality of Filipina/o Americans at Ignatian University.

Harper and Antonio (2008) wrote, “Diversity, as a central element of a college education, matters for students.” Specifically, four types of diversity were posited as having a

positive impact on the college students: structural diversity (racial and ethnic diversity of population), interactional diversity (experiences with diverse groups of people), cocurricular diversity (programming like intergroup dialogues and events), and curricular diversity (academic programs and courses) (Harper & Antonio, 2008).

Though 43.8% of the Ignatian student body identified themselves as racial/ethnic minorities, participants frequently discussed feeling that Ignatian was a predominantly White university and that group's perspectives and needs were those that the university primarily sought to meet. These participants shared many stories that highlighted this perception and how it consequently cultivated feelings of marginalization and invisibility among Filipina/o Americans as well as the larger Asian American and Pacific Islander student community. In fact, participants relayed that they did not feel Filipina/o Americans were recognized as a distinct group on campus. As a student leader among the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, Kate surmised:

I feel like they [the university] just clump us with Asians. And the typical Asian stereotypes. I don't think the community views us as Filipinos; they just look at us like Asians. Maybe it is just convenient for them, maybe it's because of ignorance, but I feel like that's the case on campus.

Feelings of invisibility and a lack of awareness about the Filipina/o American community among the broader Ignatian community were pervasive throughout our conversations. As a senior, Cora had already spent three full years as a student at Ignatian. She was the last of the participants to meet with me individually and I knew little about her before we met. I was aware that both Joy and Leah were her friends and that it was a conversation with Leah that finally prompted Cora to accept my invitation to be a research participant. I also knew from the survey responses that she was one of the

few students who was “somewhat satisfied” with the campus sense of community as well as her overall experience at Ignatian and that I would need to address these particular points with her during our meeting. Once I did, she did not hold back and was the most critical of all the participants about the lack of diversity at Ignatian. When I asked her why she was only “somewhat satisfied” with the sense of community, she replied:

I think [the sense of community] is very fake; it comes off as very fake. The school tries to portray that it’s so diverse and as one and so embracing, embraces everyone. And I feel like it only like [pause] it’s majority White people and I just feel like it’s very catering to them. I just feel like the minorities, not only Asians, we’re all underrepresented.

Cora’s statement demonstrated that the structural diversity of Ignatian University alone was not sufficient to build an inclusive or welcoming community. And she was not the only participant to express such feelings. In some way, all of the participants discussed that while the school had diversity in numbers—a feature which initially drew them to Ignatian—they often felt that ethnic minority students and in particular, Asian American and Pacific Islander students, were often overlooked and not given significant or meaningful attention in academic or social programming. More significantly, students concurred that as Filipina/o Americans, they often felt invisible to the larger Ignatian University community. Of the nearly 6,000 undergraduates who attend Ignatian University, 291 self-identified as being at least part Filipino, constituting nearly 5% of the student body. While this seems to be a fairly good numerical representation in the undergraduate population, students conveyed in various ways that they did not believe that there was a significant presence of Filipina/o Americans on campus. In fact, students

in the Filipino Club called Filipina/o Americans in the senior class the “ghost class” because so few of them were involved in the organization or visible on campus.

Students were most apt to first describe their feelings of marginalization and invisibility when reflecting on their social experiences at Ignatian. This was not surprising given how much participants focused on their feelings of cultural dissonance and disconnect with the predominantly White student community. All of the students who participated in the study described their involvement in some sort of extracurricular activity. Their activities spanned a variety of interests—ethnic and cultural clubs, service organizations, student life programming, spiritual development groups, and academic societies. Each of these organizations and subcultures provided students with valuable connections to the larger campus community (the significance of which is explored later in this chapter). Yet, students commonly identified that whatever those organizations’ contributions to the Ignatian community might be, they often did not get the recognition or support—socially, monetarily or institutionally—that they felt these organizations deserved. In every individual conversation I had with the participants as well as during the focus group, participants identified Greek organizations, specifically fraternities and sororities associated with the national Panhellenic system, as the campus organizations that receive the most attention from the university and that, in their opinions, such attention detracted from the university’s purported commitment to the development of the whole person, social justice, and interculturalism.

Nearly 25% of students at Ignatian University participate in Greek Life. Some participants attributed the visibility of Greek organizations to the fact that a sizable

number of undergraduates were actively involved in them. But as we discussed Greek Life at Ignatian further, students identified that Greek organizations received certain privileges with which they took issue. At one point during the focus group, this became a significant point of discussion:

Kate: I think they definitely get a lot more attention. Just because they're bigger; they have all these events that go on that just span the majority of the community. Because they have a lot of turn out so they get covered, they get funding because it's a bigger deal, I guess to the Ignatian community if that makes sense. That's just what I've noticed.

Michael: In general, Ignatian holds [pauses] they give Greek priority. That's actually a fact. If you go through [student life and activities office], if you are trying to reserve a place, they always say Greek gets priority, regardless of what it is or if you planned your event there first. If Greek needs it, they'll push yours back. I mean, yeah I guess it is understandable that they are as Kate said, a bigger deal. But I don't necessarily feel that that makes them more important. Some of their events are just like dances or something. Whereas other events are just like learning experiences, especially cultural stuff. But Greek is always given that priority. Whether it is [student life and activities office] or funding, whether it's *The Ignatian* [school newspaper]...because in terms of media, Greek get *everything* [emphasis added].

Leah: [Nodding] Front page.

Michael: Yeah, like everything. It's unfair. And in my eyes, it is unfair. I feel like they should have full coverage, evenly of everything. If Ignatian is talking about the education of the whole person, then why are they focusing on Greek aspects? Because the cultural stuff and all that is part of the whole person, but the media and whatnot isn't really showing that.

A little later, after discussing an incident in which a sorority was supposedly given authority by the student life and activities office to take over a meeting space that Filipino Club members were already using to prepare for an event, students further reflected on the privileges that Greek Life organizations received:

AB: What are the signals you think that sends to students who are not part of the Greek system?

Michael: That Greek think they're better.

Leah: And that we're less important in terms of what our events are and like what [sighs] I feel that because yes, my org has also experienced that [pauses] like for example, during Greek recruitment, you cannot book any classroom regardless of what your event is during that span of those two weekends because they have recruitment.

A few things emerged from this exchange. Students shared their dissatisfaction and anger at institutional practices that privileged certain types of activities and organizations over those to which most of them belonged—cultural, service, and academic organizations. They also identified that the privileges given to Greek organizations were also problematic because the recognized Greek organizations at Ignatian are predominantly White. While six of the fifteen Greek organizations at Ignatian are school-recognized Multicultural Greek organizations, students felt that the priority given to participants in Greek Life contradicted Ignatian's espoused value of a commitment to diversity as well as their mission to educate the whole person. They believed that the university attributed a higher value to Greek organizations. By giving this sense of priority and entitlement to Greek and predominantly White organizations, Ignatian was failing to enact their espoused value of diversity. These policies and approaches only reiterated the sense of cultural dissonance they felt between themselves and for the most part, White members of the student community. The participants interpreted their experiences interacting with Greek organizations as proof that they were not considered as valuable to the community as students from the White, dominant culture.

In addition to elucidating an undocumented, but inferred hierarchy within the Ignatian student activities realm, discussion about the privileging of Greek organizations

raised the issue of visibility for all other organizations. Participants frequently used the lack of coverage in the school newspaper and other media as an example of the invisibility of cultural and ethnic organizations on campus, especially those affiliated with the Asian American and Pacific Islander student community. They also believed that this showed a lack of interest and recognition from the predominantly White campus community. Cora raised this issue multiple times:

When I see like things in *The Ignatian* about how the mainstream sororities and frats on campus do so much or when I hear side conversations when I'm walking by giant groups of sorority girls and stuff. It's like [pauses] your guys' perception of everything is so [pauses] small-minded, I guess. I don't know; it's irritating. I still remember when like I went here for orientation and they were like, "Oh yeah, Ignatian prides itself on being diverse. It's only 50% White." I'm like, "That's not diverse." I mean, I knew that coming in, but I didn't feel that it would affect me as much as it has.

When I asked her if the paper ran stories about the Asian American and Pacific Islander community and their accomplishments or contributions to the community, her reply underscored her frustration:

Yeah. If anything it's like once a year [scoffs]. I feel like it's usually during [Asian Heritage Festival]. It'll be on the front, but aside from that it's like a random picture. Like Pilipino Cultural Night! That's pretty irritating. Because it's like we work so hard and it's completely student-run and we get this small article.

As he had during the focus group, Michael raised the same issue in our individual interviews. With regards to how he felt ethnic minority groups were perceived on campus, Michael reflected:

Even just in like the media, for example *The Ignatian*, I feel like there's not proper—how do you say that—I guess publication when it comes to the cultural aspects of the minority side of the school. I feel like they focus a lot on the big events, but they focus a lot on Greek life. Like last year was our 20th anniversary of PCN [Pilipino Cultural Night]. We did it huge, but we didn't even get a single

thing in the newspaper. At all! It's so hard to get any type of representation in the media whether it's being Filipino, whether it's being Chinese, Black or Latino. Like it just, I don't know why it is; it's something that we've been working on to try to change. They just don't want to put cultural stuff in it; they'd rather talk about Greeks and stuff like that. That's definitely a problem that we definitely want to try to work on.

Students' frustration over this lack of visibility and consequently, growing feelings of marginalization and invisibility, was palpable. Andy, who is involved in numerous organizations, also felt that this invisibility was evident when it came to the distribution of resources to student groups:

Andy: In terms of the clubs here, I think the Asian clubs don't get as much funding as other clubs. I know the school tries to promote interculturalism, but I think things go to like Greek or more predominantly White people or predominantly donors' children or alumni's children, usually Greek or usually clubs that are predominantly White, so I understand that, but it is—we are a minority for a reason, there is not much of us. So I understand not a lot of the funding will go to us because we are the minorities. But that's the only flaw I see in this system, the idea that we don't get as much recognition. But then again, we're not a big part of the school to get more recognition.

AB: Do you want to see the Asian American and other minority communities get more recognition?

Andy: Ideally, but I don't really see it coming. I hope for it, but I don't really see it. ...I'm not actively seeing it happening, honestly.

In his statement, Andy revealed frustration with the lack of recognition that he felt cultural clubs received from the institution, but at the same time, a level of resignation, citing the idea that because these groups represented only a minority of the student population or were not associated with “donors' children or alumni's children” that it would be unlikely they would ever receive higher recognition. Andy's statement is revelatory for it highlights once more the feelings of cultural dissonance these Filipina/o American students often felt in the broader student community due to displays of wealth

and privilege. In the minds of these students, organizations that had certain types of social and cultural capital were given greater support and attention from the institution. They saw this treatment as unfair and it further heightened their feelings of marginalization, but they felt that the university, as well as their fellow students, had little interest in reforming these practices. Unfortunately, they were able to identify that such privileging occurred in academic settings as well.

Invisibility in the academic setting. One night in late September, I administered the survey included in this study at the Filipino Club's first official meeting of the school year. I introduced myself, gave a short presentation about my interest in this research topic, and a brief overview of the rest of the project in order to recruit participants for the interviews and focus group. I told the crowd of nearly 60 students, "If you have any questions about being interviewed, come see me after the meeting. Don't be shy!" Immediately after the meeting was over, several students approached me. However, one in particular seemed especially eager to talk with me. He was a young man I had seen at various events in the past, but had never spoken to—it was John. With a big smile and an enthusiasm in his eyes, John declared, "I want to participate! I have a lot of views on this topic and I want to help." His earnestness and interest was evident. Some weeks later, John and I sat down for our first interview.

As a transfer student, John often offered a different perspective about feelings of marginality and invisibility at Ignatian. Compared to his previous stint at a predominantly White, private university in Washington, D.C., Ignatian seemed to John to be much more diverse and culturally inclusive. He became very connected right away to the Filipino

Club as well as other clubs related to Asian or Pacific Islander heritage. Most of his friends at Ignatian were in fact Asian American or Pacific Islander. While John was mostly satisfied with the presence of an Asian American and Pacific Islander community on campus, he realized that in terms of AAPI and more specifically, Filipina/o American representation in the academic realm, Ignatian University fell short.

A double major in Asian Pacific Studies and Political Science, John is also an Asian American Studies minor. He noted that that Asian Pacific Studies courses typically focused on Chinese and Japanese culture and history and the Philippines was hardly ever discussed. Furthermore, as of the Fall 2011 semester, he had yet to take a class in the minor. He attributed this to the department's limited number of offerings each year and as a transfer student who was still trying to fulfill core curriculum requirements, they often did not fit into his schedule. But more notably, John was dissatisfied with the lack of Filipino and Filipina/o American representation in course content.

Research has shown the importance of curricular diversity in higher education and, in particular, the positive effects it has on students from ethnic minority backgrounds (Gurin et al., 2002; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012). The presence of curricular diversity is a way for institutions to purposefully exhibit their commitment to diversity. Furthermore, the inclusion of curriculum that focuses on the histories and experiences of groups that have been marginalized throughout history such as immigrants and racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities demonstrates a commitment to dismantling dominant discourses as well as offering forums to give voice to the experiences of those

from marginalized communities (Jones, 2008). Curricular diversity is most effective when experienced with classroom diversity, that is, in the presence of a diverse set of peers who are able to use their various personal histories, experiences, and points of view to foster learning and intellectual engagement (Gurin et al., 2002).

John's experiences highlighted the lack of inclusion of the Philippines and the Filipino and Filipina/o American experience as a gap in available course offerings at Ignatian. At the time the interviews were conducted (Fall 2011), only Joy, Cora, and Leah—all of whom were seniors—had taken a course directly focused on the academic study of the Filipina/o American experience. According to the students and a review of course offerings from Spring 2010-Fall 2011, it had not appeared in the listings for course registration since that time (Fall 2009). Joy noted that although the Filipino Club was a good place to learn about Filipina/o culture, it was not sufficient on its own:

Joy: I think what's lacking is academics. They used to have a Filipino American History experience class. And I really enjoyed it. I actually got a lot out of it. It's really nice to know where your family comes from or what your history is about. And how the representation of Filipinos has changed over the years. It's one of those things you take for granted. I guess you don't really think about your history, I guess. I don't know. I think some of the students today are kind of ignorant in that sense, they don't know where they came from. I think having that class was really beneficial and they don't offer it anymore and I don't understand why they don't have it. Maybe they don't have enough students who want to take the class? But I think that I would totally take it again just to keep it going.

AB: So if they had more classes about Filipino American culture like Tagalog—

Joy: [Interrupts] I would love to take Tagalog. I've grown up around it my whole life. I wanted to take it. I just never had the time. I was hoping to do it my junior or senior year, but it never came back. I know they had it my freshman year, because one of my pledge-sisters took it.

AB: So how do you feel about there not being any Filipino American courses?

Joy: I just don't understand why they dropped them. I don't think students know that they were offered in the past. But for me that they were there, but I don't know why they took them away.

Cora also reflected on the impact the course had on her. While she admitted that she was “not really interested in that stuff” at that time, Cora would have probably appreciated it more if she had taken it as a senior, especially after three years of feeling “invisible” on the Ignatian campus:

Cora: If I could take it again, I would! But I don't think I can.

AB: So is what you mean is there should be more than one Filipino class?

Cora: Yeah.

AB: Like different levels?

Cora: Yeah, especially for Filipinos. I mean the whole Asian experience is interesting, but I think it is more interesting when you feel like it touches closer to home.

Leah reflected on the collective benefits taking the class had for the Filipina/o American student community:

It was a class that was very helpful for a lot of us especially, there were a lot of Filipinos, the majority was Filipino Club members. And like we definitely learned a lot together as a community, I guess you could say, about our culture and especially the culture that you could say are from here, like the community that was built here [in America] that were Filipino. It was something that we all didn't really know about.

During the focus group, Leah shared with the other three participants present—none of whom had taken the class—how she felt that taking the Filipina/o American experience course also shaped her outlook on the significance of being a Filipina American in higher education:

I think a perfect example was when I took a Filipino American history class here at Ignatian. I didn't know that there were actual laws that would restrict Filipinos from doing what they wanted in general. Whether it was working or marrying someone. It ranged. That really did bring home being a Filipina American student and a student of color.

While these seniors commended the university for offering the course and giving them the chance to connect with their Filipino culture through scholarship, they also lamented that it had not been offered in recent years and saw this as a tremendous loss for the younger Filipina/o American students, and a gap in curricular diversity only reified their invisibility on campus. For the students who had not yet had the opportunity to take the course, their feelings very much echoed these feelings of loss. Kate expressed that she felt “cheated” because the course had not been offered since she arrived at Ignatian. Kate further explained that she could not understand why since there was strong interest among the students:

I mean, of course we would want to learn more about our culture. And have it be in a more academic sort of sense... There is only so much we can do in the Filipino Club... it would be so beneficial and I know there would be a lot of interest from our community to take it. It's always important for us to learn more about our culture, especially history. That history would be so helpful. Language; when we go to visit [the Philippines] we could speak to people. I feel [pauses] I don't want to say I feel cheated... but they're not even listing it as an option so we don't even have the chance to speak our mind.

Kate's comment pointed to not only having to deal with the disappointment of not having the course offered, but also feeling as though there were little to no opportunities for them to raise their voice about this particular issue. Multiple students reiterated these feelings of disenfranchisement. They recounted having signed a petition a year earlier to reinstitute the Tagalog class, but the course never came to be. Further, though the Filipina/o American History course was offered in Spring 2012—for the first time in

more than two years—several students were excited and planned to enroll, but were concerned that if it did not fit into their schedule or overlapped with a course required for their major, they would be unable to take it nor have another opportunity in their Ignatian education to take it, given the rarity of its availability. Feelings of enthusiasm and gratitude combined with the longstanding feelings of marginality made it difficult for participants to feel completely validated by this class offering.

Students also expressed that they were disappointed and felt marginalized not only the lack of courses specifically centered on Filipina/o American studies, but the paucity of opportunities to discuss Filipina/a American history, culture, and current issues across the course offerings. All of the participated expressed a belief that providing more curricular opportunities to learn and engage with other students about the Filipina/o American community would not only be beneficial for Filipina/o American students, but for students from all backgrounds. Of the eight participants, only Cora and Leah had been presented with opportunities to conduct scholarship and lead discussions on Filipina/o American experiences or broader Asian American and Pacific Islander issues in an academic course (specifically outside of Asian Pacific American Studies or Asian Pacific Studies departments). Both pointed out that they conducted their research in social science courses that were explicitly focused on race and ethnicity.

Leah reflected on her growth as a student from a sociology research project she conducted on Filipina/o migrant workers in the United States:

There were a lot of things I didn't know even though I took the Fil-Am class that I learned through my research. I don't think I would be able to really talk to my aunts [participants in her study] the way I did if it weren't for that research.

Leah relayed that she was one of the only students to present on a topic related to Asians or Asian Americans in the class. Still, Leah was proud of her research and as she shared later, was accepted to present it at an undergraduate research symposium later in the spring. Leah discussed that she believed presenting this social justice issue—the labor exploitation often experienced by Filipina domestic workers throughout the world—to a set of White peers elicited a different response than the reaction she would have received if she had presented the same topic to a group of Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans:

Yeah, the dynamic of the race that I presented to was obviously [pauses] 90% Caucasian and I felt like there was that disconnect...I didn't realize that it made such a big difference if I were to present this to a Fil-Am class, you know? If this is something [I had presented to Filipina/o Americans] obviously they would be like, "That makes sense! Because I have an aunt who is also in that position and she also came to the States to work and she's sending money back to the Philippines because that's what [pauses] that's why she's here" versus these people who have probably never heard of the term "diaspora" and doesn't even know that, not only is [the Philippine diaspora] prevalent in the United States, but one of the highest [concentrations] is in Hong Kong where they actually have a community, where during lunch time you could see a field of Filipino women that work for upper class families. So, I don't know. Like it was [sighs] it was hard, but I feel like it was one of those learning experiences that I really need to take into account because I was talking to my professor and she said, "Yeah, this is how it is going to be at the research symposium."

Leah's experience as a Filipina American presenting the topic of the marginalization of Filipina overseas workers was one that was deeply personal and political. It was clear that she took pride in conducting her research and being an advocate for Filipina domestic workers by sharing their stories. Moreover, this was an important experience for Leah because of the support and mentorship her sociology professor, a non-Filipina female, had given her. Leah emphasized several times that it was the strong connection she had developed with this professor that gave her the push to pursue this research. Yet, it still

occurred to her that this issue would likely be presented in forum with a mostly White audience and it might not resonate with them the same way it would to Filipina/o Americans. This realization was significant for Leah because it highlighted once more that even though the work she had done was important and meaningful to her and the Filipina/o American community, there was a strong possibility it might not receive wider attention or acceptance. From her perspective, it was yet another example of the need to create curricular diversity at Ignatian, especially courses that gave privilege and voice to the Filipina/o American experience or other historically marginalized groups and highlighted social justice issues in need of increased advocacy.

Cora also stressed the need to have more diverse curricular options that were inclusive of Asian American and Pacific Islander perspectives, but also the necessity to have more diverse classrooms to combat the seeming lack of interest on the part of White peers on such topics. With regards to a sociology class about race and ethnicity she was taking at the time of our interviews, Cora shared:

[For] our final project we get to talk about our experience in a campus org and how sociological stuff plays into it. I haven't started it yet, but I want to talk about the Filipino Club and Delta [a sorority]. And I don't know; I hope that other people in the class kind of pay attention and hear me out. Because I feel like I'm the only Asian person in that class, which really surprised me because it is called Race & Ethnic Relations. And like it's literally like [pauses] it's probably one of my most diverse classes, but I'm still like the only Asian person.

