ILLUMINATING FILIPINA AMERICAN VOICES: EDUCATIONAL NARRATIVES OF LOW INCOME COLLEGE GRADUATES

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DEDICATION

To my partner and love,
Roderick Labrador

To my babies,
Miles and Ella Quemuel-Labrador

To my parents,
Carolyn and Ernesto Quemuel

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I am indebted to the amazing women who courageously shared their personal stories with me, welcoming me, without fear or hesitation, into their lives. They continue to inspire me with their deep commitment to education, and to creating better futures for our children. Thank you to these wonderful women and to the Access Program for enabling this research.

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ABSTRACT

Very little research has been conducted on Asian American women college students, especially low-income Filipina American women college graduates. This study seeks to extend the existing literature and asks how race, class, and gender influence educational experiences and students' ability to navigate the educational pipeline in order to successfully graduate from college. Using a qualitative research design, this study brings low-income Filipina American women from the peripheries to the center and provides a space for their voices and experiences to be recognized. This project employed the theoretical and methodological lens of Critical Race Theory in education as well as narrative inquiry to examine Filipina American educational life histories and "counter-stories" to move beyond the model minority paradigm. The study examines women with deeply complex lives and experiences, some from immigrant families and most who are U.S. born, sometimes multiracial or multiethnic, and often having occupied more than one class status throughout their lives. The project provides important data to better understand the needs of Filipina American and Asian American and Pacific Islander women students so that colleges and universities can work better to support and serve them.

The findings suggest that race, ethnicity, gender, class, and culture play tremendous roles in the experiences of Filipina/o American college students in Hawai'i. More specifically, this study illustrates how locally-specific racial stereotypes, prejudice, institutional discrimination, and family dynamics played key parts in the educational experiences of the research participants. The key themes that emerged in this study were: being Filipina/o (including stereotypes and gender differences), family and the level and types of family support, school expectations and institutional support, experiences with violence, as well as parenthood and the future.

Implications for theory include reexamining how we understand the categories of "Filipino," "Filipina," and "Filipina/o American" that will further expand the ways that individuals and institutions understand and work with these students, broadening definitions to include the diversity and multiplicity of experiences that construct their lives. Implications for further research include focusing on women who did not complete college as well as those who successfully went on to graduate and professional schools, which would provide insight for universities and student services providers about what needs to be done to better support student success.

Future researchers might develop theories and identity development models that do not rely on stages and unidirectional movement along a linear path. Perhaps future research might attend to other dynamics, like colonialism, geographic location or place and language, to be able to capture the educational experience of Filipina/o Americans. Future researchers could also compare the experiences of low income Filipino American male college students and conduct studies examining the differences between the experiences of low socioeconomic status Filipina/o Americans and those who are not struggling economically. Future research might also explore theories about intersectionality that incorporates the role of immigration generation in college experiences.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Emily* is a self-described local Filipino, Japanese, and Hawaiian woman, who grew up as an only child. She was raised in a multigenerational household in a densely populated urban neighborhood that houses many working class immigrant communities. Her mother's family came from the Philippines and her father is Japanese and Hawaiian. She described herself as a good student who enjoyed learning. She went to the neighborhood public elementary school, where Filipino students made up most of the student body. Her close-knit family emphasized the importance of education and she dreamed of one day becoming a teacher. A vibrant and social girl, she attended a large urban intermediate school, where she shared many stories about her education outside of the classroom, which included exposure to sex, drugs, violence, and crime. Emily considered herself a "square" who stayed out of trouble and focused on school.

Emily's family chose to send her to a high school out of her district, rather than have her attend the large public high school in their area, which had a large population of Filipino, Pacific Islander, and immigrant students, and where a high percentage of students came from low income families who received free or reduced lunch. Her neighborhood school was federally categorized as a low academically performing school with low test scores, and it also had a reputation for gangs and violence. Although Emily found few Filipino friends in her large public high school, she adjusted well on her campus where Japanese and Chinese students dominated. She did well academically, she was active in extracurricular activities, and also found time for a serious boyfriend. After graduation, Emily planned to attend State University and her boyfriend joined the military. While he was deployed, Emily discovered that she was pregnant with their son and her plans for going to college were temporarily derailed.

After high school, Emily suddenly found herself on her own as a single mother, with very few options. Her religious family was not supportive of her having a child without first being married, and they distanced themselves from her during her time of need. With few resources available, Emily relied on university based financial aid and welfare benefits to support herself and her son while she went to college. She did her best

to keep her welfare participation a secret, but decided to get involved with the Access Program, a university student services program to assist low income students to insure that they stay in school and graduate. With the support of the program, Emily was able to graduate with a bachelor's degree and fulfill her childhood dream - she is now a teacher in a public high school.

This study examines educational life stories like Emily's and seeks to extend the existing research on Filipina/o Americans by examining the experiences of low-income Filipina American students in Hawai'i. By focusing on the educational experience of low-income Filipina women, I hope to create a space where their voices and experiences can be heard. Their narratives are particularly important because they represent an aspect of the Filipina/o American experience that previously has not been explored, and contrary to what we might think, they are fairly representative (in terms of demographics) of the experiences for Filipina/os in Hawai'i. Generally speaking, being Filipina/o in the United States has very different meanings depending on where you are. In other words, being Filipina/o is not the same everywhere and the geographic area (with its own histories and social, political, and economic conditions) helps to structure the experiences and understandings of being Filipina/o. In order to better contextualize their experiences, it is important to look at the differences between Filipina/os in Hawai'i and other places in the continental U.S. and examine the different ways that Filipina/o ethnicity is constructed in Hawai'i and elsewhere, and how the creation of Filipina/o ethnicity is influenced by the specific histories and political economies of the geographic areas. In this regard, I will address the differences in economic status, educational attainment, and the dominant stereotypes for Filipina/os in these different places. To provide a broad geographic overview and for comparative purposes, I will focus on three specific locations to demonstrate the broad range of Filipina/o experiences through demographic profiles and dominant stereotypes. The geographic sites are Hawai'i, the west coast (San Francisco, San Jose & Oakland, CA), and the east coast (New York City, New Jersey, Long Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania). These profiles are a snapshot of the communities in each of these locales, and upon further investigation, they represent the ways that Filipina/o identity is constructed and understood by the broader community in these places.