Cora also remarked that being one of the only people of color in many of her courses prevented her from speaking out about certain issues regarding race and ethnicity due to her own shyness as well as feeling alone in her opinions about the topics at hand:

AB: So it isn't something you're necessarily comfortable with, being a spokesperson for [Asian American perspectives on certain issues]?

Cora: Yeah, I feel like I'd either come off in a completely wrong way and I'd rather not [pauses] I'd rather not say anything instead of giving off the wrong impression. I've left class pretty upset because I haven't said anything. I took a Social Psychology class. And we were talking about racial groups on campus and stuff and like it was so hard to sit in that class, like at one point I wanted to just leave because I felt like no one understood what it was like to be a minority on campus, because the majority of the class was White...It was so hard to sit in that class. ...I had to like put my head down because I might like yell at someone or I might leave.

When I asked Cora to explain what had been said by this class of mostly White peers that made her feel so upset, she explained:

They think that Ignatian is perfect. They think that [pauses, frustration growing] not perfect, but they think they are reaching out to minorities and that it is a very embracing campus and all this crap. And I'm just like, "It's not." I don't know. I feel like it's just so hard for like the majority to put their feet in like our shoes when it's like [pauses] I don't know [pauses] I don't know how to explain it. It's just [pauses] they have to be the minority to feel it. As opposed to being like, "We understand where you're coming from." [Frustration in her voice] No, you don't! You don't walk around campus, you don't sit in class where you're the only Asian person or you feel like you're getting attacked when you're talking about a sensitive topic and no one in the class understands.

Cora's experiences being the only Asian American or Pacific Islander student in a classroom became heightened when discussions focused on racial issues, especially those concerning the Ignatian campus. Her discomfort at being a "spokesperson" for the Asian American perspective on certain topics meant that oftentimes a predominantly White majority informed the class discussion about racial issues. These types of experiences made her feel isolated and alienated from the rest of the class; at times, a sense of hostility in the classroom made her feel as though her voice was being oppressed. For students like Cora who have felt "attacked" when such discussions arose, having more diverse and culturally inclusive classrooms could be more beneficial, providing non-

White students with a sense of security that there may be someone else in the room with whom their experience resonates; Cora's story also illustrates the need for faculty to promote structured learning environments that are conducive to having critical discussions that engage all students. While it is not to say that Cora expected other Asian Americans or the professor to share the same points of view, it was important to her to feel that she was in a safe space, where students from the dominant group on campus were receptive to hearing perspectives from ethnic and other cultural minorities.

Cora and Leah's experiences are emblematic of a problem that all of the participants felt needed to be remedied—that is, the lack of public and institutional validation of the Filipina/o American community at Ignatian. While all of the participants were in some way involved in the Filipino Club and extolled its ability to serve as a space to learn about Filipino culture and work towards increasing Filipina/o American student visibility on campus, they believed that it was truly the only place on the Ignatian University campus where such learning and meaningful engagement happened and was fully validated.

In combination with a lack of course offerings centered on or inclusive of inquiry into topics concerning not just Filipina/o Americans, but the Asian American and Pacific Islander community at large, participants noted that their invisibility and “minority status” at Ignatian University was made underscored by the lack of Filipina/o or Filipina/o Americans in academic structures and student affairs. When asked if they had ever taken a class taught by a Filipina/o American professor during their tenure at Ignatian, all but three of the participants responded that they had not. Further, when I

asked students if they had, at the very least, interacted with or *knew of* a Filipino or Filipina/o American professor on campus, most replied in the negative. Only Michael could recall ever meeting a Filipina/o professor and was not even sure what department he taught in. Kate's response was even more obscure:

Um, Filipino professors? I haven't met any. Not in my college. But I have heard of one in the business college. Actually, hmm [pauses] I think there is one. I haven't had one. I've heard of them though. I don't think there's a lot on campus. It would be cool to have one, just I feel like you'd make an instant connection...just because you have the same cultural background.... You have the instant connection.

Only Cora, Joy, and Leah had ever had the experience of a Filipina/o American leading the classroom—Francis, the instructor of the Filipina/o American experience class.

While a well-respected and well-connected member of the broader Filipina/o American community in Los Angeles and a published author on Filipina/o American history in Los Angeles, Francis was not a full-time faculty member. Instead, he was an adjunct lecturer that was called upon every two years or so to teach the single class offered at Ignatian University about the Filipina/o American community. Further, when I expanded the question to include *any* Asian American or Pacific Islander instructor they may have possibly had a course with, been advised by, or been acquainted with in their personal history at Ignatian, only Michael, Kate, Cora, Mary, and John responded in the affirmative.

As Osajima (1995) noted, Asian American and Pacific Islander college students over the years have recognized that in order for a meaningful and consistent program that includes Asian American courses to exist, a long-term and permanent faculty must also be present to lead those academic endeavors and at that, faculty who are themselves

Asian American or Pacific Islanders. Data showed that across the higher education landscape, Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty, compared to Whites, had a lower proportion of faculty with tenure (36.5%) and a higher proportion of faculty who were on tenure track, but not yet tenured (25.4%) (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010). Moreover, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, in comparison to their White counterparts, had a higher proportion of faculty who were not on tenure track (20.9%) (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010). According to data provided by Ignatian University, for the 2010-2011 school year, 9% of full-time faculty members were of Asian or Pacific Islander descent.

Given this context it is not surprising, though no less alarming, that these students rarely had contact with an Asian American or Pacific Islander instructional leader much less a Filipina/o American instructor or school leader in their academic life. Leah was disappointed and unsettled by this fact, not only because she had only experienced a Filipina/o American leading the classroom once in her college career, but only a few times in her entire life:

AB: Besides Francis, have you had any other Filipino professors?

Leah shakes head no.

AB: No? Is that something you've noticed or taken note of?

Leah: [Sighs, nodding head] Definitely.

AB: And how do you feel about that?

Leah: Through experience, even through elementary and high school, I've only had two Filipino professors. One in high school and one in elementary school.

And I feel like a lot of the Filipino professors, just the fact that there aren't a lot of Filipino professors on campus, just shows how *not* diverse we are as an Ignatian community. I mean, how could you expect community with students if you don't even have it with their staff? You know? Like the staff and faculty should be our example of how we should act or their expectations of Ignatian. So if they don't even have a Filipino professor, at least not one I know of, how do you expect us to be diverse and very open with other cultures?

AB: So you feel like to truly be a diverse community then the representation of not just Filipino cultures, but more representation of Latino professors, or Black professors, or other Asian professors needs to improve?

Leah: Definitely. I mean everybody has a different view on every topic, on every academic topic. If we only have one ethnicity's view, that's only feeding into the social norm that we create in the real world. As a sociologist [laughs], that's what I see. If we have the majority White professors here, obviously we'll think all of our bosses are going to be that ethnicity as well. We would just feed into that norm. Instead of having an Asian or African American professor and someone to be able to be like, "Wow, you know? They're in that position. Maybe I could strive to be like that when I go out to the real world." You know? It's interesting.

Leah's frustration was unmistakable. This frustration was further fueled by the critical and feminist lens that she had learned to apply to such situations through her scholarly training in sociology as well as her involvement in community service in underresourced communities. Her comments pointed to not only the invisibility of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community at Ignatian, but how such invisibility and marginality might exist in their lives beyond the Ignatian campus and in their "real lives" after college. Her statement was also alarming for the very fact that it elucidated students' awareness and interpretation of the underrepresentation of Asian American and Pacific Islanders in the Ignatian University faculty as evidence of the reproduction of systems of inequality and access in higher education on a variety of levels.

The participants recognized the importance of having Asian American and Pacific Islander voices in all ranks of the university. According to institutional data provided by

Ignatian University, as of Fall 2010 of 1170 staff members, 9.3% (n=108) were identified as Asian American and Pacific Islander; 5.2% (n=12) were in positions considered on the executive, administrative or managerial level. Yet, participants had difficulty identifying the presence of such individuals at the institution. Further, participants identified that the only “official” administrative office that seemed to recognize and value their existence on campus was the Office of Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Services. Though part of the larger Ethnic & Intercultural Services Office, the Office of Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Services consisted of just one professional staff member, Madeline, and a set of undergraduate student fellows who assisted her with the creation and implementation of programming. While all of the research participants praised Madeline for the work she had done for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community at Ignatian University, they recognized that due to the limited human and financial resources and institutional support available to her, Madeline could only do so much on her own to increase the visibility of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community on campus and more specifically, support and mentor individual students.

Participants also felt that while they were fortunate to have Madeline as an advocate for Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Ignatian, expanding this office and having a student affairs staff member(s) assigned to specifically support and carry out programming for Filipina/o American students would have a more measurable impact on building community among Filipina/o Americans on-campus as well as raise their visibility as a group. Leah brought up this idea both during the focus group as well as in our individual meetings:

I really feel like the presence [pauses] like if Kuya Marc [the Filipino Club advisor and an administrative staff member at Ignatian] had his own little office, basically where Filipinos could hang out or a common room or something, I think it would definitely build community amongst individuals. And hopefully from there that would lead to [more] classes. Like “Oh, are you going to that Filipino class?” You know? I think that would help to build a stronger community.

Leah’s recommendation echoes what research has found—that the presence of physical spaces on campus that are “meaningfully linked to group identities” serve to “affirm their presence” and identities (Kinzie & Mulholland, 2007, p. 109).

Other participants raised the utility of having a Filipina/o American mentor or advisor in different ways. Many talked about how they were often shy and even afraid to talk to their professors; compounding their hesitations was their lack of meaningful connections with their assigned academic advisors, who they often felt were ill-equipped to assist them with matters beyond the academic realm. For most of the participants, having someone they could turn to, like Kuya Marc, with whom they could connect on the basic level of sharing a cultural and ethnic background was a way to overcome some of those anxieties and fears and move towards acquiring the support needed to persist and be successful at Ignatian. For many students, they believed that this very visible form of institutional support was the validation of their belonging that they so very much wanted and needed to survive at Ignatian University.

Model Minority? Stories of Academic Struggle

The academic struggles of Asian American and Pacific Islander college students are often overlooked and understudied in higher education research (Buena Vista, et al., 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007). Because Filipina/o Americans have a high percentage of college graduates among adults age 25 and older, the

assumption may be made that students do not experience academic difficulties.

However, as the experiences of several of the students who participated in this study elucidated, that is not the case. Participants in this study represented a wide spectrum of academic performance in college. Based on the survey responses, participants recorded grade point averages in the 2.0-2.49 to the 3.75-4.0 scale; five of the participants reported GPAs 3.0 and higher while three students stated that their GPAs were between 2.0-2.99. Based on this information alone, it became clear that the research participants were managing, but not simply breezing through their academic coursework at Ignatian.

Participants offered various points of view on their own academic performance. Several students reported that their academic performance in college was drastically different from their high school performance. Cora described herself as “high achieving” in high school, but her experience in college has been the opposite. Reflecting on her academic performance during her freshman year at Ignatian, Cora said:

[Sighs] It was a struggle. It was shocking! I just feel like school was so easy for me before. I don't know why. It just was. And then I got here and it was like, “Oh god, why is it so hard?”

Michael shared that in order to maintain his scholarship, a minimum GPA of 2.5 had to be maintained. While he admitted that it was not too high of a GPA to have to maintain, he did express challenges in doing so:

AB: Has that been easy for you to keep up, the 2.5?

Michael: I mean I've been keeping it up, but it has been difficult. The classes are hard and just keep getting harder and harder. Also, I'm really involved on campus in different organizations. So it's difficult for me to, especially at first, for me to manage my time and prioritize. I definitely got a lot better at it. But at the beginning I was having a hard time to the point where I actually failed one of my

accounting classes. I didn't even know that I failed it; I found out the week before school started that I had a C- instead of a C, so I had to retake it.

This sent Michael into a panic. He became worried that he would not be able to graduate on time and as a result, enrolled in six classes the following semester to retake the class and make up credits. With 18 course units—15 credits being the typical load—on his plate and heavy involvement in his extracurricular activities, he had quite a busy fall semester.

Kate also shared her experiences with academic struggle. Kate, a physics major, had been interested in the field of study since high school. She found it intellectually stimulating, but also “fun.” While she was initially satisfied with her academic performance in her major, the increasing difficulty of coursework in her sophomore year resulted in a dip in her academic performance:

Uh, gees [sighs]. It's so difficult. I feel stupid sometimes because I'm not getting a concept and everybody else seems like they are getting it. Up until last semester I was satisfied [with her academic performance]...then I saw my grades and I was like, [in exasperated tone] “What?” I've never experienced anything like that.

Kate, who had always considered herself a good student and a hard worker, was considerably perplexed and jolted by this turn—she had been placed on academic probation:

I got so overwhelmed; it didn't turn out well. I thought, “What am I doing? I suck at my major. Do I belong here? But I'm already a junior. Do I have time to change? But I don't have the money.” It was academic problems, financial problems...I definitely hit that point last semester.

Every participant indicated that they had experienced some academic difficulty at Ignatian—whether it was not passing an exam, a deficiency grade at midterms, failing a course, or being placed on academic probation. It seemed as though every time I saw a

participant and asked about how their school work was progressing, their responses usually ranged somewhere between a groan and a reluctant “Okay.” One casual interaction in particular made this evident. At the Filipino Club Thanksgiving dinner, John invited me to sit and eat with him. As we enjoyed our meal and talked, I realized that I had not seen him since our formal meeting a few weeks earlier. When I asked where he had been, John told me that he had been very busy with midterms and his activities. I then asked how he had done on his exams. His cheerful and engaging disposition changed immediately at this inquiry. John replied somberly, “Not good.” He carefully avoided going further into this topic for the rest of the night and it was clear that he was not pleased, even stressed about his performance.

Another factor, which emerged that may have contributed to these students’ academic struggles, was the inconsistency of the quality of their relationships with their professors. While all of the students identified that two of the benefits of attending a “small” university—by comparison to large, public universities—were small class sizes and increased access to professors, participants varied in their engagement with faculty. The level of contact between students and faculty is important to explore because faculty-student interaction has been identified as a factor in student persistence. Faculty members are important in student persistence for a numerous reasons. Faculty can serve as socializing agents, helping students adjust to the college environment, providing academic support, mentorship, and serving as individual cultural agents who can assist students with building connections to the university (Dee & Daly, 2012; Lampton, 1993). Despite recognizing the importance of their professors, these particular Filipina/o

American students did not necessarily always seek the counsel of their professors, especially in times of academic strife.

The notion of *hiya* (loss of face or shame) is a possible explanation for students' reluctance to seek help and build connections with professors. Of the students, only Michael, Kate, Joy, and Leah had established strong connections with professors during their time at Ignatian; however, this "connection" was typically established with a single faculty member, rather than a series of individual faculty over the course of participants' college careers. Though participants said they did occasionally receive academic help, they admitted that they did not seek out their professors as often as they should have.

Cora shared why she was hesitant to see her professors for support:

I don't know. I have this fear of talking to teachers. I really have not been doing well here academically. I try. Maybe I could try harder. I don't know. But I have this intense fear of talking to teachers. They could be the sweetest teacher, but for some reason I'm like, "I'll talk to you if I have to but otherwise I wouldn't."

Cora's fear of talking to teachers was further compounded by her general discomfort in the college environment. Andy, on the other hand, did not seek help from professors for a different reason:

I feel that I'm pretty self-reliant to be honest. I used to be so dependent last year. But this year I'm very self-reliant. I keep things to myself. I try to stay professional and try to stay grounded on most levels.

These examples, along with similar explanations from other participants, point to a level of embarrassment at first admitting that help is needed and then actually seeking assistance. While certainly feelings of *hiya* could explain this lack of proactive behavior, it is also likely that students felt more comfortable in acquiring assistance from other

sources such as their peers or family members. Still, this lack of faculty-student interaction is necessary to highlight for it provided insight into students' own approaches to handling academic struggles as well as providing context for the participants' calls for the establishment of an office or institutional agent focused solely on responding to Filipina/o American students' needs through culturally aware and responsive methods. Overall, the academic struggles of these students illustrated that while Filipina/o Americans at Ignatian may be perceived as high achieving students, they are susceptible to experience the same academic challenges as other students who are not attached to the model minority label.

Students on the brink of departure. Tinto (1993) posited that students are more likely to persist and eventually graduate if they are able to successfully integrate themselves into college both academically and socially. As the participants revealed, the transition into college and finding the connections that would facilitate their integration into the Ignatian University community was a difficult and challenging experience. In particular, participants discussed that the cultural dissonance and “disconnect” they felt between themselves and other peers had a negative impact on their first few months of college life.

For some of the students, thoughts of leaving primarily centered around their inability to socially integrate and find belonging in the student social community. Andy described that he became overly involved in the social scene and did not like that he was perceived as a “joke.” This was especially hard for Andy because his high school experience was a positive one—he was well-liked, very involved in school activities, and

had a good sense of belonging to his school and peers. Of his first year at Ignatian, Andy said, “It was really hard. Like I think I’m right back [at the time of the interview] at how I felt in high school when I just felt really confident about things. But freshman year was really hard.” When I asked Andy what it was that made that year so hard, he replied, “People were very myopic...they didn’t really understand me or other people.” Without having a sense of grounding or relational attachment to the university, Andy felt confused about his place and struggled to see himself as part of the Ignatian University community.

Kate also felt out of place and isolated, especially because she had come to Ignatian knowing only two other students from her high school, girls with whom she was only mildly acquainted:

My reason for wanting to transfer was that I didn’t really like the people here but that was because I didn’t find that close-knit group of friends, which was always really hard because I came here by myself...I didn’t feel comfortable here.

For some students, these feelings of isolation were also compounded by the way in which being at college impacted their home life. Joy shared that her inability to connect with peers and a campus environment that seemed superficial and materialistic caused her to strongly consider transferring. However, the difficulty she was experiencing in helping her mother to transition and make sense of the college experience also contributed to her doubts about her place at Ignatian. Joy reflected on managing her mother’s feelings about Joy’s life at college:

It was always a constant struggle. There was always something going on here every weekend. And I wanted to stay on campus as much as possible, but the deal with my mom was that I come home every weekend at least one night. And some weekends, I just didn’t want to go home. But my mom did not approve. She just [sighs] I just felt bad. I felt bad if I left her at home by herself, so that’s kind of

why I had to go home. And at home, it was more a sense of obligation rather than a sense of will.

Joy further elaborated that negotiating her expectations of college with her mother's was difficult because since her father's death, she has been her mother's main support system:

My mom had a hard time when my dad passed away. She had a hard time coping with grieving and whatnot, and that was a big, big reason why I was just going to stay at home [during college] because she wasn't completely over it at all. It was only a year and a half since my dad had passed away at that time. So a big part of me was like, I have to be there for her. But it was hard though because it's just me and my dad's side of the family here in L.A.. My mom doesn't have any family here in L.A.. The closest family she has is a sister in Maryland. But all her family is back in the Philippines. So a lot of the pressure comes onto me a lot.

Joy and her mother experienced conflict because a gap in understanding about what college at a U.S. residential college was like or even what the school had to offer her daughter:

She just didn't want me getting involved on campus [in activities] my freshman year; she just wanted me to focused on school first. Yeah, so she wasn't familiar with the ideas or what Ignatian stands for. She doesn't know any of that. She doesn't see that's a big part of understanding how the campus works and how we build our education and stuff like that.

For Joy, the shared lack of knowledge between both her and her mother about the college experience created tension, but also isolation and "disconnect" between mother and daughter. As Joy struggled to find her footing in the university, she also struggled to maintain her relationship with her mother and provide her with a sense of security about Joy's life as a college student. The challenges Joy experienced balancing her life at the university with her home life echoed those revealed by Filipina American college students in earlier research (Maramba, 2008a). Home obligations, maintaining and negotiating evolving relationships with parents, as well as emerging notions of self and

identity as a result of the process of going to college, are common challenges experienced between the participants in this study, in particular Filipinas, and the Filipinas featured in Maramba's work.

Like Joy, Michael also had to balance his life on campus with parental expectations and his life back in Pomona. Still struggling to build connections to the campus, his feelings of leaving Ignatian were strongest during his first year. While staying closely connected with his friends and family at home provided him with a sense of support, the intensity and intimacy of those relationships only enhanced his thoughts of transferring:

Michael: Yeah, I had my friends [at Ignatian], but I really, I always wanted to go home. Like I said back then, I didn't drink at all or anything like that and everyone was getting really drunk around me. I wasn't really comfortable. First semester, I would go home like every other weekend.

AB: Did your parents want you to go home? Or—

Michael: [Nodding] They did. They did. Like my dad said they wanted me home every other weekend, but at the same time I wanted to also. Sometimes, I'd really be like, "Yes! I get to go home." And sometimes, not even because just the family aspect, but like friends too. I stayed in touch with my friends at home a lot because I didn't feel extremely comfortable yet at Ignatian. I had this one friend from home that [pauses] I would Skype with her like every day. *Every day* [emphasis added]. I didn't even want to think of the possibility of losing friends from home because I wasn't sure how my situation would go here at Ignatian. As first semester went on, it was all right, but part of me was like, "Do I want to be here?" It was so new to me, I just felt like I was really like [pauses] small. I felt really small in this huge, and it's not even a big campus, but the fact that I'm at a university, I felt so small and insignificant. I just didn't know if it was for me. So I was thinking, "Where else can I look at?"...there were definitely parts of me that didn't want to be here. I would rather be going home all the time and didn't want to deal with everyone bringing junk around me and stuff like that. I just wasn't used to any of that. It was tough.