In his research on Filipina/os in the U.S., sociologist Peter Chua provides a comprehensive demographic profile using 2000 census data. According to his research, the largest concentration of Filipina/os in America can be found in Hawai‘i, where they comprise 21.8% of the overall population (Chua, 2009, 10) – this is the single ethnicity and in combination numbers. According to the 2010 census data, that number has increased to 24.6% of the overall population (Hawai‘i State Data Center, 2012). The Filipina/o community is also significantly represented on the west coast where they are 5.4% of the general population, and are much less visible on the east coast where they are only 0.8% of the population (Chua, 2009, 10). The greater the population concentration of Filipinos can produce a shift in the stereotypes and perceptions about Filipina/os. As noted by Teranishi in his study on postsecondary aspirations for Chinese and Filipina/o students in California, the Filipina/o students who attended schools where they represented a large percentage of the student population, were subjected to a different range of stereotypes and they were tracked into different postsecondary opportunities than their other Asian American counterparts.

An overview of the economic conditions for Filipina/os further illustrates the geographic and contextual variance between communities, and seriously calls into question the reasons, historic and otherwise, for this significant difference in experiences. Utilizing Chua’s examination of the 2000 census data on Filipina/os, one finds that the per capita income average for the general population in the U.S. is $21,587, and is $19,259 for Filipina/os (Chua, 2009, 12) – this is the national average. The difference between the groups seems relatively minor until one takes a closer look at the breakdown by geographic location. On the east coast, where Filipina/os are the least represented, their per capita income of $26,587 is greater than the national average, but is about the same as the general per capita income of $26,604 for their region (Chua, 2009, 12). West coast Filipina/os are situated firmly in the working class, earning $21,239, which is slightly less than the national average, but significantly lower than the overall average of $30,769 for their area (Chua, 2009, 12). The biggest difference in economic status is found in the Filipina/o community in Hawai‘i, where the per capita income of $21,998 for the general overall population is slightly higher than the national average. Suggesting that Filipina/os in Hawai‘i have been unable to shake the constraints of the low wage

plantation and tourist economies, they have a per capita income of $14,545, despite the extremely high cost of living in Hawai‘i (Chua, 2009, 12). In addition, they are overrepresented, as compared to the overall population in families living below poverty in Hawai‘i, with 7.9% of Filipina/o families as compared to 7.0% of the overall population. In Hawai‘i, 6.8% of general population households utilize public assistance and a devastating 11.3% of Filipina/o families use these same social service benefits. Why are the economic conditions for Filipina/os in Hawai‘i so significantly different than those of their counterparts living on the continent? Given this large population of low income and poverty level Filipina/o families, why hasn't more attention been paid to their experiences, and perhaps to their larger social and economic conditions that continue to oppress the community?

What are some of the reasons for this economic disparity between Filipina/o communities in the U.S.? The Filipina/o community on the east coast is generally comprised of professionals who immigrated from the Philippines after 1965, following the loosening of national origins quotas in U.S. immigration legislation that contained an occupational preference provision that allowed for significant numbers of doctors, nurses, and others in the medical field. As a result, the middle and upper-middle class Filipina/o community on the east coast is predominantly composed of educated professionals in the medical field (Bonus, 2000). The community in the west coast has origins as farmworkers and in the canneries, and there is also a significant population of military families. Filipina/os on the west coast tend to have wider class variance, with a mixture of blue and white collar workers (Espiritu, 2003). The dominant narrative for Filipina/os in Hawai‘i is that they are lower income or working class. This originates from their history as laborers on sugar and pineapple plantations and extends to their current situation where they are overrepresented in service and retail industry occupations that support the tourist economy of the islands (Okamura, 2008). These historical labor contexts are important to remember as we contextualize the experiences of Filipina/os in the U.S. and this context has a tremendous impact on the life experiences of Filipina/os. As I stated earlier and is now even more evident given this economic snapshot of Filipina/os in various geographic locations, the women who are the focus of my study are not atypical from the community in which they originate. Their experiences represent

previously unheard stories that are somewhat indicative of the lives of Filipina/os in Hawai‘i.

One way to understand the stark economic differences between Filipina/os in different geographic communities is to examine their educational achievements and opportunities. Education and postsecondary education are critical tools for achieving economic stability and upward mobility for families. When examining the percentage of Filipina/os over the age of 25 with no high school diploma, one finds that the data mirrors the economic status for families. On the east coast, only 5.9% of Filipinos do not have a high school diploma, which is considerably less than the overall 20.5% (Chua 2009, 12). On the west coast, Filipina/os remain ahead of the general population with 11.8% of Filipina/os with no high school diploma as compared to an overall 16.1%. However, in Hawai‘i Filipina/os remain overrepresented and undereducated with 23.9% of the population with no high school diploma compared to 15% of the overall community. Thus, an examination of the structural and institutional barriers that prohibit Filipina/os from obtaining basic levels of education, which in turn limit their economic opportunities is essential to understanding the education pipeline of the community.

The participants in this study are Filipinas who successfully graduated from a large university in Hawai‘i with a BA or BS degree. The high educational achievement and success of these women differentiates them from many in the local Filipina/o community, where only 14.1% of people obtain an undergraduate degree compared to 18.9% of the entire population (Chua, 2009, 12). In contrast, their counterparts on the continental coasts have tremendous overall educational attainment levels with 33.9% of Filipina/os on the west coast with a BA or BS degree compared to 23.2% of the entire population. Filipina/os on the east coast have even more success in education, with 51.9% of the population with a college degree compared to only 17.9% of the overall population (Chua, 2009, 12). Again, it will be important to critically examine the educational system that is limiting educational and economic opportunities for Filipina/os in Hawai‘i.

It would be difficult to discuss the educational experiences of Filipina American women in Hawai‘i without also examining the forms of structural and institutionalized racism in the public school system in Hawai‘i, because of the way that it directly and indirectly impacts and provides or limits opportunities for its students. The schools with

the largest percentage of Filipina/o students are usually located in low-income neighborhoods (i.e. Waipahu and Kalihi on the island of O‘ahu and Kahului on Maui). Ladson-Billings & Tate (2006) suggest that income and property differences impact the educational experiences of students of color in their schools' ability to access new curriculum, updated resources, good teachers, good academic advising and college counseling. They state, "schools that serve poor students of color are unlikely to have access to these resources and, consequently, their students will have a much reduced opportunity to learn despite the attempt to mandate educational standards" (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV 2006, 18). The reduced opportunity manifests itself in multiple ways in these schools, including limited opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities that enhance academic potential, few or no advanced placement courses, inadequate postsecondary and career counseling, and access to only antiquated and out of date technology resources. Property differences also manifest themselves in curriculum. For Ladson-Billings & Tate, "curriculum represents a form of 'intellectual property.' The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the 'property values' of the school" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, 17).

To illustrate the impact that institutional racism and school climate has on the educational experiences of students in Hawai‘i public schools, I want to share an anecdote. Recently, there was a well-attended special event featuring Filipino American hip hop artists at one the largest high schools in Hawai‘i where Filipina/o students make up roughly 60% (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2009) of the student body. The presenters posed a series of questions and requested that students raise their hands to indicate if they had personally experienced what they were asking. The students were asked three questions: (1) if they have ever witnessed or experienced violence on their school campus; (2) if they had ever seen a military recruiter on campus; and (3) if they had ever seen a college recruiter on campus. An overwhelming majority of the 150+ students in attendance at the event had witnessed or experienced violence on campus, indicating that violence was a normal and almost expected aspect of their educational experiences. The threat of violence in one's educational environment would have serious consequences for their ability to access a quality education and be a detriment to their overall educational achievement. In response to the second question, almost all of the

students had regularly seen military recruiters from all branches of the military on their campus. When asked about college recruiters, about five students raised their hands. The only students who had seen college recruiters were student athletes, and more specifically, Polynesian (mainly Samoan) football players. In order to gain access to campus, the recruiters (military or college) must have permission from school administrators who determine who has access to the students on campus. These administrators are responsible for establishing what types of extracurricular experiences and opportunities their student body is exposed to, and the emphasis on military recruiters over college recruiters reflects their perceptions about their post-high school expectations and opportunities for their students. Rather than presenting a range of postsecondary educational opportunities, that would in turn provide the ability to attain higher paying careers, post-high school aspirations are often restricted – high school is often seen as the endpoint in the education pipeline. While this is a simple anecdote about one presentation at a high school, it illustrates the difficult challenges facing Filipina/o students (and others in similar conditions) in Hawai‘i public schools.

Okamura (2008) and Labrador (2003) have also talked about the harmful impacts of negative stereotypes on Filipinos in Hawai‘i. Both Okamura and Labrador suggest the prevalence of negative stereotypes and ethnicity-based jokes in local humor, something specific to Hawai‘i. Many of these jokes focus on Filipinos as being immigrants, the way they speak, the kinds of foods they eat, the kinds of clothes they wear, and generally their other-ness. Okamura also adds that these jokes are not only discursive acts of power, but also uphold the existing structure of power in Hawai‘i: “Jokes about Filipino Americans are discursive acts of power against them and need to be understood as cultural representations that maintain their structural subordination in Hawai‘i and derive from that subjugation” (Okamura, 2008, 171). The power of the images and representations contained within local humor, and their perpetuation as a harmless and normalized aspect of life in the islands, in fact serves to reinforce the racist subordination and alienation of Filipina/os in Hawai‘i.

The derogatory stereotypes that plague the Filipina/o community in Hawai‘i extend beyond the confines of local humor. Okamura (2008) traces the media representations of Filipino men in Hawai‘i newspapers prior to statehood and finds that

"through the 1940s, the racialized and gendered representations of Filipinos included being emotionally unstable, criminally inclined, ignorant, and constituting a violent "sex danger" (Okamura, 2008, 159). Many of these images have their origins in the plantations where the Filipino community was a predominantly bachelor society because of immigration policies that brought men from the Philippines to work in Hawai'i plantations (Okamura, 2008, Labrador, 2003). The discursive representation of Filipinos also speaks to ethnic stratification in Hawai'i: "Filipino American ethnic identity has been and continues to be defined by non-Filipinos through racist stereotypes and other denigrating representations that are pervasive throughout Hawai'i society. Filipino Americans thus are an example of an ethnic group that has been precluded from using identity construction as a means for their collective political and economic advancement" (Okamura, 2008, 155). The lasting impact of this negative identity construction is reflected in the educational pipeline that typically ends with high school for Filipina/o students in Hawai'i public schools, which also leads to limited employment, or underemployment in the service industry and severely reduced opportunities for economic advancement (see Libarios 2013).

What I argue and illustrate in this dissertation is that educational, economic, and social contexts have a tremendous impact on not only ethnic identity construction processes among Filipina/os but they also shape their educational opportunities. I have suggested that Filipina/o ethnicity is understood and experienced differently in different geographic locales in the U.S. depending on the community's specific educational, economic, and social contexts.

Research Questions

In this qualitative research project, I use narrative cases to examine the educational life histories of low-income Filipinas.[1] I ask the following questions: 1) What are the educational experiences of low-income Filipinas? 2) How were they able to successfully navigate their educational pipeline until college graduation? What are the various challenges and supports that they encounter throughout their educational lives –

[1] I discuss the research methods I used for this project more fully in chapter three.

from elementary school through higher education? 3) How do they describe the various forms of education they experienced both in and out of schools, including things learned from family, cultural communities, and the geographical communities within which they live? 4) What do they list as reasons for their success in education? 5) Are there significant events that have influenced the women's journey through the educational pipeline? Were students able to find a sense of place and belonging and therefore, success in their academic programs throughout their education? This study examines women with deeply complex lives and experiences, some from immigrant families and most who are U.S. born, sometimes multiracial, and often having occupied more than one class status throughout their lives. Using the lens of critical race theory, this qualitative research investigation uses narrative to illuminate the educational life histories of its participants. Often marginalized due to their gender, ethnicity, and/or class status, this study brings low-income Filipina women from the peripheries to the center and provides a space for their voices and experiences to be recognized.

Because there has been very little research specifically done on low-income Filipina women, let alone on Asian American women students, more generally (Espiritu, 1994; Hune, 2002; Maramba, 2008), it is important that we examine the educational life histories of these women. Much of the existing literature examines these women as part of a collective identity of Asian and Pacific Islander women, rather than as part of distinct ethnic groups. However, Hune (2002) cautions, "[t]heir (Asian American) educational pipeline is not free-flowing, however. There are constrictions, especially by gender and at the doctoral level. Disparities also exist within the population by ethnic group" (Hune, 2002, p. 18).[2] Similarly, in her article on Asian American student experiences, Stacey Lee notes, "In order to better serve the unique needs of diverse groups of Asian American students, we must examine the ways various identities, and the intersections of identities, inform the experiences of Asian Americans" (Lee, 2006, p. 18).