Feeling out of place and “small” in the university, Michael’s physical home, friends, and family represented a place of refuge from the cultural dissonance he experienced on a daily basis at Ignatian University. Feelings of disconnect to the community strongly influenced Mary to consider leaving Ignatian and returning home to attend a nearby college so that she would be able to have the support of her parents. During our first meeting, the second-year student shared that she was actively considering transferring out of Ignatian. She revealed these thoughts as I went through her survey responses with her:

AB: According to your questionnaire, you’re not really as satisfied with that community part. Is it mostly that part that everyone is a little bit wealthier than you’d expected? Or are there other factors?

Mary: I also kind of imagined college as being really intellectually stimulating and people going into debates and stuff. I don’t really know if I get that here. Everyone’s kind of laid back over here.

AB: You also said you were kind of [pauses] somewhat satisfied about your decision to come here. Would you consider going to another university at this point?

Mary: I was kind of considering going to another university. Actually Campbell [a private university in Orange County] because they have a nice community around. I don’t know. We’ll see.

From our exchange it was clear that Mary was struggling to find her place in the community and felt unsure about her “fit” with the institution. At several points in the same conversation, Mary mentioned that her personality and interests seemed much different than what was seemingly most represented and valued in the Ignatian campus environment. Mary also expressed strong concerns about her ability to pay for tuition at Ignatian, a concern that had been burdening her even before she began her freshman year. Consequently, it was not surprising to find out that she had been contemplating

transferring for some time so that she could save money as well as be closer to home or in an environment that was better suited to her personality and post-college career aspirations:

AB: When did you start thinking about transferring?

Mary: Well, when I first got here I got really homesick. I was thinking about just going to [a community college near her parents' home]. But then I started thinking about transferring to an art school last summer when I was reading this article about the National Design Institute and they were saying how like general education [pauses] they don't offer enough classes about art. So then the education is sort of subpar to art school. So it kind of made me freak out and start thinking about that.

Mary's uncertainty at her place at Ignatian and lack of attachment to and cohesion with the student community was exacerbated by a significant concern regarding the affordability of her education at Ignatian. Mary's experience supports research that suggests students' perceptions of the adequacy of financial aid and their ability to pay are significant because they ultimately influence a student's commitment to the institution and thus, influence their integration process (St. John et al., 2000). While her experience at Ignatian had never made her question her commitment to obtain a degree, it did make her seriously question the value and quality of the experience she was having at the university and its ultimate "worth" in the long term.

For one student in particular, doubts about her place at Ignatian were sparked by academic struggle in her first year. I first met Leah at the first Filipino Club meeting of the school year. After chatting for a few minutes, I realized that I had not seen her at the previous meetings and asked if she was a first year student. Leah laughed a little and replied that she was actually a senior, but had not been as diligent in her attendance in the

past—and wasn't sure how involved she would be this year—because she was taking an academic overload of 18 units or six courses. When I asked about her reasons for taking a large course load, Leah reluctantly admitted that it was due to some academic missteps that had occurred earlier in her college career and a need to “catch up” in order to graduate on time.

A few weeks later, we sat down together for our first formal interview. Within a few minutes into the conversation, it became clear that Leah's transition to Ignatian—both academically and socially—had been a very difficult one. Leah shared that in the beginning she felt very awkward and out of place in social settings, especially in the college party scene. Her inability to fully socially integrate and feelings of cultural dissonance made her transition particularly trying. But it was the challenge of transitioning into the academic realm and a disparity between her academic performance in high school and her college academic performance that caused her to consider leaving the university. Leah, who had been an “academic star” in high school, realized that she had arrived at Ignatian academically underprepared, especially as a biology major:

In terms of academics, it was very hard. And I needed to get out of the whole, “I'm in college” so I can, not party all the time, but hang out with your friends until three o'clock in the morning or stay up because you can. Things like that. I really needed to get out of that mindset because it did really hinder my academic standing. My freshman year, there were different aspects that I felt I would've just completely dropped out because I just [pauses, shakes head] I screwed up...because of how I did academically my freshman year, I am paying for it now.

As a result of not doing well academically, school became “a very sour note” between Leah and her mother. Their relationship became strained as a result of her academic struggles:

It was hard telling her, “Yes, Mom. After twenty hours of studying for that bio midterm, I failed it.” And just saying that was very [pauses] I don’t know. I felt like I would never have to do that, especially in college. I felt like I was disappointing her and just wasting her money and wasting my time.

For Leah and her mother, her drop in academic performance was puzzling because of how well she had done academically in high school. Leah’s academic struggles also impacted her concept of self and her “value” as a student:

You identify yourself through your major and you take pride in your major. And when you aren’t doing well in your major, it definitely burdens you. It kind of kicks you down in the mud. I questioned [pauses] why did they even [pauses] why did [pauses] why am I here if I am doing so bad?

Her experience also elucidated that her struggle was not one experienced in isolation.

Leah’s struggles pointed to how, in her case, several recognized factors in student departure intersected, causing her to contemplate leaving the university. First, her ability to pay and the costs and benefits of attendance were called into question. As Leah began to slip in academic performance, she weighed whether or not the financial costs were worth the struggle. Second, the psychological impact of her academic struggle came to the forefront. Previously, Leah had felt academically prepared and confident to take on the challenge of college-level work. However, as it became increasingly clear that the workload of her major was becoming too much for her despite her efforts, she began to doubt her own abilities and utility of her energies. Leah struggled to cope, and as a consequence created distances between herself, her mother, and other students. Finally, without a sense of belonging or strong attachment to the university, Leah lacked the support system to deter her from departure. On her own, she was left to debate internally

what her next step should be; at one point there seemed to be but one option—to transfer out of Ignatian.

The purpose of sharing these stories of trial and struggle is to expose the often unspoken and unrecognized challenges that Filipina/o American college students face. As is explored later in this chapter, many of the participants shared that they had not really conferred with many people about these challenges and feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt. For several students, our meetings provided space for them to openly and critically examine their experiences for the first time.

The participants' stories of struggle and their serious considerations of departure from Ignatian University also highlighted another challenge—identifying institutional support systems. For example, when I asked Mary if she had discussed her thoughts of transferring with anyone at the university, such as an advisor or professor, she stated that she had not and had only reviewed the idea with her parents. Mary quickly added that while her professors had been friendly and generally approachable, she considered herself very self-reliant, and thus had not reached out for help. Joy echoed a similar outlook. She noted that during the period where she deliberated transferring from Ignatian, she had not sought any counsel:

I guess there wasn't much of a support system. I know they have Ethnic & Intercultural Services where you can have a mentor. But I didn't really want to reach out to them. I don't know why. Thinking about it now, I probably should have gotten more involved, but I was afraid to do that.

Joy's reluctance and even fear of seeking support was a trait and behavior commonly found among the students. During the focus group, I raised the question about what the

university could do to better support students who are experiencing such crossroads and were considering leaving college. The participants had a range of responses:

Leah: I wish there was like an office or like a specialized person that I could have talked to who was Filipino.

Michael: [Nodding] Like Kuya Marc [the Filipino Club advisor].

Leah: Right. Someone who wasn't even connected with [the Filipino Club], but just someone who was specialized in working with like Filipino students. Just because I feel like when there was that time when I decided, that crossroads where I wanted to transfer, it was because of the expectation of my mom and I was like, "I don't know if I am meeting up to it and because I'm not meeting up to it I'm wasting her money." So I had that traditional Filipino mindset. I felt like if I was able to talk with someone that was from my culture that maybe went through the same thing or saw something similar, it would have really helped. That's just me.

AB: Anybody want to add to that?

Mary: Yeah, I think it is just important to have someone to talk to about it.

AB: Kate?

Kate: Well, we talked about it. My reason for wanting to transfer was that I didn't really like the people here, but that was because I didn't find that close-knit group of friends, which was always really hard because I came here by myself. I talked to some seniors and they said, "You know, it's going to be the same wherever you go." So I just decided to hold out, stick it out and wish for the best and it ended up being a good decision staying here. My advice is just to keep an open mind and keep on truckin' I guess. It's one thing if you can't afford to stay here, but mine was more of the social aspect. I didn't feel comfortable here, but I eventually found my niche.

AB to Michael: Do you want to add anything?

Michael: You were saying is there something the school can do, but I think it's more so the people. I feel like it's something that everyone goes through, you know? There's nothing the school can really do about it; it's just not feeling that comfort zone. It's multiple things that cause you to feel that way. Whether it's not being used to the drinking or something or not finding that group of friends or you just miss home or something like that. It's all on the person; there's nothing the school can do to help you. I think the biggest things to do as an incoming

student is to really go out and make a move to find that comfort zone, you know? Like get involved in clubs and all of that stuff until you really find what you want and just...you can't just sit there and be sad and say you don't like this place. You just have to go out there and do something about it.

This exchange between the students was significant because it highlighted contradictory but also complementary ideas. While the participants recognized the importance of having an identified person they could turn to in times of crisis—and specifically, someone with a shared Filipino background—they also seemed to resist the idea that the institution could do something to change someone's mindset about transferring. As Michael suggested, they had come to believe that these struggles and lack of connections fell on the student and the students' efforts to resolve. As Mary and Joy had expressed in our individual interviews, they felt that they were self-reliant enough to handle their situations on their own, without intervention from an institutional agent. They also expressed a sense of fear or reluctance to approach a stranger for help regardless of the official role they held at the university. However, in other individual meetings, students regularly identified and emphasized the importance of having recognized support systems that consisted of both individual and collective agents to support and advise them through times of strife. Their experiences also pointed to the importance of having quality connections with these individual and collective agents to support their persistence. In the following section, I explore how students went from being on the brink of departure from Ignatian to persistence and solidifying their commitment to graduation.

Factors Impacting Filipina/o American Student Persistence

At one point in each of their college careers, the Filipina/o American student participants in this study considered departing college. There were a myriad of reasons students identified for wanting to leave the university. These included social, academic, and financial struggles. For most students, the primary reason for wanting to transfer out of Ignatian (and in the case of John, his transfer from another private university his freshman year) was based on an inability to connect and find meaning within the student community. This “disconnect” was largely due to overall feelings of cultural dissonance.

Scholars have posited that students who experience a significant amount of cultural dissonance must acclimate to the dominant campus culture or find and solidify connections with cultural agents at the institution in order to persist (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). For minority students at predominantly White institutions, this can be daunting and troublesome if students already feel disconnected from the dominant culture and campus environment. Thus, the importance of campus subcultures and finding membership in those subcultures cannot be overemphasized. These subcultures provide safe havens for students, help them to cultivate relationships with other students and the institutions, and bridge the gap between the academic and social experience of college (Museus, Lam, et al., 2012). In the case of the Filipina/o American participants in this study, campus subcultures and the individual and collective agents they encountered within them were critical in facilitating their continued persistence at Ignatian University. As many of the participants reflected, these individuals and groups were key in helping them to find their “niche” in the university community.

Findings for Research Question Two: What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?

Ethnic and cultural organizations. All of the participants in this study came to be involved due to their membership in one organization—the Filipino Club. The club is one of the largest ethnic and cultural organizations at Ignatian University. Kate, the 2011-2012 club president, estimated that about 80 students were active members and members were from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, though the majority was of Filipino descent. The mission of the Filipino Club, which is one of the oldest student-run cultural organizations at Ignatian, is as follows:

The Filipino Club serves to be more than a student organization. It acts as a Family away from home where meetings, events, activities, projects and excursions allow its members to immerse themselves into the Filipino and Filipino-American culture. An inclusive environment is illustrated through the six focus areas of: Nationalism, Social, Art, Spirituality, Academia, and Social Justice. The Filipino Club's six focus areas contribute to the importance of our Family.

From my first encounter with the club nearly two years ago to my most recent interactions with them, it has been clear that the club leadership strives to create this family atmosphere. Their Facebook page is often updated with photos and videos from events showing happy, excited students and light-hearted messages. Their monthly “birthday blast” email greets each birthday celebrant for the month by name and class year. Finally, their biweekly “Family Time” (general meetings) is usually filled with laughter and a palpable camaraderie. Whenever I attended meetings, members seemed excited to see one another, often giving each other hugs, taking pictures, sharing food,

and blasting each other with jokes. One member described it to me this way, “It’s like your typical Filipino party, you know?”

During our first individual conversation for this project, Kate made sure from the onset to stress the role the Filipino Club had in her life as an Ignatian student:

Being from a city where there were a lot of Filipinos, I thought it would be cool to be involved in the Filipino Club...I looked for it, I went to the meeting, liked the people. Honestly, I don’t think I would have continued it if I didn’t like the people or what they did.

During that first gathering it became evident to Kate that the Filipino Club was a group that was focused on building relationships and community:

Honestly, [the club leadership] just seemed like they wanted to get to know people, they wanted to put on these events. They wanted to provide a space for members to come and feel comfortable in. So it was not exactly like, “If you’re feeling uncomfortable, come here,” but “We’re here for you” kind of deal.

Michael, who was Vice President of the club, offered a similar perspective:

I remember at orientation they gave us a binder and there were flyers and stuff in there and there was one for the Filipino Club. So I was like, “Oh yeah, I’m going to try and get involved in that.” I went to club festival and they gave me a flyer. I went to the first meeting; it wasn’t what I expected [laughs], but then they had an event [which was] a bonfire, maybe the first or second week of school. I went to that; it was really chill and I got to know them a lot more. And I started going to more events, but right away when I heard about it at orientation it was one thing that I was specifically looking for when club fest came around.

Michael found that joining the Filipino Club began to mitigate his feelings of cultural dissonance and helped him with his adjustment process at Ignatian:

It made [adjusting] a lot easier once I got more involved with the Filipino Club. I didn’t necessarily feel it right away because I wasn’t as into it; I thought it was cool and I would go to some events. But as time went on, it really became like a family.

As a transfer student, John was aware he needed to be extra proactive about immersing himself into the Ignatian University community in order to survive, especially since he was not coming in as a member of a new class of freshman:

John: [As a transfer student] you have to put more effort and be more active in order to transition more smoothly.

AB: What did you do to be more involved and put yourself out there?

John: What I did in my first two weeks of school is I would go everywhere to look for events. I made a calendar of events; a lot of things would overlap. I found out about clubs and I joined them; the Filipino Club, mainly, and then I found my family there.

Kate, Michael, and John all actively sought out the Filipino Club in search of a sense of belonging. For each of them, the club began to emerge as a sort of “family” to support them through their adjustment to Ignatian University.

The use of the term “family” to describe the level of attachment these three participants developed to the club demonstrated the success of the club in making its members feel as though they part of a large, extended Filipino family—just like the ones many of the students described having in their own personal lives. This sense of family was cultivated through the various activities and events produced by the club and their “Family Time” meetings. Furthermore, the club publicized itself as a “home away from home” for students and the student leadership of the group avidly worked to create this sense of “family” and “home” at each event.

For Andy, who had felt stigmatized as a “joke” as a result of his immersion in the social scene, developing relationships with members of the Filipino Club allowed him to overcome his feelings of discomfort and isolation.

I think the Filipino Club really helped me as a person. I feel like they really accepted me...I just want to be seen as that person that's here for the Filipino Club and known as a person and individual. And I think they saw me as that...I just appreciate how they still appreciate me as a person.

Part of the reason that Andy felt appreciated as a person by members of the Filipino Club was because he felt that they appreciated and validated his background and culture as a Filipino American:

I think with [the Filipino Club] I think it helped me feel at home. Because I am from an Asian community and most of my friends are Asian. It made me feel more at ease and more at home, just that the idea that they share some of the same cultural things as you and they understand you. Like White people don't really understand that or don't understand some jokes, or some things about your culture, or why you eat this way or why you do stuff. You don't need to justify it to Filipino people or to people [in the Filipino Club]. Because most of them know or see that or understand that. And that's why I appreciate that.

Andy raised the notion that ethnic and cultural clubs serve a different function from organizations that are academic or professional in nature. Involved in more than seven clubs on campus ranging from religious/spiritual to service to cultural, he viewed ethnic and cultural organizations as safe havens where ethnic or cultural minority students could truly be themselves:

I think it is very important to have [cultural and ethnic organizations] because I feel like people should be able to go to their roots if they can. I feel like sure, they have their own things on campus and their own responsibilities at school, but I do believe that there should be a group for them, something they share with other people, another family to them. I think a lot of the clubs are very professional in nature, like about professional image and professional ideas. There are people I've worked with where I can only be professional with them and that's how they see me. But when you are with your own culture, they can see you more informal and being more yourself.

From these statements, I gathered that due to his involvement in multiple organizations, Andy often felt he had to act in a "professional" manner in order to be accepted as part of

the group. This became even more evident during an individual interview. We met just one hour after he returned to campus from a residential life conference in Seattle. After greeting me with a hug, he apologized right away for his casual dress of basketball shorts and a t-shirt, attire he called his “laundry clothes.” As he sat across from me, he fidgeted with his cell phone and sat back comfortably in his chair, as if we were just two people talking casually, rather than in a formal research setting. Throughout our conversation, Andy occasionally used a profanity to make a point about certain aspects of the university with which he was displeased; he was also the only participant to use profanity during our discussion. I believe that his casual dress and manner in speech and body language had something to do with the sense of familiarity we had with one another. I had come to know him over the course of several months as a result of my attendance at the Filipino Club’s meetings and events. But I also think that due to our shared identity as Filipino Americans and a sense of *kapwa*, Andy felt that he did not need to act in a “professional” manner for me. Instead, he saw our meeting as a chance to speak candidly and authentically about his experiences at Ignatian—both good and bad—and be his genuine self.

Joy held a similar perspective on the purpose of ethnic and cultural associations such as the Filipino Club and her own interest in becoming a member of the organization:

For me, the Filipino Club was more of a sense of familiarity. Knowing my culture already through my Filipino folk dance group, I already had a sense of what my culture is whereas I know other people in that club have never really had an immersion in their culture. So all people from different stages of Philippine American history like there’s people who are third or fourth generation whereas there are also people who just immigrated here and are first generation. So I just think that’s really cool. I don’t know; for me it was always a sense of home....I was never able to be on e-board [club leadership], but I would always be at the

main events like Pilipino Cultural Night. I would always try to help choreograph since I already know all the dances. I would always be at the Pistahan [a religious and cultural event honoring the first Filipino Catholic saint, San Lorenzo Ruiz] or any major event they would have. I would always make it a point to come out. And just being with people who kind of understand you and have the same upbringing as you. It's very different than from when you're hanging out with people in the business school who are not always from the same background. I mean, there's people there who are like [celebrity socialite]'s brother goes to school here. It's just a very different stages of upbringing and very different conversations you have with people.

Like Andy, Joy recognized that students at Ignatian often existed in multiple spheres—academic, pre-professional, social, cultural, and spiritual. But as they both expressed, the Filipino Club as well as other cultural and ethnic student organizations were the main avenues through which ethnic and cultural minority students could be their most authentic selves because such groups valued and validated their cultures of origin. For many of the participants, the Filipino Club was the first space on campus in which they felt that their culture was validated and that their different “selves” could come together and be recognized. Through this set of cultural collective agents, some of the cultural dissonance and isolation they had experienced was mitigated.

In addition to providing a safe and welcoming space for Filipina/o American students to come together and create a sense of collective identity and express cultural pride, the Filipino Club also provided opportunities for students to connect with individual cultural agents who helped them with their adjustment to Ignatian University. For many of the participants, significant individual cultural agents and valued mentors in their college careers emerged from their involvement with the club. Kate's experience on the leadership team of the organization gave the chance to regularly access and utilize the support of more experienced peers:

Kate: I got really close to the seniors last year. I got really close to them through the club, but I would hang with them outside of the events. We'd hang out, have fun, but they were always there for me when I wanted to talk about more serious things like problems in class or what I want to do with my life. They would always encourage and support me. They've had a bigger impact on my life than they would know just because of how much they were there for me.

AB: Do you think it is important to have mentors and people like that in college?

Kate: I definitely think it's important. Because there's always—there's a point that you will always hit in college where you feel really discouraged. Whether it's hard courses or you're feeling lonely or something like that; there is always going to be a point when a student [sighs loudly] they're going to just plop back into their bed and wonder, "What's happening? It's not a good time, nothing is going right" and it is always important to have a mentor to rely on or to have so that they can talk to you and encourage you. Because [sighs] college is hard and it might seem like fun to the outside, like a lot of partying. I mean it's like Wednesday and people are partying, but it's always hard sometimes, and it is important to have that encouragement and support, "I know it is hard right now, but you've done it before and you can do it again." That support helps a lot.

Michael also identified several Filipino Club members who were juniors and seniors at Ignatian that he would turn to for advice and encouragement:

Michael: [Paul], he was president of the club at the time. Like I said at the beginning I wasn't that close to the club, but then I went with [Paul] to USC for a festival where they had Filipino performers and all that stuff. So we went together and we talked and got to know each other. So he definitely became someone I looked up to. Also [Oscar], because...I'm personally really, really interested in spoken word poetry, and they had an open mic here and me and my friend went to it and [Oscar] performed at it. And I talked to him afterwards and I told him that I thought it was cool and that I'm into spoken word and we talked and became friends. And being that he's older, I started looking up to him, looking to him for advice, asking him questions, stuff like that. And then like [Daniel] who graduated last year. For bonfire, he was our driver and then after that he took our car to Diddy Reese [laughs]. [After that] I got closer to him. I mean the other ones I'm still cool with, but [Daniel], he's someone who stuck as a role model to me even until now...he was there...He was there to talk to. He would listen if I had questions, he would give me advice for it, stuff like that.