Perhaps one reason for the dearth of research on the educational experiences of low-income Filipinas or Asian American students is the continued perpetuation of the model minority myth (Maramba, 2008; Lee, 2006; Kumashiro, 2006; Espiritu, 1994;

[2] I examine the literature on Asian Americans as the model minority as it relates to my project more fully in the next chapter.

Hune, 2002). In this study I also ask what impact, if any, the model minority myth has on Filipino communities in the U.S., and are they subjected to this stereotype or are they affected by other prevailing images of Filipinas as domestic servants, sex workers, or nurses/home care operators (Parenas, 2001, Choy, 2003)? Although there is a lack of research on the experiences of low-income Asian American students, Lee notes that "differences in educational attainment and achievement across Asian American groups appear to be related to differences in social class. Ethnic groups with high rates of poverty also experience low rates of educational attainment, and ethnic groups with low rates of poverty have higher levels of educational attainment" (Lee, 2006, pg. 18). While her research focused specifically on Cambodian students, Lee's research suggests that "[c]lass differences also play a significant role in differential achievement within ethnic groups" and this seems likely for Filipinas and other Asian American ethnic groups. What then, are the intersections among race, ethnicity, class, and gender on their educational experiences? This study will attempt to examine the lives of low-income Filipino women college graduates using multiple lenses, looking at the various ways that race, ethnicity, class, and gender converge.

Furthermore, the existing research on the experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander college students in general focuses mainly on the undergraduate experience of traditional and/or high achieving students (Park, Lin Goodwin & Lee 2001, Hune, 1998). More broadly, there has been very little educational research conducted on Asian American women students college. Hune (1998), Yamauchi & Tin Mala (1989), and only a few researchers like Espiritu (1994), Wolf (1997), Teranishi (2002), Maramba (2008), Nadal (2008), and Buenavista (2009) have conducted research on the experiences of Filipina/o American students in American higher education. Discussions of class are rare, and an examination of how race, class, and gender inform the postsecondary experiences of low-income Filipina students is completely absent from the literature. This study seeks to extend the existing literature and asks how race, class, and gender influence educational experiences and students' ability to navigate the educational pipeline and successfully graduate from college.

In this study, I use qualitative research methods (e.g. formal and informal interviews) and narratives (via Solorzano's "counter-stories" and Delgado Bernal's "race-

gendered epistemology") to elicit educational life histories "told from a nonmajoritarian perspective – [stories] that white educators usually do not hear or tell" (Delgado Bernal 2002, p. 116) from individuals who obtained an undergraduate college degree after participating in a student services program designed to assist low-income students at a large university. In her study with Chicana college students, Delgado Bernal utilized a raced-gendered epistemology that "allows educators to better understand the different knowledges Chicana/Chicano students bring from their homes and communities" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 115). Along similar lines, I use a raced-gendered-classed epistemology to elicit individual educational life histories that will give us examples of the educational pipeline experienced by low-income Filipina college students. Through these methods, Filipina women who were low-income college students have the opportunity to share their personal stories and experiences as students. It allows them to discuss the unique challenges and benefits that they may have encountered because of their racial, class, and gender identities. As this population continues to expand, there will be an increasing need to provide educational opportunities and support for them.

In this study, I interviewed participants about their educational life histories and present them as individual cases. This life history included both the formal modes of education found in school, and the informal modes that are found within their families and communities. These individual educational life histories give us examples of the educational "pipeline" experienced by Asian and Pacific Islander women college students. Asian Americans are often perceived as the "model minority," a high academic achieving stereotype linked to a monolithic identity category (Hune, 2002; Osajima, 1991), which in reality encompasses multiple and diverse ethnic groups (i.e. Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Cambodian, Chinese, Vietnamese). The model minority myth can in turn lead to schools, academic departments and programs not providing necessary outreach and support services to Asian American students because of the misperception that they are already successful and do not need personal or academic assistance (Osajima, 1991). Inherent in this overall perception of success is the assumption that model minority families are economically stable and somehow possess the social and cultural capital to do well in schools. This issue is intensified in the case of Filipinos, where immigrant families may have a familiarity with U.S. educational systems because

of America's colonial presence in the Philippines, but might not possess an experiential understanding of schools, colleges and universities in the U.S.. Through her interviews with Filipina/o college students, Wolf (1997) discusses the challenges these students have in navigating American higher education, mediating intense family expectations with personal struggles to survive college. In addition, depending on their gender, Filipino youth are faced with differential family pressures.

Through the use of narrative and qualitative research methods in this project, Filipina women who were low-income college students had the opportunity to share their personal stories and experiences as students beginning with elementary school through college graduation. Participants were invited to provide suggestions for educators and administrators, as well as words of wisdom to pass along to future generations of women. This study enabled participants to discuss the unique challenges and benefits that they may have encountered because of their racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities in formal and informal modes of education. By providing space through the use of narrative, participants moved beyond the confines of discussing only experiences that they had in classrooms, and shared their out-of-classroom learning experiences as well. They discussed modes of learning that were significant to them, including their families, friends, and communities. This process centered not only the women themselves, but on their whole experience, including those experiences that traditionally are not valued or investigated in research. This contribution can inform institutional practice and policies, as well as provide insight into the different experiences of diverse students.

The participants in this study were women who self-identified as Filipina and who attended a public, four-year university as undergraduate students. As college students, they were participants in the Access Program, a student affairs program designed to support low-income college students. The Access Program was used primarily for purposeful sampling and the focus of this project is not on the program, however some participants discussed the role of Access Program on their postsecondary educational experiences. I am particularly interested in how they navigated the educational pipeline to get into college, how they succeeded in earning their bachelor's degree, and the modes of formal and informal education that shaped and guided their educational voyage. The Access Program Coordinator initially identified the Filipinas who participated in this

study and then I contacted them via email and phone calls to participate in this research project. There are several reasons why the Access Program was chosen for sampling purposes: 1) there are a large number of Filipina participants in the Access Program; 2) the Access Program is a well-established program on campus and has had a significant number of graduates; 3) there is a limited amount of research on low-income Filipina/os in higher education, and this will fill a need in the literature.