Michael's adjustment to Ignatian was helped along not only through his membership in the Filipino Club, but also, through the individual agents he connected as a result of his

involvement in it. Throughout our conversations, Michael noted how important these individuals were in helping him to make sense of the college environment and structures. His experience demonstrates the importance of both the collective and individual cultural agents he met through the Filipino Club in his adjustment and eventual persistence at Ignatian. Further, the individual cultural agents Michael established connections with helped him to pursue his other interests and build social networks in other realms of the campus. As Museus and Quaye (2009) found, individual cultural agents were important not only for the individual influence they exerted on a struggling student, but also because of their ability to help students become persistent through the connections they can link them to in the broader campus community.

Like most of the other participants, Cora sought out the Filipino Club and joined it during her first semester at Ignatian University. However, she left the first meeting less than impressed, feeling that the club felt “kind of cliquey” and not inclusive since there were not many freshman members and most of the upper classmen only interacted with each other. But during her second semester at Ignatian, she became more involved in the club during preparations for their yearly cultural show. Through increased interactions with other club members through their work on the production, she came to view the club not as a clique, but instead as a close-knit family rooted in Filipino cultural pride and a shared experience as ethnic minority students on a predominantly White campus.

During her second year, Cora deepened her involvement in the Filipino Club, becoming the coordinator of the club’s hip-hop dance group. She also attended the club’s yearly retreat, an event focused on fostering deeper relationships among club members

and cited by several of the participants as a watershed moment in their involvement with the Filipino Club. For many, the retreat was what helped to cement their commitment to the club, but also to Ignatian University because it drew them closer to other members and created a sense of community. However, Cora attributed her increased involvement in the Filipino Club most of all to the strong connection she had made with another club member, Faith. A year ahead of Cora, Faith was Cora's "Ate" as part of the Filipino Club's Kuya-Ate-Ading program.

The Kuya-Ate-Ading program was created to build a sense of kinship and family among the Filipino Club's members; it is aimed at matching new members who are typically freshman or a first-year student with a sort of mentor or individual agent to look to in the club for advice or just to enhance their social network. The name of the program refers to the Philippine kinship system. In *Tagalog* (a primary Filipino language), *Kuya* and *Ate* are terms used to signify and address an older brother and older sister, respectively, though the terms can also be used as a term of respect for other older relatives like cousins or other elders who are not related to the individual, but hold a position of importance. *Ading* is a word from *Illokano* (another Filipino language) that is used to signify a younger sibling or relative. While not all pairings in this program created intimate friendships, Cora and Faith became very close. According to Cora, Faith was "very, very, very important" to her and her experience at Ignatian. She lamented, "It's hard not to have her here now."

Faith was a significant cultural agent for Cora who helped her to overcome barriers to persistence. Faith not only helped Cora to become more involved in the

Filipino Club, but also helped her to navigate the university structures. Although Cora seemed very comfortable talking with me about many personal and difficult issues, she told me that she had a “fear of talking to teachers” which made it hard to ask for help. Cora also shared that she had changed advisors multiple times during her Ignatian career and did not feel confident or comfortable seeking their counsel. Her Ate, who was a psychology major like Cora, became her primary academic and social support system:

I feel like I've been on my own. And my Ate, she was the one who would help me pick classes. I think she helped me pick my classes every single semester since she had become my Ate [laughs]. Which is every semester until like [pauses] now. I think this coming semester is the first time I will be picking classes on my own.

Cora's involvement in the Filipino Club illustrated the importance of both individual and collective cultural agents in helping students to bridge the gaps they perceived between themselves and the institution as well as other students. Faith was able to help Cora to navigate the university culture and structures and was an instrumental figure in her persistence. It was clear how much Cora valued Faith's friendship and guidance. Faith and Cora's relationship underscored the importance of quality connections between minority students and their cultural agents (Museus & Quaye, 2009). While the Filipino Club provided a connection and a space for socialization and greater community engagement, it was primarily the depth and quality of Cora and Faith's connection that allowed Cora to become more involved in the group and feel membership in the Filipino Club and by extension, the Ignatian University campus.

Most of the participants also shared that the Filipino Club provided them with a venue to explore and develop their identities as Filipina/o Americans. All of the

participants expressed in some way that attending a predominantly White university raised their awareness of their status as a person of color and, further, caused them to identify more with their Filipino background and heritage than they had in the past. Representing a range of locations on the Filipina/o American identity development model developed by Nadal (2004), the Filipino Club served as a space to contest the invisibility of Filipina/o Americans at Ignatian University and challenge a student culture they believed privileged White and affluent perspectives. Participants identified their participation in educational workshops, social events, and cultural performances—including the yearly Pilipino Cultural Night, which involved at least 80 students each year—as being avenues through which they increased their knowledge as well as pride in their Filipino culture.

As club leaders, Kate and Michael reflected on both the challenges and successes they had in creating this counternarrative. On increasing the visibility of the Filipina/o American community at Ignatian, Kate said:

I want us to be known throughout campus. For me and [Michael], that's one of his main goals is to get us to super recognized. When you say, BSU you think Black Student Union. They're really big and you know, people know who they are. When people say, Filipino Club they're like, "Eh? What's that?" [laughs]. So I would kind of like to get us—I would *love* to see us recognized campus-wide. I'm not saying we have to be a huge club, but I want us to be known. That's one of the goals for us.

Yet, Kate also recognized that the same barriers that prevented her from being able feel comfortable in predominantly White settings might exist for White students feeling comfortable in predominantly ethnic and cultural minority spaces:

I know it's hard because to get like, you know, other people to come [pauses] people not in the Filipino or Asian community to come out. Because I'd be

intimidated if I was the only like, let's say non-White person, there's like sorority or fraternity thing going on and a friend of mine invited me, I'd feel intimidated. I don't know; I'm obviously different from everybody. So in that sense it is hard for people to come out.

Kate as well as several other students remarked that as Filipina/o American students attempted to increase the visibility of the Filipina/o American community at Ignatian through cultural events, other (primarily White) students moved to categorize ethnic and cultural clubs as being "exclusive" because they primarily attracted individuals of that ethnic or racial background. Joy discussed that this issue had been raised in a leadership course she was taking:

We've been talking about community...and it's very tense sometimes. Because that class is 90% White and I'm one of the only who is very active in our ethnic clubs. And we're talking about diversity and how diversity shouldn't matter...that these ethnic clubs are kind of segregating the school rather than unifying. And I just felt like so angry because these people just don't understand. Because they don't understand that it is a shelter for some people or a way of understanding your culture. Learning of more opportunities for people who are of the same culture or whatnot. Or bringing awareness to other people from all walks of life.

She grew angry as she recounted this experience. Joy went on to say that she felt that those from the dominant group felt that differences in culture should be ignored or "shouldn't really matter":

Joy: One of our debates is that there is a Black overnight on campus before school starts so that they have time to transition in. And a White kid wanted to join in on this program and they told him no because he's White and it is a program for Black students. And they were upset about that. But that program is in place for a reason because they're not from the same background and if you start letting people from different races, it defeats the purpose of what they are trying to achieve....You know what I mean?

AB: So you feel there is a general lack of awareness—

Joy: Yeah, there's a general lack of awareness and a disconnect with understanding the purpose of all these different activities.

Cora also expressed her frustration at this perception attached to ethnic and cultural groups as exclusive, including in a paper she had written for her Race & Ethnic Relations course in the fall and later shared with me. Cora wrote that the ethnic and cultural clubs she belonged to Ignatian were “meant to promote and celebrate being of Asian or Filipino descent, but what I think becomes misconstrued is that these organizations are viewed upon as exclusive.” She went on to say that the events put on by the organizations are done to promote pride and unity and the “need to promote this pride and unity exists because Asians are still indeed a minority.” Later in her essay, Cora argued:

These events that we held are all held in order to promote our heritage despite whether or not people of other races decide to actively participate or not—it is the mere act of taking pride in who we are and letting people know that we are here and not fading into the background.

Cora’s perspective demonstrated a strong belief that ethnic and cultural organizations at Ignatian were essential to keeping Filipina/o Americans as well as the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander community visible in a predominantly White university. She contended that these events ensured that students’ from ethnic minority groups continued to have a voice. Many participants shared this notion that events organized by and celebrating the Asian American and Pacific Islander community and more specifically the Filipina/o American community were opportunities to claim space and identity and ultimately, critical to their agency and survival at Ignatian.

Michael believed that the best way to try and reform this perspective as well as increase the visibility of the Filipina/o American community would be to build stronger

relations with other organizations and collaborate on events that were pertinent to each group:

I think want to...to mix cultures. So if we're doing something, I want to do an event with BSU or Latino Student Union, the Korean Club or the Hawaiian Club. Like why make it [pauses] why limit yourself? I feel like as a leader of the Filipino community it is my job to teach others about the Filipino culture as much as it is to learn about other cultures. You know what I mean?

He further argued that he felt further collaborations between ethnic and cultural clubs would not only increase the visibility of Filipina/o Americans, but all ethnic minority groups on campus:

We shouldn't necessarily divide and separate. We might as well come together and support each other. Because we just are [pauses] in the end I feel like these clubs have been made that because we are the minorities and so it's like coming together to bring awareness to events of that culture, I guess.

Michael's sense of interculturalism was further developed by his involvement on a student advisory committee to the university vice president for intercultural affairs. By representing the Filipina/o American student community on that panel, Michael felt that he was not only bringing Filipina/o American voices to the table, but also highlighting their contributions as a group to the Ignatian community. Michael believed that through his role as a leader, he could not only contest the invisibility of Filipina/o Americans on the campus, but help those students who felt isolated and invisible, but were not necessarily active in the Filipino Club:

AB: How do you think you're able to help other Filipino students who aren't in the Filipino Club or aren't active to feel that sense of community or that they are being recognized?

Michael: Just through example. I mean if they're not active in the Filipino Club then the fact that they're seeing us. For example, the freshman in my Alternative Break group, [a service trip for students conducted during school breaks] I didn't

even know he was Filipino. Out of nowhere he said to me that he's going to be more active in the Filipino Club. I'd never really seen him around campus before all the Alternative Break stuff. And the fact that he knows about the Filipino Club, the fact that he's seen us around [pauses] he sees that we're doing good things, that we're having a good time, and *we* have that sense of community. We're always so welcoming. Every meeting so far or every event, there is somebody new there like someone I've never met, a new member, someone who wants to be involved in Filipino Club. I haven't even met them, I haven't seen them before, but you know what? They see we're having a good time, we're welcoming and that comes through.

John, president of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Association (AAPISA), reiterated that it was through example and the sense of community built by the ethnic and cultural organizations that individual students could serve as support systems for others who were not actively involved in such groups:

I actively resist the invisibility simply by being visible. I create events for students to bring attention to Filipino American and other Asian students through AAPISA...we provide resources such as socials, workshops, get-togethers. To sum it up, providing a warm, welcoming community.

The participants' experiences as members of ethnic and cultural organizations—specifically, the Filipino Club—elucidated the significance of its presence in the Ignatian University context. It has served as a site not only to meet new people and build vital connections, but as a space that allowed Filipina/o American students—and their other club members, many of whom were not Filipina/o American themselves—to contest their invisibility as a community and allowed for cultural expression, validation, and advocacy. The ethnic and cultural organizations students belonged to at Ignatian served as a subculture within the larger university culture in which they felt accepted in spite of their minority status within the larger university context.

Strength and solidarity in sisterhood: The role of an Asian-interest sorority.

I first met with Joy on a Thursday evening in October. Besides her bright smile and confident demeanor, I noticed right away that she was proudly wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with letters of the Greek alphabet. Though I knew little about Greek organizations and their role in college life, I knew enough to recognize that those letters represented her sorority. Once we formally got our conversation underway, I came to realize that those Greek letters not only represented a group to which she belonged, but represented a significant and meaningful part of her life as a college student at Ignatian.

Joy was very comfortable discussing the trials she experienced during her first year as a college student. She was forthright with her responses, making it easy to ask somewhat difficult questions. It was obvious that Joy was very proud of her Filipino heritage and that it was a source of strength in her life. So I was surprised to find that she was not more involved in the Filipino Club. As I learned later from the three seniors involved in the project, the Filipino Club was a place that they had stayed connected with and figured as very important in their lives as college students, but viewed as their second “family” compared to other organizations on campus.

Joy’s first “family” was her sorority, which will be referred to as Delta through this chapter. Delta is an Asian-interest sorority. Joy first heard about the sorority from an older Ignatian student with whom she had gone to high school. Joy had not initially planned to join a sorority but became interested after attending an information meeting with another participant, Cora, whom she had met through their residential hall’s

Facebook group. At the meeting, Joy saw something that resembled the community she hoped college would be able to provide:

I ended up listening in to what all the sisters had to say and I got sucked in. The sorority is built on five main points. It's sisterhood, community service, cultural awareness, social activity, and academics. I really wanted each and every one of those things. And the way they described they were involved and how they were so close. I just wanted the same bond they had. Especially since I hadn't found it yet. And it was really apparent with them and you could see, it wasn't fake.

This group appealed to Joy because as she noted, it provided an antidote to what she saw as a superficial and privileged student community. She felt that Delta, which at the time only had eight members, was the space and group where she could be able to find some connection to the university. In addition to its small size and sense of intimacy, Joy admitted that she was drawn to the sorority for another reason—it was founded as an Asian-interest sorority and thus, emphasized cultivating cultural pride and awareness in its Asian American and Pacific Islander members. After that meeting, Joy decided to pledge to the sorority along with two other freshmen including Cora.

Cora's reasons for joining Delta were very similar to Joy's. She talked about how she felt very out of place in the college environment and struggled to find connections to other students. Cora decided that she would try new things to help her build those relationships—she went on a retreat for first year students, a community service trip to Mexico, and the Filipino Club. After attending the informational meeting for Delta, Cora felt that she had met people with whom she could relate and build those desired relationships. Like Joy, Cora also cited the sense of sisterhood among sorority members as the primary reason she was drawn to joining Delta.

Cora and Joy credited the process of pledging for the sorority with helping them to overcome their feelings of disconnect with the broader Ignatian community. By growing closer to one another and developing a unique bond through the process of pledging, they found strength to combat their collective feelings of isolation and dissonance from the rest of the student body. Cora summed it up by saying:

I grew so close to these girls. They knew some things about me that even my friends from home who I'd been friends with for twelve years didn't even know. It's like in twelve weeks you end up growing close to people who were strangers to you a few weeks before. So in that aspect I felt like I found my home.

Both Cora and Joy extolled their experiences as members of Delta as critical factors in their decision to stay at Ignatian University. According to Cora, "I feel like if I didn't find my sorority or if I didn't find the Filipino Club, I would have transferred. And I still believe that four years later."

Joy opined that Delta gave her both a sense of membership and support which allowed her to want to continue to be at Ignatian. When I asked what in particular about the sorority made her feel this way, she replied:

Joy: I think it was just the fact that you can draw a sense of connection with these girls and it's the whole point that you do grow from the whole process and being a sister. I would say that I'm a lot more independent and confident and a better person now that I'm in the sorority. I thought that I grew a lot from when my dad was sick in high school, but they test you in different ways and really push you to your limits.

AB: So were they people that you found support in?

Joy: Uh huh. That was my big support system here. And they still are.

Joy and Cora's experiences as sisters in a sorority reinforce the importance of collective agents in facilitating students' sense of belonging and membership to the university and

extensively, facilitating their ongoing commitment to graduate from the institution. What is especially interesting about their experience in Delta is that this membership was still accompanied by feelings of marginality due to Delta's status as an "underground" Greek organization at Ignatian and in fact, was one of several such "underground" Greek organizations on campus, most of which were other multicultural or ethnic-interest fraternities and sororities. Both Joy and Cora shared that Delta, which is a sorority consisting of six chapters in California, had never been granted official status with the Office of Greek Life at Ignatian for a variety of reasons and thus was not "recognized" on campus. This meant they did not receive the same privileges or support that other Greek organizations on campus received. Their status as an underground sorority was something they both struggled with and had tried to resolve through discussions with student life advisors as well as through joint efforts with the other unrecognized Greek organizations. They took issue with the lack of recognition and their point of contention centered mostly on being an unrecognized sorority that was committed to cultural awareness and identity development among its Asian American and Pacific Islander members—a group of women that has historically been shut out of and marginalized in the Panhellenic Greek system (Chen, 1998; Park, 2008). In fact, Asian-interest sororities and fraternities were created to address the exclusions and counter the dominant culture of the Panhellenic system (Chen, 1998). For Joy and Cora, being unrecognized as an organization on campus only reinforced their feelings of invisibility and marginality.

Still, Delta provided them both with the belonging, membership, and even the purpose that they had struggled to find during their first year at Ignatian. It also provided

them both with a platform to grow as individuals. According to Cora, being part of Delta “made” her college experience not just because it provided her with a core group of friends, but also a chance to be a leader, something she had never seen herself as before:

Delta helped me a lot. I was never the type that would take initiative in terms of leadership stuff...But because we're so small...it is implied that you take on positions. And we work so hard to be become active [in the sorority] that it is like, why don't you want to give back?...I've held a lot of positions; like I was president last year and now I'm pledge-mistress and it's very rewarding... I just get to help [the new pledges] and I really like that feeling.

Cora's experience as a leader in the organization allowed her to be a support for the pledges—who were all freshman—and helped them to acclimate and navigate both the sorority and the Ignatian University community. Cora recognized that she had a role in these young women's persistence—just as her sorority sisters had contributed to her own survival at Ignatian. Cora strongly believed that the quality of her connections in Delta made all the difference in her college career, and perhaps was the most important factor in her own persistence.

Cora and Joy's experiences as members of Delta were noteworthy because they shed light on how this particular type of subculture—an unrecognized, Asian-interest sorority in a predominantly White university—has been able to engender persistence in college. First, their experiences underscored that for these young women, their shared Asian American and Pacific Islander racial identities were significant sources of identification, and thus drew their interest in Delta. Cora and Joy both surmised that most of the Delta members had not expected to join a sorority in college, but did so once they encountered the sisters from Delta and saw how their group provided one another with support. Second, a sorority that emphasized cultural awareness—specifically Asian

American and Pacific Islander cultures—may theoretically served the same purpose as an ethnic or cultural organization because it encouraged its members to explore and celebrate their ethnic and cultural identities through different activities and educational opportunities. As Cora shared, being in Delta and its stress on cultural awareness helped her to “grow up a lot and in a lot of ways. It helped me embrace being Filipino.”

As an organization, Delta is unique because it did not receive institutional recognition or support; this signified another level of invisibility of this subgroup—Asian American and Pacific Islander women—within the university culture. Yet, somehow Delta as an organization persisted despite its underground status and provided its members with the support and membership students needed to be able to continue at Ignatian University. In both Cora and Joy’s cases, Delta provided a safe space that helped them to mitigate their feelings of dissonance from the predominantly White community at Ignatian and also, actively resist it through community, sisterhood, and solidarity.

Being women and men for others: Uncovering meaning and membership to the university community through service organizations. A key piece of the Ignatian University mission is the notion of the “education of the whole person.” This aspect of the mission is directly connected to one of the hallmark ideals of Jesuit education—*cura personalis*, which roughly translated from the Latin means the personal care and concern for the whole person. It is one of the most recognizable features of the Jesuit educational tradition and works in tandem with another aspect of Ignatian’s mission—a commitment to service in faith and the promotion of social justice. It is not surprising then that

Ignatian offers and encourages its students to partake in service to the community through a variety of avenues including service-oriented organizations. For Mary, Andy, Michael and Leah, engaging intensely in service was instrumental in their persistence at Ignatian.

Mary, by her own admission, was not very involved in extracurricular activities as a high school student. She wanted to make sure that her experience at Ignatian would be the opposite and as a consequence, signed up for a multitude of organizations her freshman year—“too many things” she later surmised. Mary joined the residential hall association as a representative for her dormitory. She was also part of the Filipino Club, sang in university choir, and joined the Ignatian chapter of Circle K and El Reflejo, organizations both based on service and volunteerism.

As a high school student, Mary, who was of Filipina and Mexican descent, associated more with her Filipina identity and had mostly Asian American friends. At Ignatian, whose Latino/Hispanic population totals 20.7% of the student body and which is considered an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, Mary recognized that she had more opportunities to explore her cultural heritage as a Mexican American and identified El Reflejo as a possible space to do that as well as engage in service. According to the Ignatian University website, El Reflejo “serves to educate, mentor, and establish a bond with inner city youth in order to promote a better understanding of the possibilities of personal and intellectual growth. It provides leadership, support advice and awareness on crucial issues facing the Latino community.” Though Mary had joined other clubs on

campus, she found that her involvement in El Reflejo was most meaningful to her and called it her “favorite thing” at Ignatian.

Mary explained that her interest in El Reflejo emerged from what she had learned in an introductory class in American Cultures, a course required as part of Ignatian’s core curriculum. The course is used to explore issues surrounding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and other identifiers from a variety of perspectives and bolsters the school’s commitment to diversity and social justice. According to Mary, the course encouraged her to think about her position as a Latina and Filipina in higher education and how to use that position as well as what she has learned from her own struggles as a college student to help Latina/o youth and encourage their aspirations to pursue higher education:

I felt like I was really making an impact and I could really relate with the kids. Being Latino and just not like, having a lot of income and just I felt like if they can have the foresight to go to college and prepare for that, they could save themselves from the stress of financial burdens and getting into the school they want to.