While the focus of this study is on individual women's experiences rather than on the Access Program, it is worthwhile to provide a brief description of the program and degree of involvement for student participants. The Access Program provides student support services for low-income individuals who are enrolled as full-time undergraduate or graduate students. Access Program services include, but are not limited to, individual academic and personal advising, assistance finding on-campus employment, workshops on topics such as time management and budget basics, and advocacy with finance related issues (i.e. financial aid, food stamps). Many Access Program students are first generation college students and the responsibilities and demands on them can be excessive. Beyond the regular academic workload experienced by traditional college students, all of these students struggle economically and juggle the demands of family, school, and work (a typical Access Program student works from 6-20 hours per week at on-campus jobs).

Study participants were former members of the Access Program, a university-based student services program that provides postsecondary educational opportunities for low-income students within a university system comprised of community colleges and university campuses in Hawai‘i. The Access Program participants are female and male, they come from a wide range of ages and racial and ethnic backgrounds, and they have very diverse life experiences. Some students grew up in middle class homes, only to find themselves in poverty as adults; others grew up in poor families that always struggled to get by; while others found themselves on welfare following divorce, death, or unexpected pregnancy. The only common denominator for all Access Program students is they are all full-time low-income college students.

As the Filipina/o population continues to grow in the U.S., there will be an increasing need to provide educational opportunities and support for all students

throughout the educational pipeline. It is important to bring more awareness and understanding about the experiences of Filipinas, and the various challenges and supports that they encounter both in and out of school. This research project seeks to give voice to women whose experiences are typically marginalized and unheard. The project provides more information and data to better understand the needs of other Filipinas and Asian American and Pacific Islander women students so that colleges and universities can work better to support and serve them. This study challenges the dominant narrative by centering the unique experiences of marginalized women and empower them to share their stories and to contribute to the field of education.

Glossary

The following is a list of terms and operational definitions that I use in this dissertation. **Race** and **ethnicity** are often used interchangeably in academic and everyday use (Omi & Winant 1994, Cornell & Hartmann 1998). For the purposes of this study, I understand **race** as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi & Winant, 1994, 55). In their definition, Omi and Winant further point out that race is not solely about phenotype, but also points to individual and group positionings within the broader structures and relations of power in the United States. Although closely related, I understand **ethnicity** in slightly different terms. Cornell and Hartmann point out that at "the foundation of ethnic attachments lies real or assumed common descent" (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, 16). Although ethnicity has often been talked about and externally defined as "shared culture," "peoplehood," and "kinship," I use ethnicity and ethnic group to refer to "a group of persons distinguished largely by common culture, typically including language, religion, or other patterns of behavior and belief" (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, 17).

Other terms that need to be defined are related to class and immigration generation. For my study on low-income Filipinas, I understand "**low-income"** as college students who are eligible for federal Pell Grants. The majority of Pell Grants recipients are undergraduates who have an annual total family income of less than $20,000. The

study participants are mainly 1.5 and 2nd-generation Filipina Americans. I use **1.5 generation Filipina/o Americans** to refer to individuals born in the Philippines, who migrated to the United States during early childhood, and I use **second generation Filipina/o Americans** to indicate those individuals born in the United States who are the children of first generation immigrant parents from the Philippines.

Lastly, because the study is limited to Filipinas in Hawai‘i it is also important to understand the pan-ethnic identity category of **Local**. Rather than claim any specific personal ethnic identity, the term “local” is often used by Filipina/os in Hawai‘i (as well as by other racial and ethnic groups). Although I discuss the term more closely in a later chapter, for this glossary I use Okamura’s definition to highlight the oppositional characteristic of **Local**: “local identity can be seen to derive its significance primarily from structural rather than cultural factors. This structural dimension of local identity is based on the categorical opposition between groups considered local and those considered nonlocal, including haole, immigrants, the military, tourists, and foreign investors… From this perspective, local identity is very exclusive rather than all inclusive and serves to create and maintain social boundaries between groups” (Okamura, 1994, 165).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Because this study focuses on the individual educational experiences of Filipinas, this chapter begins with an introduction to scholarship that address issues related to Filipina/o Americans and education. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the impact of the colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines on educational systems in the Philippines (Constantino 2003, Buenavista, Jayakumar, Misa-Escalante 2009, Nadal 2009) and the residual effects of colonization on immigrant Filipina/o communities in the United States (Buenavista, Jayakumar, Misa-Escalante 2009, Teranishi 2002, Nadal 2009, Espiritu 2001, Wolf 1997). The second part of this chapter outlines research on the broad educational experiences of Asian Americans and more specifically, Filipinas/os in the United States. The Filipina participants in this study were geographically situated in Hawai‘i (a few left the islands after college graduation) so it is also necessary to include the literature on the experiences of Filipina/os in Hawai‘i. The third section of this chapter will incorporate existing research regarding the role of gender (broadly speaking), and Filipina college students (more specifically). In the fourth section, current research on Filipina/o students and Critical Race Theory will be reviewed to introduce one of the theoretical lenses that frame this research project. Critical Race Theory recognizes the importance of examining the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in education and as such, it is assumed that this more holistic framework helps provide spaces for capturing the wide array of experiences of the research participants. Finally, because the participants in this study were all active members in the Access Program, a college program designed to provide student support services for low-income students, the literature review will also include scholarship on gender and class in higher education, focusing specifically on research on poverty class, or poor women of color.

U.S. Colonialism in the Philippines

In order to better understand the educational experiences of Filipinas in the United States, it is important to understand the social, political, and historical conditions and contexts that may influence their lives. U.S. colonialism in the Philippines had a profound

impact on the Philippine educational system, shaping the experiences and understandings of education and the idea of "America" for the families of this study's participants. The U.S.-Philippine colonial relationship also shaped American understandings of Filipinos, in terms of their sociocultural and racial statuses as well as their legal and political standing in the United States, as exemplified in restrictive immigration laws and policies (Espiritu 1994; Lowe, 1996). The U.S.-Philippine colonial relationship influenced what "types" of Filipinos were able to come to the U.S. to meet specific labor and political needs, whether they were scholars like the *pensionados*, agricultural laborers for west coast farms (*manongs)* and Hawai'i plantations (*sakadas)*, or highly-educated professionals (Espiritu 1994). In addition, between 1898 and 1935, Filipinos in the U.S. were in an in-between legal status: "Under formal colonial status, Pilipinos immigrated to the United States freely as American 'nationals,' a liminal position in which they were not considered aliens or citizens. With this government status, Pilipinos were not subject to immigration restrictions. Such a unique status was beneficial to American agricultural and service industries, which came to rely on Pilipinos as cheap labor during a time when xenophobia prevented the immigration of other racial minorities to the United States" (Buenavista, Jayakumar & Misa-Escalante, 2009, 75).

To understand the impact of an American educational system on contemporary Filipinas in the United States, it is important to understand the legacy of American colonization in the Philippines, and how it continues to have lingering effects in contemporary Filipina/o communities. Formal U.S. colonial presence in the Philippines began in 1898, and as Constantino argues, education was intentionally used by American colonial administrators to conquer the peoples of the Philippines: "The education of the Filipino under American sovereignty was an instrument of colonial policy… Indigenous Filipino ideals were slowly eroded in order to remove the last vestiges of resistance. Education served to attract the people to the new masters and at the same time to dilute their nationalism which had just succeeded in overthrowing a foreign power" (Constantino, 2003, p. 179). By shaping the educational systems the United States was largely able to suppress Philippine resistance and opposition and insure American colonialism: "The educational system introduced by the Americans had to correspond, and was designed to correspond, to the economic and political reality of American

conquest" (Constantino, 2003, 178). Constantino further describes the systematic takeover of the Philippine's educational system as a process to quickly indoctrinate a nation to allegiance to America: "The primary reason for the rapid introduction, on a large scale, of the American public school system in the Philippines was the conviction of the military leaders that no measure could so quickly promote the pacification of the islands as education" (Constantino, 2003, p. 178).

The educational systems in the Philippines were transformed by the US to reflect American history, literature, ideals, and values – including the use of the English language for instruction, which helped to shape the ways that Filipina/os saw themselves in relation to education and with respect to the United States. Language played a key role in the American colonization of the Philippines: "The first and perhaps the master stroke in the plan to use education as an instrument of colonial policy was the decision to use English as the medium of instruction. English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen" (Constantino, 2003, p. 181). The impact of the use of English language in the Philippines reverberates into contemporary communities in the US, particularly with respect to struggles around linguistic authenticity and representation (Labrador 2004) and cultural nationalism. The impact of this on this study may be reflected in family attitudes towards education as well as the lingering effects of colonialism. The majority of participants in this study are children or grandchildren of immigrants from the Philippines which means that their immediate families were raised in the American colonial education system in the Philippines. This is important to understand as we contextualize the educational experiences of this study's participants because of the ways that their families were directly and indirectly influenced by American colonial education.

Filipina/os in the U.S.

U.S. colonialism in the Philippines influences not only the educational experiences of Filipina/os in America, but also their connections (or disconnect) with the Philippines and their personal ethnic identity development. Diane Wolf (1997) and Yen Espiritu (2001) have highlighted the transnational character of Filipina American identity

development, while Nadal (2009) uses psychology to ground his Filipino American Identity Development and Filipina Feminist Identity Development models.

In her study on transnational identity struggles, Diane Wolf focuses on the challenges facing college-age, second-generation Filipino youth. For the purposes of my study, second-generation immigrants represent the American-born children of those immigrants who left their home country (Wolf, 1997). Also included in my study are 1.5 generation Filipina/os, who are between first-generation (born in the Philippines) and second-generation immigrants (born in the United States) and came to the US at a young age, "before most of their childhood socialization or schooling occurred" (Wolf, 1997, 461). Wolf suggests that this population of students remains largely understudied because, as, "Filipinos appear to be assimilated and successful, and indeed, to some extent, for various historical and cultural reasons many of which are connected to colonialist history, tend to 'blend' into American society such that they are relatively invisible to the average American and U.S. academic eye" (Wolf, 1997, 460). As Buenavista et al (2009) and Teranishi (2002) note, Filipina/o Americans are also usually "blended" into the broader "Asian American" racial category who are often perceived as the "model minority," a high academic achieving stereotype linked to a monolithic identity category, which in reality encompasses multiple and diverse ethnic groups (i.e. Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Cambodian, Chinese, Vietnamese). Kumashiro (2006) also links the Asian American model minority myth to the attainment of the "American Dream": "The supposed model for other racialized minority groups, Asian Americans were and still are often characterized as having achieved the 'American Dream', as succeeding educationally, socially, and economically through hard work and perseverance" (Kumashiro, 2006, 130). The model minority myth can in turn lead to academic departments and programs not providing necessary outreach and support services to Asian American students because of the misperception that they are already successful and do not need academic assistance. Buenavista et al argue that the "model minority is more than just a myth; it is also a pervasive paradigm that has been used in educational research to perpetuate white, middle-class, hegemonic notions of merit and dismiss the educational disparities and overall educational experiences of Asian Americans (Buenavista et al, 73). Belief in this myth can contribute to an institution's

inability to recognize the real struggles and experiences of its Asian American, and more specifically, Filipina students. Thus, the combination of model minority with the incorrect understanding of a monolithic Asian American racial category, can leave some Asian American ethnic subgroups, like Filipino Americans, nearly invisible in the academy. Even in existing research on Asian Americans, there remains a problematic use of the Asian American category, namely that research in higher education has not always supported the understanding of the diversity (i.e. ethnicity, gender, class) within this artificially constructed racial category. Coupled with the model minority image are the widely held beliefs in the gendered stereotypes of Asian American women as exotic or submissive. It is my hope that my study will problematize these stereotypical images and address the complexity and multiplicity of Filipina identities and experiences.

In her study, Wolf conducted four focus groups with twenty-one UC Davis college students, who were predominantly women. Using a transnational frame, Wolf critically examined the impact that family and gender have on the emotional well-being and educational success of Filipina/o youth in California. Wolf introduces the idea of "emotional transnationalism" in order to "evoke more of a sense of multiple discourses circulating and competing in the lives and minds of Filipino children of immigrants and go beyond binary and segmented notions of assimilation" (Wolf, 1997, 476). Furthermore, she notes that being a second generation Filipina/o "is constituted by multiple and sometimes conflicting images, cultural codes and discourses that stem from experiences or images of relationships in the two countries in addition to nostalgia for "home" and being "Filipino" (Wolf, 1997, 475). The relationship between the Philippines (of being "Filipino") and the US (of being "Filipino American") often plays out in generational, cultural, and linguistic differences within the context of the family where "many Filipino second generation youth are beset by transnational struggles, some of which are deeply connected to their relationships with their families" (Wolf, 1997, p. 458).