Mary shared that at the beginning, she did not feel very attached to the other members of El Reflejo. She felt that there was even a bit of cultural gap when other students would speak Spanish or Spanglish—neither of which she could easily understand since Spanish was not regularly spoken at home. Still, she felt that their collective service and sense of communal potential eventually created a pathway for connections. During our second individual meeting some weeks later, Mary shared that she had been elected to the El Reflejo executive board and also experienced growth in her relationships with members of the group as well as her own identity as a Latina:

AB: So this college has actually given you the chance to better know that other aspect of yourself?

Mary: Yeah, I used to feel a lot more left out...I felt left out around Mexican people; I didn't feel like I belonged, but now definitely...

[Later on in the conversation, we talked about her new role in the club.]

AB: What do you [pauses] what drove you to want to be on the e-board for El Reflejo?

Mary: I just wanted to apply my talents in art to something that I was passionate about. Yeah, I'm really passionate about El Reflejo and what they do for the kids.

Additionally, El Reflejo's emphasis on the importance of college completion gave Mary a stronger sense of her own commitment to graduating. When asked what helped her to continue to persist, in addition to other factors, Mary replied, "Yeah, my involvement with El Reflejo and just trying to be a role model for the kids and that I need to graduate for them."

Mary's involvement with El Reflejo provided her with the sense of attachment and purpose she needed to continue her education at Ignatian University. Through their service work, El Reflejo espoused in both their members as well as the youth they mentored a sense of communal potential, cultural validation, and emphasis on educational attainment. El Reflejo reinforced for Mary the importance and validity of her own personal goals and values and helped to abate the cultural dissonance she felt between her and the broader university community. As she shared in the focus group, while the wealth and materialism displayed by some students at Ignatian still bothered her, those interactions also helped to push her to meet her own goals. When asked how

her concerns with ability to pay affected the way she took advantage of attending college and the opportunities available, Mary answered:

I think you feel the need to make the most out of it and get really good grades in order to make all the money you're paying worth it. So yeah. But I think I learned you can't be prejudiced towards people just because they have money as well. It's something [pauses] it took me awhile to learn that.

Mary's story showed the power collective agents and individual agents can play in a college student's adjustment and commitment to persist. For Mary, the concerns over her ability to pay and her discomfort in the college environment related to the wide socioeconomic disparities among the student population. This discomfort was mitigated by the communal potential she began to feel as a member of El Reflejo. Her experience of gaining a sense of grounding and solidarity through service mirrored that of other ethnic minority students who identified the positive impact collective cultural agents such as El Reflejo had by providing support, cultural validation, a sense of community, and stressing achievement (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Engaging in service allowed Mary to feel a sense of purpose—beyond academic and career aspirations—in attending college. Through El Reflejo she was get involved in a way that she believed benefitted not only her growth, but the Latino community as well.

Andy became engaged in doing community service at Ignatian after a rough adjustment period. In addition to directly serving the Ignatian community through his leadership on three different executive boards, Andy contributed ten or more hours of service through a theme-housing initiative, is involved in the school's Campus Ministry program, acted as a member of the residential hall association, and served as a peer coordinator for the university's chapter of Christian Life Community (CLC), an

international organization that focuses on supporting students' spiritual development as well other activities that develop an individual's *cura personalis*.

It was clear that the Filipino Club is where Andy found “family” and a sense of belonging, but he also fostered his belonging to the community by being an advocate for other students. The notion of *cura personalis* was very central to Andy's chosen activities and it was clear that not only was his advocacy for others something he enjoyed doing, but something he was good at—he was given a student advocate award last year for his work with the residential hall association. Andy's work in being an advocate for students and helping them with their personal development stemmed from wanting to bridge gaps in support services. He frequently mentioned that he felt academic advisors were ill-equipped to advise students on matters outside of academics and that resources for students—such as psychological services—often only addressed student issues if they were extreme cases such as alcohol abuse or thoughts of conducting harm to oneself. Andy was inspired to do advocacy work to help address students' everyday struggles—something that he could very much relate to based on his own difficulties during his first year at Ignatian.

Andy's experience being an on-campus resource for other students elucidated the importance of individual cultural agents in helping students to establish a sense of connection and belonging to the community. In this case, however, Andy's service has served dual purposes. By helping to bridge the gaps and provide support for students struggling at Ignatian, Andy continually renews his own sense of belonging to the community.

Leah and Michael both attributed their belonging and work as members of service organizations as influential factors in their persistence at Ignatian University. There are several student-run Service Organizations at Ignatian University. Service Organizations were regularly brought up by all of the participants and considered, as John put it, “a really big thing here.” These organizations receive a lot of attention from the university as they exemplify the notion of being men and women for others through service. Though only two participants in this research belonged to a Service Organization, those associations seemed to be something of interest to a few other students including Joy and Mary (who at the time of our final interview was applying to join one for the next school year).

Each organization has its own mission and particular service placements in non-profits and service agencies throughout Los Angeles addressing different social justice and equity issues; members log at minimum twenty-five to thirty hours of service a semester. To become part of a Service Organization, students must go through an application process. Both Michael and Leah joined Service Organizations in their second semester of their freshman year. Michael joined an all-male organization, which I refer to as *Voluntas* (“good will” in Latin) in this study, while Leah joined an all-female cohort, *Amo* (“to love” in Latin).

Michael attributed his interest in joining the *Voluntas* to Dan, an older student whom he had identified as one of his role models at Ignatian. Michael called his involvement in *Voluntas* one of the best things that had happened to him in his Ignatian career. *Voluntas* offered a set of values and a culture that helped to mitigate his cultural

dissonance with the rest of the student community. Like the Filipino Club, Voluntas became another family and home for Michael on campus as well as a venue for personal growth:

These guys are like my brothers. In that sense you could say it's a fraternity with the brotherhood aspect, but we're focused on service, on doing more for others and stuff like that. I can definitely say Voluntas has changed me. It has made me more aware of those around me. I feel like it's made me a better person.

Voluntas also provided Michael another set of individual cultural agents to look to for support in his college career. They also helped him to engage in other meaningful activities. Michael was chosen to be a student leader on an Alternative Break trip to Vietnam focused on combating human trafficking. He attributed his selection as a team leader to his membership in Voluntas and the foundation it gave him to lead on issues of social justice. It was an achievement Michael was very excited about and proud to share with me, and clearly made him feel like he was a valued member of the Ignatian community.

Leah's involvement in Amo was possibly the factor that most enabled her survival at Ignatian. Leah joined Amo the second semester of her freshman year, at a time when she was floundering academically. Leah shared that Amo was in fact the reason she was able to come back for a second year:

I think if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be here studying or thinking of doing post-grad service. It has definitely given me a sense of direction in life. They've definitely given me life lessons that I will take once I leave the bluff as cliché as that sounds [laughs]. I think Amo has kind of brought me back to that feeling of being—not the star—but also being a very special person.

For Leah, Amo provided not only a support system, but a sense of purpose and enabled her to visualize what she could do beyond Ignatian once she graduated. It was members of Amo who gave her advice on how to overcome her academic struggles as a biology major:

I think one of the first people I told about switching majors were the women in my service org. Just because I knew that they wouldn't judge me for dropping something. I think it was kind of the first time I had ever not done something [pauses] not seen something through. And it was such a learning experience just because I was so freaked out. I didn't really know how to approach it so that's why I just kept going. I kept dragging this burden on me, which I didn't really understand why I did now.

Leah finally switched her major in her sophomore year, primarily due to the advice and support she received from the other women in Amo. When I asked Leah if there was anything Amo had done specifically to help her to remain resilient and persistent, she retorted:

I think just the fact that they believed in me. The fact that they kept pushing me just to do well or just at least pass in a class that I was struggling with. My mentor was a natural science major, top ten percent of her class...so she would just push me and like, someone I looked up to and still look up to now. And I guess I kind of strive to make her proud in a way. One in particular, or instance in particular...in an anatomy class, you have to do really well on one of these big tests and you had to get an 80% or above, which you think wouldn't be too hard...if it wasn't for her making sure I studied every single day after an Amo meeting regardless of what time it was...if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have passed that test...experiences like that. I feel like Amo has never given me a limit, never said no, or never said, "Okay, well maybe you should you know take a year off and just focus on your studies or whatever." They were always there; they were always pushing me to be the best person I can be.

Leah also attributed her involvement in Amo in giving her a newfound strength and outlook to help her be persistent. Leah said the feminist lens cultivated in Amo has helped her to see herself as a feminist who "just tries to empower people in society,

someone who voices their opinion when need be. And I feel like that is the type of person I am now.” By being involved in service through Amo, Leah was able to find her voice, but also her passion—helping marginalized individuals and communities. It gave her a sense of purpose as well as agency to continue persisting despite her own personal and academic challenges. For Leah, Amo provided the connection and membership she needed to survive at Ignatian.

The role of subcultures in fostering student persistence. The participants’ experiences in various organizations demonstrated the significance of both collective and individual cultural agents to a student’s persistence. While each organization had its own unique mission and purpose, they all held something in common—they stressed the importance of college, validated students’ cultural heritages, and encouraged achievement. In doing so, they encouraged not only a student’s will to persist, but their sense of belonging and membership, attachments none of the students had found in the dominant campus culture. As was evidenced through these stories of persistence, students not only connected to the university because of the friendships and the connections they made with other individuals, but also through the sense of purpose and meaning these activities provided the students. In many cases, participants were leaders in these activities, seeking to make themselves known and be resources for others. Thus, they sought to contest their marginality and invisibility through leadership and action.

For these Filipina/o American students, their integration into the Ignatian University community was primarily facilitated through their social connections on campus. But participants also identified another important component in their

persistence—their families. The next section explores the importance familial support played in the persistence of these Filipina/o American undergraduates.

Familial support. Research showed that family support is a strong predictor for student persistence, especially for ethnic minority students who attend predominantly White universities (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In some cases, Latino and African American students considered their families to be one of the most, if not the most influential factor in their persistence (Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). These findings countered Tinto's original postulation that in order to fully integrate and persist in the university, students must separate and detach themselves from their home communities and families. As it has been argued throughout this study, precollege cultures and their enduring relevance in college students' lives cannot be overlooked or trivialized. Moreover, for many of these participants, their cultures and home communities brought them strength to face and overcome the challenges they have experienced in college. Through the exploration of the role of their families in their college persistence, the validity of Tinto's notion that college students must separate from their home cultures and those connected with it is further contested.

Family was a theme that continually emerged in the conversations with the participants. John surmised that for Filipina/o American students, family is “our stronghold of support” and thus carried significant weight in Filipina/o American college students' daily lives. Participants described familial support in various ways, but these fell primarily in two categories—emotional and motivational, and financial. These

categories are similar to those used by Guiffrida (2005) in his study of African American college students and the nature of their ties to their families and home.

Emotional & motivational support. Every participant identified the strong role parental encouragement played in encouraging their aspirations to attend college. None of the participants relayed that their parents did not approve of or want them to go college. Parents supported their goals to attend college throughout students' lives. Participants commonly stated that their parents instilled in them the value of hard work and the importance of a strong work ethic. Joy shared that her mother always emphasized the importance of doing well in school:

She wasn't like, "You have to get all As." But she was always like, "In order to succeed you need to do well in school." By having that background, I believe that it helped me to become and develop a strong work ethic and be a better student. I don't think I would have been as driven as I was if my mom didn't push me so hard.

Kate shared a similar perspective:

My dad is like every time I call, "Okay, study hard. Get those grades." That's what he told me; to always work hard. That is something both of my parents had to do and are still doing to send me here. So I take that advice very seriously.

The parents of these Filipina/o American students did not just emphasize the importance of grades, but the importance of taking advantage of the opportunities that being a college student had to offer. Andy shared that his parents showed their support by encouraging him to get involved on campus:

It's funny because my parents don't really ask me about school for the most part. They just let me do my thing. They're those people that are letting me explore and do what I want to do with it. And it's funny because they care more about my extracurriculars and what I am doing with that. They're kind of like me—the education of the whole person, that grades only say so much on paper.

Cora had a similar perspective on her parents' approach and their type of support:

I think they just [support me by] letting me do what I want in this sense. They're not, I think I said in the last interview, they're not very controlling, they're not the stereotypical, "You have to be a doctor" type. They were pretty open to me doing what I want to do when I got here. They trusted me. So that helped a lot. Even when I told them that I was going to declare psychology, they weren't super excited, but they didn't deny me either. They were like, "Okay, if it makes you happy then do it." That's always been their approach raising me and my brothers. Like when I told them, "I'm joining a sorority." They were like, "Okay! [laughs] Do what you want." I don't know. They're very supportive. For PCN, they'll drive down and stuff. I try to call home at least once a week; I randomly text my parents. The little things for me are what really helps.

All of the participants credited their parents with providing them with motivation to persist. For most, their parents' expectations were those they most valued and aspired to meet. During the focus group, I asked the participants what roles their parents had on their college education:

Michael: I guess their role has changed throughout the years. They've always been supportive and I guess in my point of view, before I just wanted to get away. I didn't want to go home, but now it's like, I get excited to go home, not even to see friends, I'm just down to spend a night with my parents. I just feel like as college goes on you see like, being that for me family has always been a really, really important thing. I was always really close to my sister, my parents, all my cousins. That's just how my family was I guess. So before college they were all just such a huge part of my life and now that you're away from them, you start to see [pauses] now is when you start to see how big of a part of your life they were.

Michael went on to say that their role in his life now was even more important than it was before he was in college—or at least, he is now more cognizant of their significance:

Yeah, they are what drive me in school and like everything. One of my biggest fears is like disappointing them. So I wouldn't do anything that would do that. So I see the expectations they have for me and I want to if not meet them, then surpass them. I love going home and telling them, "Oh I'm doing this now and this" and to get the response that they're proud of me and stuff like that. So their role is even more important because they are what they push me now.

Mary agreed with Michael and reiterated the significance not only her parents, but her sister had on her life as a college student:

Mary: I wouldn't want to disappoint my parents. They drive me to want to get good grades and do well in school. I think my parents' role has been to be a support system for me; they've never brought me down or anything like that.

AB: And your sister goes here too, right? So what role does she play in your success here?

Mary: I guess my sister is like a really close friend for me. She's a good support system and she's always really studious and she also drives me to do well.

For many students, they were also continually motivated to persist at Ignatian University in order to be able to provide support for their parents later in life. Mary shared:

Yeah, both of my parents would tell me that I should go to college. My mom would always tell me, "Are you going to buy me my house when I am older?" I always wanted to go to school for my parents to have them live a more comfortable life.

For Leah and Joy, college completion was especially motivated by a desire to be able to provide for their mothers. As the only children of single parents, they were very determined to meet this goal. Joy mentioned this several times during our conversations:

I guess my personal goal for why I want to finish college was [pauses] I want to be at the point where I'm comfortable financially, to the point where I can support my mom and she doesn't have to work any more. She's worked so hard and I just want to make sure that she's okay. I just want to build a comfortable life for everyone that I love.

College persistence and eventual completion also had special meaning for Mary and Leah's families as a whole. As a first generation college student, a degree would be especially meaningful for Mary and her family:

I think having a college degree means success. Just having education is already a big milestone for us since like a lot of my family members didn't graduate

college. So just the degree in itself is a success and then it's just like another stepping-stone to a successful life.

With one semester left at Ignatian and graduation within sight, Leah was able to reflect on the meaning of degree completion as both a sign of achievement, but also resilience given her earlier academic struggles:

My family came here as immigrants and being able to have a daughter, niece or grandchild—the first grandchild to graduate from college—is another statement on their part. Like how, you know, they always enforced education as such a high priority and it should go above anything else other than religion [laughs], but you know what I mean?

Later on in our conversation, she said that the resilience she displayed in her pursuit of a degree was a product of her family's experiences and a trait that she believed best described them as a group:

I think the way that they've handled a lot of tragedies or a lot of downfalls in life, they've just pushed through and that's a value that I also really took to heart when I came into college. Obviously, there are a lot of things that we as college students cross when, whether it may be values that you never thought you would question or just you know, education in general or school in general...but that was something that I definitely really did incorporate while I was studying or while I was making a moral choice.

These Filipina/o American students shared that the emotional support they received from their families was a critical factor in their persistence at Ignatian University. Parents showed their support through expressions of pride and love. Families were also a significant source of motivation not only to do well, but to take advantage of the college experience. This was especially important given the financial implications their family had to manage as a result of attending a private university. Students described that the financial support they received from their parents was also an important factor in their persistence.

Financial support. A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the moderate to extreme concern students held about financing their college education. Out of the eight participants, only one individual was not utilizing some kind of financial aid to pay for their college education. The other participants were using a variety of means to pay for their education including scholarships, grants, private and federal loans, as well as direct payments by their parents. Additionally, six of the eight participants worked part-time to help with the costs of their education.

All of the students shared the perspective that the financial support they received from their parents provided them with the motivation to take advantage of their time at Ignatian, but also to be cognizant of the real and measurable costs of their education.

Michael reinforced this point multiple times during our conversations:

I mean my parents tell me all the time like, “When I was your age I couldn’t do this, I couldn’t do that; I didn’t have those opportunities, always working, working, working, trying to make money and then go to school.” That’s all they ever said... Ignatian gives us so many opportunities to do whatever. It’s just making the most of it, taking advantage of those opportunities. Don’t let those fly by; don’t look over them. Just because there’s those less fortunate including your parents who were less fortunate than you are when they were your age. They want you to make the most out of your opportunities because they want the best for your future.

Kate discussed that, at her mother’s insistence, she did not work while in school and thus, she was receiving financial support from her parents. This was one of her main motivators not only to finish, but to finish “on time.” For most of the students, finishing “on time” meant to complete the degree within four academic years:

I’m really lucky because my mom is like, “Don’t worry about it; of course get financial aid, but I’ll take care of the rest.”...I know how hard my mom works; she works so hard. She’s a nurse. She has two jobs. She’s old [laughs]. She works 16-hour shifts just to send me to this school and to give me the financial

freedom as far as, I don't buy expensive clothes or anything, but she's giving freedom to you know, if people want to go out to eat, I'm not the one who will say I can't because I don't have money. I know I am really lucky.

Feeling “lucky” and grateful characterized the students’ feelings about their parents’ financial support. They knew that without it, they would probably not be able to attend Ignatian University. Students frequently noted that by attending a private university like Ignatian, they had a higher likelihood of graduating in four years compared to their public university peers. They shared stories of their friends and relatives attending community colleges and public universities—specifically the University of California and California State University system—who would likely need more than four years to complete their degrees as a result of budget cuts and tuition increases. At times, however, this gratitude also led to feelings of guilt and stress over financial matters; this was another common topic of discussion. Yet this somehow made students more resolved and dedicated to completing their degree and making the most out of their college experience. Kate observed:

I mean there's different ways of approaching college as a student. Some people just you know dunk their heads low and just study just so they can get through school. Some people are really social and want to be involved in everything. And you know, they find that place that they want to be a part of and they do well.

She further argued that students’ experiences are enhanced by involvement and a key to having a more meaningful college experience.

Overall, students believed that their parents’ financial and emotional support motivated them to be more persistent in spite of academic or social struggles, and keep working towards graduation on a daily basis. For these Filipina/o American students, family served as their foundational support system. Many described that over the years,

their relationships with their family, especially their parents, strengthened and became their main motivator and inspiration even through their greatest struggles.

Institutional characteristics. Participants recognized that certain institutional characteristics aided in their commitment to persist at Ignatian University. These factors included the size of the university, availability of resources, and opportunities for religious engagement. At just over 6,000 undergraduates, Ignatian is considered a medium-sized university. It is by no means a “small” liberal arts college, yet participants still often referred to the “smallness” of the institution and the advantages that such a characteristic provided for them. This typically meant smaller class sizes, increased opportunities to engage with professors as well as more accountability for both students and professors, and opportunities to be involved.

Participants described the size of the school as a mostly positive contributor to their persistence. They discussed the advantages of the “small” school environment during the focus group:

Michael: Smaller classes, more focus from the teachers; they’re more willing to help you. They have office hours and stuff like that. They know you on a personal basis so it’s a lot more intimate in that sense. So it is easier to work with them and go through classes. There’s not like 300 people in the class or whatever.

Leah: And you actually get the class.

Michael: Yeah, good point.

Kate: And graduate on time.

Joy reinforced the importance of knowing she could graduate on time and the importance of being able to visualize that future during difficult times:

I think that going to school where you didn't have to worry if the classes I need to take are going to be offered...and I think I've been telling all my family this. I'm really fortunate to go to school where we didn't have budget cuts and we didn't have to stay around an extra year just because our school didn't have the necessities I need in order to graduate.

Students also recognized that because the institution had a smaller student population to serve than a public university, resources seemed more accessible to students:

Kate: I think Ignatian has good resources like the career development services. I'm sure other colleges have that, but maybe because we are smaller, it is easier for us to access them. And I know personally, my professors, I know them all really well. They're all really supportive and you know, they send me emails about internship opportunities, which is good...And having that close camaraderie with them is just beneficial to being a small campus like this.

Michael: Going off of what she said and going back to that question about pros and cons. Ignatian does really give you those resources and opportunities for other stuff. Regardless of just whether it be internships or career development, stuff like that. In terms of pros and cons again, being that it is a smaller school and there is more, especially Ignatian [pauses] Ignatian is pretty rich so they offer so many opportunities for different things just to expand your experiences. For example, Alternative Break. A lot of other schools don't offer that.

Throughout the focus group dialogue, the participants discussed how the small feel of the school impacted their own behavior and accountability to their education:

Mary: I think also because it is a small school there's more obligation to go to class. We have a strict attendance policy so that also helps to prevent you from your grades slipping or being apathetic.

[Leah and Kate nod in agreement.]

Michael: Also, it is more expensive, so it is more expensive per class. So you don't want to like not go to class and waste that money. That's how I think.

Leah: Mmmhmmm, yeah [nodding].

Michael: A lot of times I'll be too lazy to go to class and I'll be like I don't know what we're doing in class. And then like, "No, I'm paying like \$4,500 per class. I'll go even if I'm just going to sleep in class." [All laugh]

AB: So actually being there and being present in class?

Leah: Yeah; I also think being surrounded by students. Like I'm surrounded by really driven people and you're like, "Oh dang, they're doing their homework. I should do it too." [All laugh] It's like, okay, I think everyone has that mindset. Like yes, you want to do well, you want to get this degree. Just keep going, just keep chugging.

In addition to a sense of intimacy and the presence of resources and opportunities, several participants identified the importance of being able to identify with and engage in their religious faith as Catholics as a factor that contributed to their sense of belonging to the university:

Andy: I think my Catholic faith has played a big part of it. I feel like I've established [pauses] it's really hard to explain honestly. I think I could write a whole paper about it. It's my morals, my Catholic morals have shaped me over here, helped me to be more inclusive of others, think that everyone should be treated equally and I think I'm more grounded with morals. And I'm not saying if you don't have those morals you're not. I think it's promoted me to live a life of justice and service. I feel like sure, my whole high school career it was really just something I grew up with and practiced, but it was not so much something I picked. And now I realize that when I came here, it's something that has shaped me and pushed me in the right direction.

AB: So, has coming here made you stronger in your faith?

Andy: Yes.

AB: Would you say that [Ignatian] has fostered that in you or the things you did on your own?

Andy: I think it fostered me in many ways; I think they offer many opportunities that it's fostered me as a person. They believe in the education of the whole person and building an inclusive community. I think they've offered me opportunities to grow as a person and as an individual and help me create a family with opportunities in culture, service things, and leadership opportunities.

Joy said that in addition to belonging to the Filipino Club, being at a Catholic university helped in her transition. She felt the Catholic identity of Ignatian provided a mirror to her pre-college life:

I could see a lot of values that the university holds are very similar to the values that I hold. And I think I guess you could say that is because I am Catholic. And actually one of the priests from my [home] church is from Ignatian and he just preaches over there.

During one of our interviews, Cora shared that she was going to the Sunday mass being offered later that night. When I asked her if Catholicism was still relevant in her life as a college student, she replied:

Cora: Yeah. Actually, I'm very Catholic. Well, I'm not very strict on the rules and all that stuff. But in terms of having faith and stuff, I feel like it's always been my backbone.

AB: So do you feel like that's helped you in any way to be okay here? Next to your sorority and Filipino Club, has your Catholic faith had any impact on your experience here?

Cora: I'd say yes. I like going to 8:00 p.m. mass and like [pause] and before I used to go and meet up with my Ate and a lot of people from the Filipino Club which was nice. And I really like Pistahan...but lately, senior year in general, I've been going by myself. It's still nice, but it's not necessarily the same.

Like Cora, Leah also attached a special meaning to remaining engaged in her faith at

Ignatian:

Whenever I would go to 8:00 p.m. mass which is a very special mass Ignatian has always had, I feel like that's the time when I could just like get away from all the stress and all the pressure that Ignatian or that I put myself through...it's just one of those instances that I really connect with myself and connect with God. And I feel like going to Ignatian, it's not looked down upon when you're worshipping or when you are talking about God... And I feel like if it wasn't for me going to Ignatian, I wouldn't have been able to be [pauses] as open as I am right now with my faith...I feel like being a Catholic is still really important to me...hopefully that won't ever change.

Students engaged in their Catholic faith in a diversity of approaches. For some students, practicing their Catholic faith provided them with a way to connect to the university mission; for others, it offered opportunities to connect to other students or to remain connected to practices that reminded them of home and their families. In this variety of ways, Ignatian's Catholic identity supported these Filipina/o American students' persistence.

Understanding the role of university characteristics is significant to this study because it illustrated once more the importance of finding making a match between a student and the institution of higher education in terms of culture, values, and needs. For these participants, attending a smaller school and one with a Catholic identity helped them to establish a stronger sense of belonging to the community. In many instances, participants believed that though attending a “smaller” school had some disadvantages—namely, that one often encountered the same people on a regular basis and did not leave much room for anonymity—these factors were especially important in making it manageable for them to understand and navigate the university structures and culture.

Summary

In this chapter, the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian University were explored through the presentation of stories they shared through individual interviews and a focus group. Participants identified experiencing challenges in three specific areas: difficult transitions and adjustments to the college community and campus life due to cultural dissonance; ongoing feelings of cultural dissonance, isolation,

and invisibility due to a lack of structural, interactional, and classroom diversity; and struggles in academic performance.

Participants identified that they were able to overcome these challenges through their participation in ethnic and cultural organizations, Service Organizations, and an Asian-interest sorority. These groups served as venues where participants found a sense of belonging and membership through their interactions with collective and individual cultural agents. They also shared that family served as a major factor in their persistence. Through emotional, motivational, and financial support, participants' families were able to contribute positively to the students' commitment to persist at Ignatian University.

The next chapter continues the exploration of findings produced from this research. It also includes an assessment of the research findings as well as the participants' reflections on the research. Implications and recommendations for future research in this area of study are also shared.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Reflections on Struggle and Persistence

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university in order to better understand the challenges they encounter on their journeys towards graduation and the factors that have enabled them to remain persistent. The research questions that this study addressed are:

1. What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university?
2. What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees?

Additionally, this study was undertaken to destabilize the notion that Filipina/o Americans belong to a model minority who, as a result of their perceived academic and professional success, do not warrant deeper understanding, attention or support from educators and institutions of higher education. Because the narrative of Filipina/o American college student persistence has been largely excluded from the field of educational research, I aimed to provide the participants with a venue to exert their voice, share their stories, and engage in a critical, co-constructive dialogue about their experiences as students at Ignatian University.

The stories of these eight Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian University showed that persistence is a journey that includes personal struggles along with success. Though the challenges participants have faced often caused them to question whether or not they belonged at Ignatian University, their ability to overcome such struggles only made them more resolved to persist and accomplish their goal of earning a college degree. In many cases, they found their strength and motivation through solidarity and kinship.

The voices of Andy, Cora, John, Joy, Kate, Leah, Mary, and Michael offer a counternarrative to a scholarly discourse on persistence that has been largely devoid of Filipina/o American voices. Their stories provided a glimpse into a journey of persistence that is ongoing and must be nurtured and validated every day. The challenges they faced mirrored many of those experienced by other ethnic minority college students—feelings of cultural dissonance, isolation, and invisibility—and reinforce the need to create more culturally responsive, inclusive, and diverse college campuses (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Kuh & Love, 2000; Maramba, 2008a; Museus, 2008a; Museus & Quayle, 2009; Rendón et al., 2000).

These Filipina/o American students' narratives of resilience and persistence also illustrate the continuing need to contest the myth of the model minority in higher education. Participants in this study repeatedly stressed the need for increased support for Filipina/o American students and understanding from peers, educators, and administrators about the challenges they face as people of color in higher education. Their narratives of persistence underscore that students' cultures and meaning-making

systems must be recognized as sets of knowledge and capital that can support them throughout their tenure as college students (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Family, identity, and supportive collective and individual agents were and continue to be significant factors in helping these students make it to Commencement and beyond.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings. I also share the participants' views on the meaning of the research and their participation, and finally, implications and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one: What challenges have Filipina/o American students encountered in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university? Participants identified a range of challenges they have faced as students at Ignatian University. Their challenges dealt primarily with their difficulties in integrating into the Ignatian campus both academically and socially. As the previous chapter detailed, Filipina/o American students' challenges largely centered around their feelings of cultural dissonance as students of color in a predominantly White university; their continued feelings of isolation, invisibility, and dissonance due to a lack of diversity in both the social and academic realms of the university; and their personal academic struggles.

Feelings of cultural dissonance. The eight participants described feelings of cultural dissonance as members of a racial and ethnic minority group (Filipina/o Americans) within a predominantly White university. This perceived tension between their home and pre-college culture and that of the university dominant culture became

evident to participants from the onset of their college careers. Despite attending a school in which 43.8% of students are racial or ethnic minorities, the participants shared that these feelings of cultural dissonance developed as a consequence of the sense of privilege held by the White majority and presence of social divisions among students due primarily to disparities in wealth. Participants reiterated that at Ignatian University, affluence and Whiteness often intersected; this created an environment in which displays and discussion of material wealth seemed to permeate the social milieu of the university and were intricately part of the university's dominant culture. It was this tension that students surmised had impacted their ability to relate to a good portion of the Ignatian University student community, and therefore had a negative impact on their ability to attach and develop a sense of belonging to the college. The experiences of Filipina/o American as racial and ethnic minorities in a predominantly White university echo previous research that has shown the negative effects feelings of cultural distance and tension have on the transition, adjustment, and persistence of students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (Guiffrida, 2002; Kuh & Love, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus & Quayle, 2009; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999).

Invisibility and marginality of Filipina/o Americans in higher education.

Participants shared that in addition to ongoing feelings of cultural dissonance, they experienced feelings of invisibility and marginality as racial and ethnic minority students, specifically as members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Participants articulated that the AAPI community at Ignatian was consistently overlooked

and underserved in both the academic and social realms. As Filipina/o Americans, they felt as though they were just “lumped together” with other AAPI subgroups and not recognized as their own distinct group by the larger university community. Combined with their feelings of cultural dissonance, participants painted a portrait of a Filipina/o American community struggling in silence with little attention or support offered to help them overcome these barriers to their persistence at Ignatian University.

For these students, the invisibility and marginality they felt was essentially borne out of everyday experiences on a campus. They came to believe that the dominant culture and population—individuals who were White and affluent—were given more privileges and were more valued by institutional policies, structures, and agents than those who were not part of the dominant culture. This was particularly evident to them in the ways in which student life activities such as Greek Life organizations and others consisting of predominantly White students received more visible signs of support including funding and publicity. The experiences of Filipina/o American participants mirrored closely the invisibility and marginality experienced by AAPI and Filipina/o American college students that has been documented throughout the scholarship on this racial subgroup (Buenavista, 2007, 2009, 2010; Castillo, 2002; Jacinto, 2002; Maramba, 2003, 2008a, 2008b; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Oliveros, 2009; Osajima, 1995; Suzuki, 2002).

In addition to being overlooked and marginalized in the social sphere of Ignatian University, participants noted that there was a glaring lack of representation and visibility of Filipina/o Americans and extensively AAPIs in the academic sphere of the university.

For the eight Filipina/o American participants, a lack of Filipina/o American faculty and staff members along with a gap in the academic program in the representation of Filipina/o American courses were clear indicators of their marginality at Ignatian. Participants stressed that though 5% of the student body identified in some part as Filipina/o American, they felt as though the community was dispersed and very spread out through campus life without a central space to bring them together. In their view, having more course offerings that gave weight to the Filipina/o American perspective as well as the hiring more advisors and faculty of Filipina/o descent would have demonstrated to them that their unique cultural background was valued and that they as a group were recognized members of the university community. Echoing findings from research that has shown the positive impact of such spaces on students of color, Filipina/o American participants in this study underscored the importance of having a student services office or a Filipina/o American studies program to show that Ignatian University was actively committed to fostering Filipina/o American student growth and viewed Filipina/o Americans as cultural assets to the community (Museus, Lam, et al., 2012).

Academic struggle. This study also revealed that the Filipina/o American participants have experienced academic difficulties throughout their college careers. Admissions of this kind contest the notion that Filipina/o Americans—who have been conceptualized as members of a model minority—are universally academically and professionally successful and do not experience such struggles (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2010; Wu, 2002). For these Filipina/o American students, the challenges they experienced in their academic life ranged from receiving a poor grade on

a test to failing a course. Multiple participants discussed that the social and academic difficulties they experienced caused them to consider departing from Ignatian University.

It is important to note that most of the participants were surprised by their own academic struggles. Having been academically successful in high school, the unexpected difficulty that college coursework presented to them caused self-doubt and panic. Several participants shared that in retrospect, their high school education had not adequately prepared them for college. Participants also surmised that in addition to increased rigor, learning to balance living on their own on a residential campus, maintaining relationships with their families while trying to build new friendships on campus, and added responsibilities such as part-time employment, made it difficult for them to allocate the same attention to their studies and perform at the same level as they had in high school.

Participants' experiences of academic challenge were also characterized by difficulty identifying and accessing resources to help them with these issues. Feelings of invisibility and marginality were augmented by their academic problems; students felt that there were not enough services or resources specified for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community to provide academic and personal counseling. They asserted that it was necessary to have academic and social support advisors and mentors of AAPI or Filipina/o American descent available for students from those backgrounds; they believed that such individuals could address the academic, social, and personal problems of Filipina/o American and AAPI perspectives with a level of empathy and cultural competency borne out of shared backgrounds and cultural understandings. Nadal (2009)

argued that due to the Filipina/o notion of *kapwa*, Filipina/os may feel more inclined to seek support from other Filipina/os or Filipina/o Americans. Additionally, acknowledging that Filipina/o American students may not seek help from a stranger in order to avoid *hiya* (shame), it is important to offer them resources who make them feel safe and understood. Moreover, the hesitations of these Filipina/o American students in accessing support services, including psychological or mental health counseling, underscored research that has shown AAPI students to demonstrate the lowest self-efficacy and self-esteem among student groups (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008); Asian American and Pacific Islander students are also more likely to use avoidant coping mechanisms to deal with personal issues. Combined with the stress from diminished academic performance and other pressures, it is critical that the needs of Filipina/o American students and AAPI students be addressed through increased support across academic and social programs.

Significance of diversity, institutional resources, and increased visibility.

Participants largely believed that the invisibility and marginality of Filipina/o Americans as well as other racial and ethnic minority students was the direct result of the lack of structural, interactional, and curricular diversity at Ignatian University. Though Ignatian University purports itself as a diverse community and is recognized as an emerging minority-serving institution (43.8% of students are racial or ethnic minorities; the school has proven success at graduating racial and ethnic minority students), participants believed that the benefits of structural diversity failed to play out in their everyday experiences.

The experiences of the eight Filipina/o American participants from Ignatian University illustrated the significance of campus culture and diversity on racial and ethnic minority students' transition, adjustment, and ultimately, integration into the college campus. Participants believed that ultimately most of the conflicts they experienced in the college setting that resulted in cultural dissonance could be mitigated and perhaps eliminated if Ignatian University engaged in more targeted efforts to build a culturally diverse and aware student body, faculty, and administration. Participants reiterated multiple times that the school was "predominantly White" even though Ignatian University has a diverse student body compared to most schools of similar size and cost. In their view, structural diversity was only one component of the diversity equation. Most relayed that experiences of cultural dissonance occurred when White peers' actions seemed to question or devalue the culture and perspectives of Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Each participant offered a different example to demonstrate how this sense of White privilege manifested itself—in classroom settings, in the social sphere, or in institutional practices and policies. They regularly used terms like "lack of awareness," "disconnect," "unspoken divisions," and "different upbringings" to describe the ways in which a seemingly diverse campus has been socially divided into groups primarily drawn along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Jayakumar and Museus (2012) asserted that an institution like Ignatian University with a "diversity-oriented culture" has espoused values of diversity, but only limited enacted diversity values. This type of campus is usually structurally diverse and has strategies in place to create some level of interactional, cocurricular, and curricular

diversity, but typically in confined and defined spaces. At Ignatian University, these confined and defined spaces were often in the form of student-initiated cultural or ethnic organizations, (limited) curricular offerings about ethnic or racial minorities, and programs produced by student services for racial or ethnic minority students. While well-intentioned, these types of institutions fail to holistically challenge the racial and ethnic inequalities extant on their campuses (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). This assessment matches that made by Filipina/o American undergraduates who participated in this study; in their view, while Ignatian University has taken efforts to include the voices of racial and ethnic minority students, they do not fully address the task of cultural integration for those students into the broader campus community. Truly creating a diverse and culturally integrated campus means facilitating these exchanges and interactions in all aspects of the university system (Museus, Lam, et al., 2012).

Participants believed that Ignatian could best address this problem by employing more Filipina/o American and Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty. The underrepresentation of AAPI faculty, staff, and administrators in institutions of higher education is an issue that has been receiving increasing attention from scholars. It has been surmised that, “While increasing educational attainment alone will not resolve this issue, it is important to recognize the role that expanded opportunities, increased support, and greater mentorship play in developing leadership pathways for AAPI college students. AAPI mentors can serve as “visible reminders that AAPIs can strive to achieve the highest levels of professional success” (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010, p. 13). Participants agreed with this

assessment and repeatedly suggested that the most immediate and effective ways the invisibility of not just Filipina/o Americans, but all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at Ignatian could be addressed would be through the hiring of more AAPI faculty, staff, and administrators. Expressed desires for increased diversity in the academic sphere acknowledged participants' awareness of the broader impact the lack of representation of AAPIs overall has on being able to enact significant change in the university. Further, it vocalized the need to provide AAPI students with more mentors and models of persistence to help them navigate the challenges they experience in college.

Further, the stories of struggle as presented by the Filipina/o American participants in this study demonstrated the need for Ignatian University to more aggressively foster what Museus (2007) called an "ethos of institutional responsibility" for the care and support of racial and ethnic minority students. While the university does have some strategies in place to address the needs of racial and ethnic minority students, it is clear that AAPI students do not feel that those strategies are necessarily intended to deal with *their* specific cultural, emotional, social, and academic needs. By taking on an ethos of institutional responsibility, Ignatian University could make it more clear to the students of color that the onus is not just on individuals to seek out services and support, but also the responsibility of the institution, faculty, and administrators to make students aware of these options and provide services. Museus suggested that this may be accomplished by having more proactive tracking of student progress as well as policies in place that create a culture in which students themselves understand the need and benefits

of being engaged in the community. This means cultivating “holistic and integrated systems of support” that include purposeful support, advocates, and engaging broader cultural networks of support such as campus subcultures (Museus, 2007). As this study shows, the importance of an integrated and intercultural approach in fostering racial and ethnic minority student persistence cannot be overstated. Participants’ calls to create a more diverse and inclusive campus and culture in order to foster racial and ethnic minority student success affirmed findings that have shown such approaches to be successful (Castillo, 2002; Choi, 2011; Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Guiffrida, Kiyama, Waterman, & Museus, 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2007, 2008b, 2009; Oliveros, 2009; Rendón et al., 2000).

The intersection of silence and marginality. What was most interesting about the discussions the participants and I had about the challenges they had encountered was the sense that they had mostly felt alone in their struggles, especially during their first year at Ignatian. Students were surprised to learn that other individuals involved in the study had considered transferring as a result of feelings of cultural dissonance and marginalization and the lack of diversity at Ignatian. Our conversations made evident that a culture of silence had developed among Filipina/o American students when it came to discussing their challenges and struggles. This culture of silence was a product of individual students’ dispositions, but also a campus culture that was, as several participants described, fairly passive in nature with regards to expressing dissatisfaction or difficulties. Several students commented that while Asian American and Pacific Islander undergraduates at Ignatian had a strong sense of solidarity and community, the

AAPI community at Ignatian University was more social in nature rather than one united under a political or reform agenda.

Mary reflected that it was not just Filipina/o Americans who remained on the fringes of the Ignatian community, but all AAPI students. Able to compare her own experience engaging with the Latino student community to her involvement with Filipina/o American students, Mary deduced that in contrast to Latino students, AAPI students at Ignatian appeared to be less vocal about issues of inequity on campus. Instead, she surmised that they just “kept going” and perhaps, even “put on an act,” assimilating into the dominant culture of Ignatian rather than bringing attention to themselves—an assessment with which Joy, Leah, and Michael agreed. John called the Ignatian AAPI community largely “apathetic” and as a student leader, struggled to get his Asian American and Pacific Islander peers to recognize some of the social justice issues that surrounded their own experiences as college students. This “invisibility from within,” is not unique to the experience of AAPIs at Ignatian University, but rather, a product of an increasingly diverse AAPI community that represented different immigration generations, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and political viewpoints (Osajima, 1995).

From the perspectives of the participants, the challenges of invisibility and broader social justice and political issues were addressed primarily in certain academic courses such as those offered by the Asian Pacific Studies or Asian Pacific American Studies department. They were also given attention at events produced by the Asian Pacific American Students Services office or amongst the AAPI student leaders during a

monthly roundtable meeting held to bring such issues to the attention of the broader AAPI community. Hence, while Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University were largely aware of the ways in which they had been rendered invisible by institutional practices and policies, they still struggled to find a way to correct those disparities beyond the appropriated spaces. In lieu of larger organized acts of resistance or protest by students, participants identified the ethnic and cultural organizations such as the Filipino Club as sites to problematize and strategize those changes. They believed that using their student leaders to serve as spokespersons and advocate on their behalf was more effective than mass resistance. In this vein, at the time this dissertation was being written, John as well as Andy were in the process of running for a senate position in the Ignatian University student government in order to be a voice for the AAPI student community on campus. Fortunately, one student was successfully elected. He hopes to join the financial board of the student government in order to ensure more equitable distribution of monetary resources.