In Wolf's study, the majority of student participants identified "family" when asked what being Filipino meant to them. Family was followed by language, culture, pride, and respect. Throughout the narratives documented in her study, one becomes aware of the hierarchies and intense pressures placed on the students to achieve academic

success: “Privileging the notion of ‘family’ with which they were brought up has meant accepting patriarchal family dynamics and the predominance of parental wishes over children’s voices, resulting in internal struggles and an inability to approach parents openly for fear of sanctions” (Wolf, 1997, 473). The complexities of the parental relationships reveal themselves as oftentimes contradictory – parents and family as the core support for students, yet also the primary stressor because of their high academic expectations. Wolf’s participants discuss their family’s unwillingness to accept anything less than perfect grades, and the pressures to get accepted into top tier colleges and universities and enroll in majors selected by the parents. Yet, Wolf’s study points to the differential treatment of Filipino children based on gender: “Male and female children of Filipino immigrants are treated differently, given different messages about what it means to be Filipino, and are reacting differently to their environment. In particular, Filipinas seem to be under greater parental controls over their movements, bodies, and sexualities than their brothers and more of them are exhibiting signs of distress” (Wolf, 1997, p. 459). Wolf found that despite the intense drive to succeed that is instilled within the students at a young age, the parents will often create specific “roadblocks” for the Filipinas, but not their brothers, by discouraging the freedom that might send them away to geographically distant colleges and universities. Her participants shared examples of being emotionally pressured into staying close to home, and some were even given new cars if they stayed at home for college (Wolf, 1997). The families encouraged the young women in particular, to choose schools close to home with status and reputations less than those where they could be accepted. The excerpts from the student focus groups provide valuable and powerful insight into the educational experiences and distress of Filipina/o participants. The most disturbing finding from Wolf’s research was the high percentage of Filipina students (27% of participants) who had thoughts of suicide. She attributes this in part to the overwhelming pressures and stresses experienced by Filipinas to succeed and achieve family expectations. She is quick to note that the blame for this does not rest with the parents and family alone, that the legacy of colonization and experiences of racism are also contributing factors.

Espiritu (2001) has similar findings in her examination of the experiences of young, college-age Filipina Americans, with a specific focus on gender roles and

gendered experiences within the family. She contextualizes Filipina American experiences by providing a historical background to immigration to the US, beginning with the impact of US colonization and immigration legislation and policies that restricted or allowed the movement of Filipina/os to America (Espiritu, 2001). Espiritu conducted in-depth interviews focusing on "family and immigration history, ethnic identity and practices, and community development" with nearly 100 Filipina/o Americans in San Diego, using snowball sampling to identify a range of participants from different backgrounds (Espiritu, 2001, 418).

Espiritu's findings reflect many of the broader immigrant community attitudes towards the perpetuation of cultural values and practices through women's lives. In immigrant communities women are often seen as the keepers of the culture – women's lives must somehow perpetuate cultural values embedded in their individual bodies, despite perpetuating unequal, patriarchal practices. As Espiritu suggests, "Because womanhood is idealized as the repository of tradition, the norms that regulate women's behaviors become a means of determining and defining group status and boundaries. As a consequence, the burdens and complexities of cultural representation fall most heavily on immigrant women and their daughters " (Espiritu, 2001, 421). She discusses the ways that immigrant families place unequal boundaries on their children based on gender. Participants shared that young men in the family are often afforded a great deal of freedom to date and go out with friends. However, there are strict expectations that young women in the families will assist in hosting and maintaining family and cultural activities and events, which can lead to challenges with regards to emotional well-being and personal identity development: "even when parents are unable to control the behaviors of their children, their (dis)approval remains powerful in shaping the emotional lives of their daughters" (Espiritu, 2001, 434).

Further, controlling women's bodies achieves a type of community control that is also a response to the marginalization of their communities: "the immigrant community uses restrictions on women's lives as one form of resistance to racism" (Espiritu, 2001, 436). In other words, control over women's bodies and lives reveal "how the 'margins' imagine and construct the 'mainstream' in order to assert superiority over it" (Espiritu, 2001, 416). In the face of racism and oppression, Espiritu's participants created their own

sense of superiority over the dominant culture through a sense of moral superiority based on the sexual purity of Filipinas: "female morality – defined as women's dedication to their families and sexual restraint – is one of the few sites where economically and politically dominated groups can construct the dominant group as other and themselves as superior" (Espiritu, 2001, 421). Espiritu's findings are insightful, yet many of the values and ideas that rely on the virtue and virginity of Filipina women do not resonate with the experience of Filipina women in Hawai'i. Espiritu's research on Filipinas in San Diego, California, has forced me to recognize the need to identify the general geographic location of my study, because the historical, social, and cultural significance of being Filipina/o in Hawai'i is too relevant to ignore.

Hawai'i is the context for the educational pipeline that the women in the study have travelled, navigating through a system that has its own particular stereotypes and cultural and ethnic markers that shape and influence the way the participants will experience education, and the ways that they are viewed by teachers and administrators in their communities. Because the Access Program that serves as a participation criterion for individuals involved in this study is located in Hawai'i, it is important to take into account as many factors as possible when examining the racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities and experiences of individuals. The history of Filipina/os in Hawai'i, complete with historically specific community dynamics and specific gender-based ethnic stereotypes, plays a significant role in the ways that Filipina/o students experience education, and the types of opportunities that are and are not available to them – there are stereotypes of males as criminally-inclined, prone to violence, and sexual predators (Fujikane 2000, Labrador 2004, Okamura 2008) and there are hypersexualized images of females leading to stereotypes of sexual promiscuity and prone to teenage pregnancy (Mayeda 2006).

In addition to these stereotypes, Okamura (2008) notes that the public education system in Hawai'i also creates an unequal environment for success, and ethnic groups such as Filipina/os are placed at a severe disadvantage for educational achievement (Okamura, 2008). Clearly, the institutional barriers and challenges play a large role in the educational experiences of students. Okamura's discussion on educational inequality in Hawai'i frames and provides a broader educational context to the experience of

participants in this study. Lastly, because of this study's focus on race and ethnicity, it is also important to take into account the categories of "Local" and "non-Local." As Reed suggests, "'Local' and 'non-local' are terms that represent two pan-ethnic groups that are differentially related to the geographic space of Hawaii" (Reed, 2001, 330). In this sense, "Local" and "non-Local" are about claiming a type of legitimate belonging to Hawai'i. In a different sense, Okamura focuses on the structural aspect of the Local/non-Local duality: "local identity can be seen to derive its significance primarily from structural rather than cultural factors. This structural dimension of local identity is based on the categorical opposition between groups considered local and those considered nonlocal, including haole, immigrants, the military, tourists, and foreign investors… From this perspective, local identity is very exclusive rather than all inclusive and serves to create and maintain social boundaries between groups" (Okamura, 1994, 165). In this sense, Local is as much about who doesn't belong to or in Hawai'i as who does. Reed also warns that "local, non-local and haole terminologies are imprecise and flexible, that they are historically situated, continuously contested and partially rule driven. They sometimes depend as much on the cultivation of sensibilities and attitudes as they do on ethnic heritage and history" (Reed, 2001, 337). For many Filipina/os in Hawai'i, the Local/non-Local divide is an important community issue and a dynamic that was somewhat significant in this study.