As for the collective struggles experienced by Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University, the findings elucidated that the participants' experiences echo much of what has been uncovered in other educational research about the challenges faced by Filipina/o American undergraduates. They bolster the notion that Filipina/o Americans are "in the middle," mostly unrecognized as members of a marginalized group and thus, deprived of certain resources and services that could help improve Filipina/o American students' college experiences. Yet, the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian University point to a need for both improvement of

institutional policies and practices, and increased student-initiated organizing. Buenavista (2007) found that student-initiated programs provided Filipina/o American students a counterspace to promote community empowerment and collectivism. The student-run and organized retention program explored in her study shows the effectiveness of such a space to contest invisibility and marginality, promote activism, to interact with people from similar backgrounds, gain cultural nourishment, and seek advice and support. The stories of Filipina/o Americans at Ignatian University demonstrated the need to further develop subcultures that have proven successful in fostering community empowerment, such as the Filipino Club, Delta sorority, and Service Organizations, and do so in such a way that students feel they are actually agents of change and can transform institutional culture, practices, and policies that have kept Filipina/o Americans on the fringes and invisible. The role of such subcultures is further discussed in the next section.

Research question two: What strategies and resources have Filipina/o American students used to help them cope with these challenges and be successful in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees? Participants' stories of persistence are stories of resilience and community. All of the participants agreed that their survival at Ignatian was fostered by their systems of support—their parents, siblings, and relatives as well as their families on the Ignatian campus, that is, the campus subcultures to which they had developed connections and attachments.

Campus subcultures and individual and cultural agents. As postulated by Kuh and Love (2000) and later reinforced by several scholars including Museus and Quaye

(2009), the significance of university subcultures and campus individual and collective cultural agents in facilitating ethnic minority student persistence at predominantly White universities cannot be underestimated. Participants explained that they began to feel at “home” at Ignatian University once they found their “niche” and the part of the Ignatian community that validated their belonging, their culture and values, and personhood.

Participants found their belonging to Ignatian through distinct types of subcultures: an ethnic and cultural organization, an Asian-interest sorority, and community service-oriented organizations. Each of these subtypes of organizations offered something different that appealed to students’ individual passions and interests. In the case of the Filipino Club, it served as a site that allowed students to experience cultural familiarity, expression, and validation. For the two participants in Delta Sorority, it offered a space where they could build community through a sisterhood that emphasized pride and awareness of their Asian heritage. The participants who joined service-oriented organizations believed that these groups helped them to find attachment to the university by providing a way to contribute to the community and a sense of purpose and meaning rooted in the missions of their particular service organizations.

The role of subcultures in facilitating the persistence of Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University echoed research findings which have shown the positive role subcultures have on racial and ethnic minority students (Chen, 1998; Gonzalez, 2002; Guifrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, 2008a; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Participants reiterated on numerous occasions that before joining these subcultures, they had strong feelings of cultural dissonance,

disconnection from the larger campus community, and considered leaving college. Unable to find their “niche,” participants questioned how well they “fit” in with the college environment. These subcultures eventually provided them with a sense of belonging as well as connected them to the “family” and “home” they needed to feel secure and cared for at Ignatian. As Leah reflected, these subcultures have enduring importance for Filipina/o American college students because they provide students with a “niche, that community [where] you feel not only that you’re yourself, but you can grow in.”

College persistence and the influence of family and home. In addition to feeling at “home” and finding a “family” at Ignatian, participants’ college persistence was further encouraged by the support they received from home through their friends and family. Numerous studies underscore the important role family and friends from home play in the lives of ethnic and racial minority students’ persistence (Guiffrida, 2005; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). For the Filipina/o American undergraduates who engaged in this research, their stories of persistence were often woven together with their family’s own stories of persistence and resilience as immigrants in America. The participants affirmed the role their families, including immediate and extended relatives, had in keeping them motivated to do well academically, but also to make the most of the college experience. Their willingness to try new things, meet new people, join clubs, and take leadership roles was attributed to having familial encouragement to take on such additional experiences.

Participants shared that the affirmations they received from their families and friends were key in helping them to keep persisting even in times of challenge. They were quick to point out that though they sometimes experienced conflict with their parents over issues like parental versus student perceptions of residential college life or the need to meet home obligations, such conflicts eventually strengthened relationships between parents and children. Further, participants with older siblings often described them as sources of inspiration. For those with siblings who had completed college, they served as models of persistence. For the participants who will be one of the first or few in their families to obtain a college degree, working towards this achievement served as a source of pride and strength. Remembering this fact often helped participants to visualize the future and the greater meaning of achieving their goal of college completion.

By recognizing their families and home communities as sources of strength and support, participants of this study destabilized Tinto's (1993) notion that students must detach from their pre-college cultures in order to fully integrate in college and be persistent. As the stories of these Filipina/o American undergraduates have elucidated, family and friends from home continued to serve an important purpose: they were constant reminders to students of where they came from and the significance of what they hope to achieve with a college degree. In some cases, friends and family who had not completed college reminded the Filipina/o American undergraduate of the negative consequences of dropping out or choosing not to enroll. Participants were clear that even though these connections could not relate to them about the college experience, they

served as motivators who continually validated the student's aspirations through their support and friendship.

Research has shown that family and friends can be critical factors in racial and ethnic minority students' transition and adjustment to the university, especially early in the student's college career. They also serve as resources and an expanded support system for the remainder of the student's tenure at the university (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer et al., 2011). For students on the brink of departure, strong support from home connections can make the difference between persistence and departure. For students like Mary and Leah, who strongly considered transferring from Ignatian University, their parents' encouragement along with their on-campus support systems convinced them to commit to staying. As Mary shared, though finances have been a major concern for her family, her father urged her to stay at Ignatian and complete her degree, reminding her that it was not only possible, but also important. Mary is now committed to staying at Ignatian and plans to graduate by Fall 2013 (a semester early). Similarly, Leah noted that though her academic struggles caused conflict between her and her mother, she always knew that her mother would support her decisions. This helped Leah to make the choice to return to Ignatian, even if it meant that she would not be the academic "star" that she had once been.

Moreover, for Filipina/o American students, remaining close to friends and family provided a link to their Filipino heritage and culture. Participants relayed that they felt as though there were very few Filipina/o American students on campus and this only

augmented feelings of cultural dissonance. While the continual communication with parents and friends, visits, and accessibility of home sometimes made students homesick or long for their previous comforts, these connections eventually served to remind students of their values, beliefs, and the agency in being a representative on the Ignatian campus of a larger Filipina/o American community. This provided participants with a sense of pride and in some cases purpose, acknowledging that not all Filipina/os in the United States have the opportunity or means to attend college; therefore, their attainment of a college degree was important for not just one individual, but for the entire Filipina/o American community.

Institutional characteristics. Participants named certain institutional characteristics that had a positive influence on their ability to persist. The “small” size of the school was seen as a positive factor in student persistence because of the obvious benefits it provided—smaller teacher to student ratio, accessibility of professors, a higher likelihood of graduation in four years, and the presence of institutional resources and experiential opportunities. Students found that size of the institution facilitated what they believed to be increased engagement in student activities and leadership opportunities. Joy surmised that if she had gone to a larger, public university, she probably would not have done as well as she had at Ignatian:

I don't think I would have survived in a really big school...I'm very reserved and it takes me awhile to open up to other people. So, by going to a small school I guess you see people around more and by having a campus where most freshman live on campus the first year, it helps to build that bond with other people and have more chances to hang out with everyone. And, I guess it promotes more involvement on campus whereas if you have a bigger school, as it happens with any organization or company or school, the bigger it is, the less forced you are to be involved and people don't feel that sense of responsibility.

Michael, Kate, and Mary concurred with this statement, sharing that they would have been more likely to stick to a small group of friends or just merely “fly under the radar” at a bigger school. Instead, a more manageable college size gave them the chance to take on leadership roles and become more engaged in the campus community.

In some cases, they also felt that in addition to being at a “smaller” school, living on a campus contributed to students’ level of involvement and attachment. Michael shared that one of the main reasons he chose Ignatian was so that he would not have to commute from his family home and attend a local state university. This was also true for John who relayed that he was considering commuting from home to reduce the costs of attending Ignatian. Yet, John was very hesitant to do so because he felt that it might stifle his ability to engage fully in activities and events on campus—opportunities that made him feel attached to the university and surrounded by people who supported his commitment to graduating from college.

Participants also recognized that attending a medium-sized, private university had some influence on their ability to persist. In most cases, students defined this as being able to access the courses and resources that would allow them to graduate in four years. Several participants shared stories of friends and relatives attending community colleges and public universities. They recognized that the significant budget crises facing these institutions negatively impacted their peers’ abilities to obtain the courses needed to fulfill graduation requirements. At Ignatian, participants did not experience such setbacks to the same degree. All of the participants, with the exception of transfer student John, were on track to graduate within four years and in Mary’s case, in three and

a half. If nothing else, the private university designation was an important one for students because of the way in which resources were controlled. Though students raised issue with the lack of services for Filipina/o American and other AAPI students and a culturally inclusive curriculum, they did not contest the fact that they were in a stronger position to finish their degree “on time” in comparison to many of their peers attending public institutions. These assessments were consistent with data that showed students attending private universities have a higher percentage of completing a degree within five years of entry (57.8%) than those attending public universities (43.7%) (College Board, 2009).

In addition to the evaluation of the above characteristics, what also makes this study unique is the finding that students felt the Catholic identity of the college and their own identification with Catholicism had some impact on their persistence. Little research has been done in this area and most has analyzed the evolution of students’ religious and spiritual beliefs as a consequence of attending college (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Lee, 2002a, 2002b). In the case of some of the Filipina/o Americans included in this study, their Catholic beliefs offered a set of values and principles that influenced their involvement in certain student organizations and activities—groups that helped to solidify their commitment to stay at Ignatian. This was evident in students who related that their Catholic faith helped to inform their decision to get involved in service-oriented organizations, similar to findings that showed a positive correlation between service and spirituality (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant et al., 2003). For other participants, their faith and religious engagement offered them a sense of comfort

and release from the stress of their academic and social obligations. And for others, it was another space where they found community and belonging through collective religious expression, serving as a peer group with which they identified (Lee, 2002).

The exploration of the role of Catholicism in the lives of Filipina/o American college students was unique to this study because most research on Filipina/o Americans in higher education has focused on the experiences of students at public universities and factors that impacted their persistence at those sites. By looking at the experiences of Filipina/o American Catholic undergraduates at a Catholic university, this research was able to identify that this aspect of the students' cultural identity did provide some positive impact on students' commitment to graduate. Though these findings are nascent, they provide a starting point from which to continue exploration of the connection between religious beliefs, developing or declining spirituality, and persistence at a Catholic institution of higher education.

Implications

This research study was undertaken to provide Filipina/o American undergraduates with the opportunity bring voice to their experiences at a private, Catholic, and predominantly White university. Through the exploration of their own journeys, participants came to recognize and become critical of the attitudes, behaviors, and systems that had failed to recognize their struggles as ethnic minority college students.

Implications for students. This study offered Filipina/o American youth the opportunity to understand the experiences of Filipina/o American college students. With

this insight from models of persistence, it was hoped that students considering postsecondary education will be able to recognize that though there will inevitably be challenges in college, with the right support and mindset those challenges can be overcome. The stories shared by the participants can serve as a “guide” for students entering college; their narratives emphasized the importance of engaging in campus life through meaningful activities and subcultures, especially for Filipina/o Americans on a predominantly White campus. As all of the participants reflected, “getting involved” and finding their niche on campus was key to remaining resilient in the face of both academic and social challenges. Moreover, this research showed the importance of utilizing support services. Many of the participants discussed their reluctance to use such services because they were shy, embarrassed, or unsure of how those services could really help them. These same participants acknowledged that looking back, they should have accessed those support services and agents such as peer mentors, the Ethnic and Intercultural Office administrators, tutors, professors, and mental health counselors. Students’ hesitations in using such services highlighted the prevalence of *hiya* in Filipina/o culture, but also the stigma individuals may attach to seeking help from a therapist or counselor. Therefore, those preparing Filipina/o Americans to attend college should stress that such services are beneficial to a student’s emotional well-being and consequently, persistence.

In addition, this study underscored the importance of support from networks outside of the university to student persistence. While participants in this research identified those networks to consist primarily of friends and family from home, this could

be expanded to show the power of pre-college support programs and other networks that mentor high school students preparing to go to college and encourage students to continue that support once they are there. These findings imply that we must recognize that Filipina/o American students come from “cultures of collectivism” and should not be expected to break away from their families and home communities in order to become part of the college community (Guiffrida et al., 2012). Instead, family and friends from home must be viewed as keys factors in the success of Filipina/o American students in college.

This study also showed the importance of students becoming engaged in the community in order to facilitate persistence. Institutions share the responsibility of creating inclusive and welcoming college environments, offering meaningful opportunities for racial and ethnic minority students to become integrated into the community. For Filipina/o American students at Ignatian, becoming involved *and* engaged enabled them to claim their place in the university community. For some students, this included leadership positions within the community that allowed them to advocate for others. By holding positions of leadership, students led for transformative change and social justice on their campuses. Findings from this study suggested that Filipina/o American students are more cognizant of their own agency and ability to serve as agents of change.

Implications for secondary school educators and counselors. Teranishi (2010) reported that among a sample of AAPI college students, 81.5% of Filipina/o Americans attended colleges with low selectivity, the highest percentage among those surveyed.

Further, most Filipina/o Americans attended a four-year public college (43.6%, the highest percentage among the ethnic groups). Of all the groups, Filipina/o Americans had the lowest percentage enrolled at a four-year private university (12.7%). As reviewed earlier, Filipina/o American students were the most likely to apply to a college based on its proximity to home and cost (Teranishi, 2010). The experiences of the participants in this study showed that those same factors played a role when it came time to decide where to attend college. This study emphasized the importance for secondary school educators and counselors who are assisting Filipina/o American students in the college choice process to understand the strength of these factors, but also help students to review college options also based on personal fit and cultural match with an institution. The feelings of cultural dissonance experienced by the Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian have the possibility to emerge at other predominantly White universities. Still, students understood how to navigate those feelings once they found activities and academic programs that matched their interests and helped them feel as though they “fit” in with the institution.

Counselors and educators must help high school students preparing to apply to colleges to identify schools that have programs, curriculum, and activities that will match the student’s needs and help them to more easily attach to the university. Using the experiences of the Filipina/o American undergraduates in this study will also help counselors and educators of Filipina/o American high school students to prepare parents and other support figures for the challenges their student may experience in college. This

will help to initiate dialogue between students and their out-of-school support networks and, hopefully, build strategies for support early in the students' college career.

Implications for higher education institutions and practitioners. The findings of this study support previous research findings that have asserted the importance of ethnic minority students' precollege experiences and cultures in helping them to make sense of, understand, and eventually acclimate to the university setting (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Each of the eight participants represented a range of experiences at Ignatian University. Though sharing a common cultural heritage as Filipina/o Americans, participants brought with them to college diverse parent educational backgrounds, views on college, interests, major choices, and academic readiness. The Filipina/o American undergraduates who participated in this study recognized the need for an increase in support services for Asian American and Pacific Islander students, who are often, as Leah put it, "swept under the rug," even in structurally diverse college campuses such as Ignatian University. Thus, the findings of this study reinforce the need for college administrators and other higher education personnel to look past the myth of the model minority and notions of a homogenous Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Moreover, this research supports the notion that structural diversity on college campuses is not enough to make racial and ethnic minority students feel attached and welcomed at the university. Diversity must be an enacted and not merely espoused value—students must see that it is valued in student life programming and the academic program, truly integrated into the fabric of the university culture, but most importantly,

valued by their fellow students and the institutional agents with whom they interact. Institutions of higher education, even one that is diversity-oriented like Ignatian University, need to regularly reevaluate and reconsider their diversity efforts to ensure that they are having measurable and effective outcomes, especially on students of color. Universities must regularly review their curricular offerings to ensure that they include culturally inclusive and relevant courses, especially for students of color. Offering courses on Filipina/o American history, culture, and language are opportunities to give visibility, validation, and cultural nourishment to Filipina/o American students.

Further, predominantly White universities such as Ignatian University should make more concerted efforts to increase Asian American and Pacific Islander presence in their faculty and staff. The paucity of AAPI professors and other personnel at Ignatian University signaled to students a lack of care and commitment to providing them with examples of success and mentors. As other studies have suggested, to transform institutions, cultures, and practices that devalue and maintain the invisibility of AAPIs, it is necessary to have a critical mass of AAPI educators and leaders to serve as advocates for students (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010). Increasing the number of AAPI faculty and staff, as suggested by the participants in this study, will give AAPI and extensively Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University a sense of validation, pride, and community that is often difficult for them to find in a predominantly White institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study reiterate the need to reevaluate, retransform, and reconstruct the current discourse on Filipina/o Americans in higher education. As a group who has been understudied and overlooked in educational research, the stories of Filipina/o American college students demand to be heard and recognized.

There are several recommendations for future research. First, comparative research between the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in private, Catholic, and predominantly White universities and those in public universities could provide insight as to how context and culture impact student persistence. Participants in this study believed their experiences at a medium-sized, private university differed from what they knew of their peers' experiences at large public universities and community colleges. A study that compares student experiences could provide valuable information about how the persistence processes are similar or different based on the institution type. Future research could also examine whether certain institutional characteristics (public/private; residential/commuter; size; location; diversity of student, faculty, and personnel) have any measurable impact on student persistence.

Another area of research that could be further examined is the experience of Filipina/o American gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, questioning and other sexual minorities (LGBTQ) on a Catholic university campus. This was addressed just once during this study with participants in the focus group. Although participants knew of individuals who openly identified as LGBTQ at Ignatian and were aware that the college had a LGBTQ Student Support Services Office (one of only two Jesuit

institutions to have such an office), they were unable to elaborate on the experience of being a Filipina/o American LGBTQ student on a Catholic campus. As more college students openly identify as part of the LGBTQ community, it is increasingly relevant in higher education to understand how colleges can better support these students, especially religiously affiliated institutions. We must interrogate whether religiously affiliated universities or schools that perpetuate White, and heterosexual (male) norms are competently and holistically supporting LGBTQ students. Recognizing their unique positionalities, researchers and practitioners must ask, “How are the challenges Filipina/o American LGBTQ students face at a Catholic university unique or similar to those shared by the Filipina/o Americans in this study?”

Another area for future research should identify how college experiences and persistence strategies differ for Filipina/o American students from different immigration generations. With the exception of Leah, participants in this research were born in the United States. How does being a Filipina/o born and raised abroad impact how they construct their “families” on the college campus? Do they find them through the same types of collective and individual cultural agents as Filipina/o Americans from second, third, and fourth generations?

Finally, though this research focused on Filipina/o American students who have persisted, it is equally important to understand the experiences and stories of Filipina/o Americans who have dropped out or chosen not to attend college, especially those that are second generation and beyond. As the percentage of degree holders drops between the first and second generation, it is important to know what factors aid them in their

persistence, but also what has caused students to decide against entering postsecondary education or to leave and not complete their degrees. This possible direction for research would acquire important information not only for Filipina/o American youth and their parents, but for secondary teachers, higher education practitioners, and education policy makers.

Sharing Stories of Persistence as a Work of Social Justice

The imperative to conduct this study was developed out of a concern for the stagnation in degree attainment for Filipina/o Americans, especially U.S.-born individuals. A group that has been largely ignored in scholarship, especially in the discourse on student achievement in higher education, it was necessary to produce a work that used Filipina/o American voices to tell the story of Filipina/o American postsecondary schooling experiences. Bell (2007) surmised that often, “‘common sense’ knowledge and assumptions make it difficult to see oppression clearly...and are often invisible in daily life” (p. 1). Consequently, as educators we must learn how to both recognize and address oppression in order to create a “society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (Bell, 2007, p. 1). In the case of the Filipina/o American college students in this study, addressing the invisibility they have endured in college and recognizing their resilience is a beginning towards the goal of social justice for the Filipina/o American community at their institution and in society at large.

The participants in this study were aware of the unjust treatment and oppressive practices they had been subjected to, yet found difficulty identifying ways to name and

change them. Through our dialogue together, participants were able to articulate and eventually contemplate what they could do to ameliorate not only their conditions for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the overall Ignatian community. Instead of continuing to accept the status quo that has privileged the perspectives and values of the dominant culture, these individuals were learning to more actively challenge them in both individual and collective approaches. More importantly, through the use of their voices, they were asserting their right to be treated as valued members of their campus community. While this work on its own will not change the oppressive conditions extant in institutions of higher education that have marginalized Filipina/o Americans, it was a work rooted in social justice and advocacy. By interrogating and sharing their stories of persistence, this research contributes to a growing body of literature that highlights these inequities and informs a broader audience of their serious implications for the college experiences and outcomes of Filipina/o American students.

Co-Constructing Meaning

As stated earlier in this dissertation, the study was informed by a critical constructivist epistemological lens and Pinayist praxis. The research was approached with the notion that the Filipina/o American participants would be able to share their own stories of persistence as well as reflect on their meaning in the context of both their own lives, but also, meaning in the greater context of Filipina/o Americans in higher education.

The most commonly raised theme throughout our discussions was about the challenges they faced as students dealing with their feelings of cultural dissonance and

invisibility at Ignatian University as Filipina/o Americans. For many students, their cultural dissonance was exacerbated by their daily interactions with students. They portrayed the Ignatian University community as generally “friendly” and “nice,” but an underlying sense of privilege among the student body created an unspoken sense of alienation and otherness from a predominantly White and affluent student body. For most of the participants, this dissonance and disconnect caused them to recognize their status as a “minority” and person of color in higher education. In many cases, though this alienation from the broader, predominantly White student body was a struggle, it also provided an opportunity for them to take more pride and grow in their identities as Filipina/o Americans and as persons of color. Cora shared that prior to attending Ignatian, while she was proud of being Filipina, she had never really thought about her culture or what it meant to be Filipina in a context that did not have a plethora of Filipina/os. She said:

I feel like I was very uncultured in high school because I was never forced to or put in the situation to. I think PCN for sure, in terms of the Filipino Club...it opened my eyes to like what the Filipino culture has to offer.

Michael had a similar perspective, sharing that in his hometown and pre-college life, he was very much surrounded by Filipina/os and proud of his heritage, but never really knew “anything about Filipino culture besides food my mom cooks and stuff like that.” But suddenly, being a minority on a predominantly White campus made him reevaluate his passivity; his Filipina/o identity and culture became more important for him to understand:

Everything I know [about Filipino culture] either I picked up from the Filipino Club, from my parents, from going to the Philippines, stuff like that. But I feel

like there is so much more that I can learn, that I want to learn, I want to know about my culture and my heritage...because I feel like if you don't know about it, then you're going to [pauses] not lose it, but lose its meaning or the importance of heritage...it's like this Bob Marley quote, "In this great future, you can't forget your past."

As participants reflected on the challenges they faced with their feelings of cultural dissonance in a predominantly White university, they also revealed that a culture of silence within their own groups of friends and possibly within the larger Asian American and Pacific Islander community existed, preventing them from discussing many of these issues openly. Participants shared that the research setting had provided them with the opportunity to discuss these issues in a more trenchant manner. Joy divulged:

I guess it was really nice to really think about these things. I've always had them in the back of my mind and I've always had my opinions. It was really nice to share them with someone...it was really nice to [pauses] raise awareness within myself about [pauses] how this is really how I feel and just vocalizing my opinions to someone without having to worry about their bias or whatnot.

Michael also talked about how his growing awareness:

I guess since we've started this, I've become more [pauses] in a sense more aware of it. You know? Like with the whole like, you know, I guess I've always been aware and actively known about Asian representation on campus and all that stuff. But since this whole thing started...I guess I've become more active with the subject.

Michael went on to say that he continued his participation in the student intercultural council and was excited to provide his input for an upcoming conference for students at Ignatian on topics relating to interculturalism. He also successfully led publicity efforts for this year's Pilipino Cultural Night, which sold out at 500 attendees, and resulted in a feature story about the show in *The Ignatian*. Michael's growing awareness made him even more committed to leading the Filipina/o American community towards more

critical and effective action to destabilize conditions that oppressed and marginalized them.

Cora reflected on her growing consciousness and how our discussions had helped her to see her personal struggles as part of a broader experience, but one that students rarely spoke of:

I feel like when I left after the first time we talked, I think I just felt very “wow.” It’s something that I really don’t talk about a lot and it’s different, but comforting to talk about too. Even though it’s kind of new territory, it’s something that I’ve been living, so it’s a nice reflection type thing. I feel like I want to have more conversations like this with just my peers in a more casual setting...I think it is something no one wants to talk about or feels inclined to unless it’s in a setting kind of like this or in a class setting...I think [people] ignore it...or they don’t think it’s a big deal [pauses] because we’re living it. We’re surviving here.

Cora’s statement pointed to the culture of silence that students experienced when it came to discussing their feelings of alienation and marginalization at Ignatian and her desire to change it. In a paper she presented to her Race & Ethnic Relations sociology course, Cora shared with her classmates—most of whom were White—her raised consciousness and willingness to speak out about the invisibility and struggles of Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Ignatian:

During my dissertation interview, I was in a sense forced to really reflect on my experience here at Ignatian. It made me think about Yuri Kochiyama...“She was apolitical, provincial, naïve, and ultrapatriotic...Yuri’s color-blind worldview did not yet reflect a sophisticated understanding of how social conditions were affected by race, class, gender, or immigration status, even as her life was shaped by these factors...WWII inaugurated Yuri’s racial awakening. For the first time she began to perceive race discrimination’ (Fujino, 2005).” Similar to Yuri, I came to Ignatian rather blind to race. I grew up in a diverse part of the Bay Area where race honestly didn’t seem to matter...When I arrived at Ignatian, everything changed for me...I was the minority and I felt it. I didn’t feel comfortable nor did I feel like I could relate to anyone. Joining the Filipino Club and Delta made me feel comfortable and at home here at Ignatian.

Speaking so candidly about her experience in front of an audience of peers was a huge step forward for Cora, who had often been too shy or afraid to speak out in class about these types of issues. Being involved in the research process gave Cora the forum to verbalize what had so long gone unspoken. In breaking her own silence, she was able to share her story—successes and struggles—with other peers who may have never had the chance to know otherwise. With this heightened sense of agency, Cora believed that, as a leader in her sorority, she could be a change agent for others, helping them to recognize these inequities and encourage her fellow sisters to work together towards social justice for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at Ignatian University.

Mary also spoke of how her participation in the study and opportunities to dialogue openly with other Filipina/o American students about these issues compelled her to break the culture of silence. Mary found comfort and solidarity in knowing that other students shared similar struggles and had found ways to work through them and persist. Critical dialogue with her peers also helped Mary to see the value of her voice as a bicultural woman in the discourse on the experiences of students of color in higher education. During our final conversation, Mary said that the conversations “made me consider that a lot more, my role as a minority. I didn’t really think about how important my voice was until this conversation.” In a follow-up email, Mary wrote:

Next semester I will be taking a class on Art and Social Justice. Part of the class is creating artwork inspiring social justice and also devoting our time to art tutoring at a nearby school. My involvement in these interviews definitely sparked my interest in using art as a medium for sharing my opinions on political and social issues.

Along with the email, Mary shared some of her artwork. These paintings beautifully conveyed Mary's pride in her Filipina-Mexican heritage, but also her growing racial and social consciousness as two pieces were portraits of farm workers. From the experience of being a participant in this research, Mary was also able to gain something else—the knowledge that she was not alone in feeling disconnected and isolated from the larger Ignatian community. By engaging in this process, Mary was able to dialogue with other Filipina/o American students about the issues she faced, issues that had led her to want to transfer out of the university. Instead of applying to transfer, Mary used the knowledge she had constructed with others about the shared difficulties of Filipina/o American undergraduates at Ignatian to help her make a decision to stay. Realizing that others had overcome feelings of doubt, cultural dissonance, and isolation to persist at Ignatian made her more confident in her own abilities to do the same and achieve her goal—to be one of the first members of her family to earn a college degree.

For Leah, the opportunity to reflect on her experience at Ignatian provided her with an enhanced perspective of the meaning of her impending graduation from college. She recalled the moment during her sophomore year when she recommitted to completing her degree at Ignatian and its renewed meaning:

I prayed about it actually. And um [pauses] I woke up the very next day and decided to pack my stuff for second semester. [Confidently] And I don't regret that decision because I found my passion. It was a struggle to get there, but I mean, I guess when I look back and once I have like family or whatever, I could be like, "Hey, yeah, I struggled too. And if you're struggling, it's normal. You're just trying to figure out what you want to do." And I feel like this is the time to struggle, this is the time to make your mistakes, you know? You do just get out of it. It's the way, yes, you make mistakes, but they don't define you. It's the way that you deal with them.

Leah's story of struggle and resilience embodied the purpose of this research—to recognize and validate the experiences of Filipina/o Americans in higher education. Through this research, students were able to exert their voice and tell others their stories of persistence—a story they at times did not even realize needed to be told.

For the participants of this study, their participation and the knowledge we gained and co-constructed together begged the question, “What do we from here?” Their participation allowed them to recognize how they contributed to the persistence of other students, especially first-year Filipina/o American students who were struggling with their own transition and adjustment to the university. Leading by example, sharing words of advice, giving the simple affirmation “You’ll get through this”—participants realized that through such acts they could serve as a source of support for others going through difficult times. Through fellowship, friendship, solidarity, and leadership these participants recommitted daily to their own journey to graduation day as well as to the success of the entire Filipina/o American community at Ignatian and beyond.

Final Reflections of the Researcher

As a second generation Filipina American, this research forced me to reflect and reevaluate my own journey as a college student at a Catholic and predominantly White university and the journey that ultimately led me to conduct this work. With this awareness, I felt it was my responsibility to be always mindful of the trust and courage it took participants to share their stories of struggle and persistence with me. I made certain that they knew how much I valued their openness and that their voices and stories were vital—not just to me or this project, but to the larger Filipina/o American community,

especially for Filipina/o American youth who may be struggling themselves to find meaning and purpose in their journeys through higher education.

Throughout the process, I was continually humbled by their willingness to speak candidly and from the heart, and the trust they had given me to share their stories. As I got to know them through our conversations and spending time together at different events and gatherings on campus, I realized that they endeavored and worked hard to take care of one another and sought to build a sense of community and family with those around them, regardless of whether they were Filipina/o or not. I learned that the Filipina/o American student community at Ignatian University engaged in the process of relove for one another on a daily basis. Their collective story of persistence was the strongest testament of that commitment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form Interview & Focus Group Participants

Date of Preparation: May 17, 2011

Loyola Marymount University

Informed Consent Form for Research Study on Filipina/o American Undergraduate Student Experiences

- 1) I hereby authorize Angelica Bailon, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University to include me in the following research study: "Narratives of Persistence: Filipina/o American Undergraduates in a Private, Catholic University."
- 2) I have been asked to participate in a research project which is designed to explore the experiences of Filipina/o American undergraduates at Loyola Marymount in order to better understand the challenges they face in their college careers as well as the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. I understand that the study will last for approximately 3 -5 hours over the course of 3 months. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- 3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a Filipina/o American undergraduate student in my sophomore, junior, or senior year of study at Loyola Marymount University.
- 4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be asked to participate in (2) individual interviews and a focus group that will be used to explore my college experiences and dialogue with other participants about the challenges faced by Filipina/o American college students and what strategies have been used to overcome those challenges and be successful.

The investigator(s) will facilitate the (2) individual interviews (one which will last 90 minutes to 2 hours; the second which will last for no more than one hour) and a focus group (which will last no more than 90 minutes) and ask questions that focus on building an understanding of the college experience from the Filipina/o American student perspective. These procedures have been explained to me by the researcher, Angelica Bailon, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University. I understand that I may contact the researcher at any

time to discuss my involvement in this research study and the procedures carried out as part of it.

- 5) I understand that I will be videotaped, audiotaped and/or photographed in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.
- 6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: embarrassment or discomfort at describing experiences that have been challenging for me in my college experience and the potential discomfort as a result of sharing such information with others in the focus group.
- 7) I understand that as part of this study I will participate in a focus group. I understand that as part of this focus group, I will discuss with other research participants topics regarding the college student experience at Loyola Marymount. I understand that the information shared by myself and other participants must not be shared outside of the focus group and should remain confidential.
- 8) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are providing insight in the field of educational research on how to better support Filipina/o American college students.
- 9) I understand that Angelica Bailon, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University who can be reached at abailon@lion.lmu.edu or 626-825-7225 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study. I may also contact Dr. Edmundo Litton, faculty advisor, at elitton@lmu.edu with any questions or concerns.
- 10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
- 11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to (e.g., my future medical care at LMU.)
- 12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
- 13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.
- 14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

- 15) I understand that I will receive no financial compensation for my participation in this study.
- 16) I understand that I may request a copy of the final research document (dissertation) upon its completion.
- 17) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact John Carfora, Ed.D. Interim Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at john.carfora@lmu.edu.
- 18) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Subject's Name (Print) _____

Appendix B

Cover Letter to Survey

September 2011

Dear Student:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The purpose of the following survey is to gather information about Filipina/o American students at this college. Please read each question carefully and clearly mark the response that applies to you. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please be honest and accurate in your responses. All responses will remain confidential and will only be viewed by the researcher for research purposes.

When you have finished the survey, please bring the completed forms to Angelica Bailon, primary researcher and doctoral candidate at Loyola Marymount University.

Sincerely,

Angelica Bailon
Doctoral Candidate, Loyola Marymount University
(email) abailon@lion.lmu.edu
(ph) 626-825-7225

Appendix C

Survey Distributed to Filipino Club

1. Do you identify yourself as a Filipina/o or Filipina/o American?

- Yes
- No

2. Age: _____

3. Gender:

- Female
- Male

4. Class level:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

5. Major: _____

6. Minor: _____

7. GPA:

- 3.75 – 4.0
- 3.5 – 3.74
- 3.0 – 3.49
- 2.5 – 2.99
- 2.0 – 2.49
- Less than 2.0

8. Status:

- Full-time student
- Part-time student

9. **Did you transfer to this college from another college or university?**

- Yes
- No

9a. If **yes**, what year?

- 2008 or earlier
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011

9b. If **yes**, from what type of school?

- Trade or vocational school
- 2-year community college
- 4-year public university
- 4-year private university

10. **What type of high school did you attend?**

- Private (non-religious)
- Public (traditional, *not* charter or magnet)
- Public (charter or magnet)
- Catholic
- Other religious _____
- Other _____

11. **Where do you currently reside?**

- With parents/guardian
- With relatives
- On-campus residential hall/apartments
- Off-campus housing

12. **How many miles is this college from your permanent home?**

- 1 – 10
- 11 – 50
- 51 - 100
- 101-500
- Over 500

If you are from out of state or out of the country, please list your home state or country of origin _____

13. **Were you born in the United States?**

- Yes (if yes, go forward to question #14)
- No

If no, what country were you born in and what year did you come to the U.S.? _____

How old were you when you came? _____

14. **What generation do you consider yourself?**

- First generation (born and raised in the Philippines or outside of U.S.; immigrated recently [age 12 and older])
- 1.5 generation (born and raised in the Philippines or outside of U.S.; immigrated before the age of 12)
- Second generation (born and raised in U.S., or born in Philippines, but immigrated here when I was 5 years old or younger)
- Third generation (My parents are second generation)
- Fourth or higher generation

15. **My father's ethnicity is** _____.

16. **My mother's ethnicity is** _____.

17. **Do you speak a Pilipino language?**

- Yes
- No

17a. If **yes**, please name the language (such as Tagalog, Ilocano, Visayan):_____

17b. If **yes**, do you speak the language:

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely

18. Which best describes the community in which you grew up (select one):

- I grew up in a community that was predominantly African American
- I grew up in a community that was predominantly Asian American
- I grew up in a community that was predominantly Caucasian/European American
- I grew up in a community that was predominantly Hispanic/Latino American
- I grew up in a community that was predominantly Middle Eastern American
- I grew up in a community that was predominantly Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- I grew up in a community that was a mix of different ethnic groups
- Other (please describe)_____

19. How would you describe your family structure?

- Single parent household (mother or father only)
- Raised by another relative (such as an aunt, uncle, or grandparent)
- Raised in foster care
- Raised by two parents (mother and father, two mothers, two fathers, two adoptive parents, etc.)

20. What best describes your religious affiliation (select one)?

- Catholic
- Non-Catholic Christian (such as Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian)
- Muslim
- Buddhist

- Other religion
- No religion

21. What is the highest level of education that your mother completed?

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- Associate's degree (A.A. or equivalent)
- Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S., MBA, etc.)
- Doctoral or Professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)
- Don't know

21b. Did she complete college or graduate school in the U.S.?

- Yes
- No

22. What is the highest level of education that your father completed?

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- Associate's degree (A.A. or equivalent)
- Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S., MBA, etc.)
- Doctoral or Professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)
- Don't know

22b. Did he complete college or graduate school in the U.S.?

- Yes
- No

23. **My parents' estimated combined income is:**

- Less than \$24,999
- \$25,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$ 59,999
- \$60,000 - \$79,999
- \$80,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$250,000
- More than \$250,000

24. **What type of financial aid did you use this academic year?**

- None, did not apply
- None, applied and was turned down
- Aid which need not be repaid (grants, scholarships, military funding, etc)
- Aid which must be repaid (loans, etc)

25. **Do you have concerns about your financial ability to pay for your education?**

- Yes (not sure I will have enough funds to complete)
- Some (I probably will have enough funds to complete)
- None (I am confident I will have enough funds to complete)

26. **Are you currently working?**

- Yes
- No

26a. If you are **currently working**, where do you work:

- On-Campus
- Off-Campus

26b. If you are **currently working**, select your employment status:

- Full-Time
- Part-Time

27. **Attending this college was:**

- My first choice
- One of my top choices
- One of my last choices
- My last choice
- Not my choice

28. **What is the highest degree you expect to obtain?**

- Bachelor's degree (BA or BS)
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S., MBA, etc.)
- Doctoral or Professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)

29. **Briefly describe your post college goals or aspirations (i.e. career or professional path)?**

If you are a first year student at LMU, please skip and proceed to question #31.

**30. As it relates to your experience at this university, how satisfied are you with
(please mark one response per row):**

	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
The quality of instruction at the university?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of the professors at this university?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of education you receive at this university?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of student services?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The overall sense of campus community?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your overall campus experience?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your decision to attend this university?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. Please list the activities or organizations you are involved in, as well as any leadership positions you hold in those groups or activities:

32. Please list any honors or distinctions that you have received during your college career (example: GPA, Dean's List, fellowships, department awards):

33. Have you ever taken a leave of absence from this university?

Yes

No

INTERVIEW SIGN UP

In addition to this survey, the dissertation study aims to give voice to the perspectives of Filipina/o American students on their college experiences. If you would like to participate in this study as an interview participant, please provide your name, phone number, and email address. Participating in this portion of the study will entail 3 – 5 hours of your time in total over the course of the semester.

Contact Information:

First & Last Name: _____

Phone number: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Times you are available for interview:

Monday: _____

Tuesday: _____

Wednesday: _____

Thursday: _____

Friday: _____

Saturday: _____

Sunday: _____

THANK YOU! Your participation in this study is very important and vital! If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Angelica Bailon, doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Loyola Marymount University, at abailon@lion.lmu.edu. All responses will be confidential and will only be viewed by the researcher.

Appendix D

Qualitative Research Participants

Participant	Gender	Year of Study	Major	Generation	Mother's Education	Father's Education
Cora	Female	Senior	Psychology	2 nd	Bachelor's	Bachelor's (U.S.)
Leah	Female	Senior	Sociology	1 st	Bachelor's	Associate's
Joy	Female	Senior	Business	2 nd	Bachelor's	Bachelor's
John	Male	Junior	Political Science/ Asian Pacific Studies	2 nd	Bachelor's	Bachelor's
Kate	Female	Junior	Physics	2 nd	Associate's	Some college
Michael	Male	Junior	Marketing	2 nd	Bachelor's (U.S.)	Associate's (U.S.)
Andy	Male	Soph.	Political Science/ Sociology	2 nd	Bachelor's	Bachelor's
Mary	Female	Soph.	Studio Arts (Graphic Design)	3 rd	High school graduate	Some college (U.S.)

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Entrance Interview

I. Life History Information

1. Briefly describe yourself.
 - a. Place of birth
 - b. Age you came to United States, if applicable
 - c. Where you grew up, describe.
 - d. Family structure and family characteristics
 - e. College student generation
 - f. Socioeconomic status
 - g. Year
 - h. Major
 - i. Activities on campus

II. Pre-College Experience

1. What factors played a role in your choice to come to this college?
2. What were the challenges you faced in making that choice and how did you resolve them?

III. College Experience

1. Describe your transition into college life. What was your adjustment like as a new student?
2. Was your first year what you had anticipated it would be like? If yes, please describe. If not, please discuss how it was different.
3. How would you describe your college experience so far (academically and socially)?
4. What challenges have you faced as a student?
5. How do you think these challenges are similar to those of other students? Different than those of other students?
6. What did you do/have you done to overcome those challenges?

IV. Post-College Aspirations

1. What are your aspirations beyond college?
2. How do you think that you have worked to be successful at achieving those goals?

Focus Group

The primary purpose of the focus group was to review in a group setting the initial themes that emerged from the entrance interviews. In addition, these questions were also addressed:

1. What do you think is the broader university's perceptions of Filipina/o Americans?
2. How do you think Filipina/o Americans as a whole "fit" into the culture of LMU and the LMU community?
3. What do you think have been the challenges as a community for Filipina/o Americans at LMU?
4. In what ways can the university better address the issues facing Filipina/o American students in this institution?

Exit Interview

1. How do you think you contribute to the persistence of other Filipina/o American students at Ignatian University?
2. What do you believe is the significance or meaning of being a *Filipino American* in higher education? At this particular college?
3. What is something that you've learned from your participation in this research process?
4. Do you believe that what has been discovered and discussed is an accurate interpretation of what is happening in this community? If yes, how so? If no, then please describe what is missing from this interpretation.
5. Do you have any other thoughts about your own experiences as a college student or other issues discussed that you would like to share with me?

Appendix F

Dissertation Research Timeline

Date	Action
April 26, 2011	Defended Dissertation Proposal
June 1, 2011	Submitted IRB Application, received approval June 3, 2011
September 21, 2011	Distributed survey at meeting of The Filipino Club
September 23 – 30, 2011	Conducted statistical analysis of survey results
September 23 - 30, 2011	Identified participants for interviews. Contacted to schedule interviews.
Week of October 10, 2011	Began data collection. Conducted interviews with informants 1 & 2; transcribed and coded interviews
Week of October 17, 2011	Conducted interviews with informants 3 & 4; transcribed and coded interviews
Week of October 24, 2011	Conducted interviews with informants 5 & 6; transcribed and coded interviews
Week of October 31, 2011	Analyzed interview data; identified shared domains, prepared focus group questions
Week of November 12, 2011	Conducted focus group; transcribed & coded focus group interview
November 19 - December 15, 2011	Conducted exit interviews
December - March 2012	Analyzed data, wrote findings and discussion, revisions
April 23, 2012	Dissertation Defense
May 6, 2012	Graduation

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