Nadal's (2009) work on Filipino American psychology is an attempt to further the research about the continuing impact of US colonization on Filipina/os. In his chapter on gender, Nadal provides an introduction to traditional Filipina/o gender roles by providing a history of gender and sexual orientation in the Philippines. More significantly, he introduces his own Filipina Feminist Identity Development model, a hybrid of Downing and Roush's Feminist Identity Model, and Nadal's own Filipino American Identity Development model. The result is a highly structured linear model composed of twenty statuses "that represent the spectrum of experiences for Filipina Americans" (Nadal, 2009, 181). The model includes the four development stages that represent how individual women are "accepting, grappling, and dealing with their feelings about sexism and gender discrimination" (Nadal, 2009, 180). The stages are: 1) passive acceptance, where there is no consciousness of individual or institutional sexism; 2) revelation, where

there is an awareness of institutional and individual sexism; 3) embeddedness/emanation, when there is an interconnection with other women and their gendered experiences; and 4) synthesis/active commitment, which is a combination of the synthesis stage when "a woman learns to value herself and her gender" (Nadal, 2009, 180) and the active commitment stage when "a woman learns to be fully accepting of herself" (Nadal, 2009, 180). According to Nadal, these stages represent the ways that women emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically experience their gender development. In Nadal's proposed Filipina American Feminist Identity Development model, women also have racial and ethnic experiences that influence and impact their gender identity. These stages, include: 1) assimilation; 2) sociopolitical awakening; 3) panethnic consciousness; 4) ethnocentric consciousness; and 5) Integration (Nadal, 2009, 181).

While Nadal attempts to provide insight into the diversity of the Filipina/o community through a focus on subgroups within the community (i.e. chapter on women, gays and lesbians) his work still creates a portrait of a seemingly monolithic community (for example, his community portrait seems to be rather limited to middle class and heterosexual characterizations) that adheres to essentialized cultural values. He introduces the dominant stereotypes that reflect the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of contemporary Filipinas/os, yet he tends to reinforce the stereotypes that he uses to characterize Filipina/o identities. Kumashiro (2006) describes this challenge in the following way: "Defining and celebrating the culture of a group requires first searching for and, in a sense, choosing only certain aspects as the 'traditions' or 'essential' experiences of that cultural group. In the process, we end up reifying only one version of a culture that cannot help but to be transitory, or to put it another way, we end up reifying only one moment of a cultural history that cannot help but to be constantly changing" (Kumashiro, 2006, 132). Furthermore, throughout his research, Nadal relies on the use of linear and highly structured identity development models that leave little room for divergence outside of the constructed frame of what it means to be Filipina/o. In the next section, I focus on an often overlooked point of difference: class.

Class and Poverty

There has been a very limited amount of research conducted on low-income students in higher education and how their class status impacts their experiences in post-secondary education. In *Class Matters*, bell hooks (2000) reflects on her personal educational experiences to examine the American public discourse around class issues by integrating the impact of race and gender. She highlights the ways that economic disparities contribute to the oppression of already marginalized communities, and how "poor" becomes synonymous with women of color. Further, hooks notes that the US "is fast becoming a class-segregated society where the plight of the poor is forgotten and the greed of the rich is morally tolerated and condoned" (hooks, 2000, p. vii), and this has contributed to the silencing and marginalization of poor women. Similarly, Dahlberg suggests, "The popular rhetoric of the single mother insinuates that poor women have a preference for motherhood outside more economically stable two-parent families… Wholesale vilification of these single mothers endorses domestic abuse and makes women and children the scapegoats of a destructive patriarchy that punishes the victims for the ills of society" (Dahlberg, 2003, 79).

Typically, categories like race, gender and class are analyzed separately, rather than in a more integrated way. hooks states, "Class is still often kept separate from race. And while race is often linked with gender, we still lack an ongoing collective public discourse that puts the three together in ways that illuminate for everyone how our nation is organized and what our class politics really are" (hooks, 2000, p. 8). Similarly, Espiritu suggests that "race, gender, and class, as categories of difference, do not parallel but instead intersect and confirm each other" (Espiritu, 2001, 15). hooks' discussion is important because it addresses mainstream American college life. She examines the ways that individuals are socialized and inscribed with key markers that identify their class status and the various barriers and opportunities that arise depending on one's class positioning. hooks' and Espiritu's emphasis on the intersectionality of race, class, and gender is compelling for my own research focus on the racialized, classed and gendered experiences of Filipina students, and the ways of race/racism, class/classism, and gender/sexism influence their educational experiences. Here I am using Delgado & Stefancic's understanding of "intersectionality" which points to the examination of race,

sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 51). Intersectionality is particular useful when studying individuals who occupy multiple sites of oppression, like the low-income Filipinas in my study.

In her book *Reclaiming Class*, Vivyan Adiar (2003) explores the experiences of poor women in higher education through a collection of writings by women who have experienced poverty in the academy. She introduces the concept of "poverty class," an economic status firmly grounded in the experiences of extreme poverty in the United States (Adair, 2003, 2). The women in her collection write about the various personal challenges that they overcame in order to succeed in academia, and the impact that educational programs and policies had on themselves and their families. Adair addresses the challenges facing poverty class individuals without the social and cultural capital that enable one to more easily navigate college. Her contributors also provide personal narratives about the devastating impact that national welfare reform in the 1990s had on their ability to attend or complete their degree programs. The impact of these changes extends beyond the individual college student who is no longer eligible to attend school, but also disrupts the lives of their children and families.

While simultaneously critiquing educational systems that exclude and marginalize poor women, Adair notes that higher education can provide class liberation and economic freedom for women and their families who successfully navigate the education pipeline (Adair, 2003). In another study, Adair interrogated the impact of the 1996 welfare reform legislation had on poverty class welfare recipient students who were attending college (Adair, 1999). The students in the study all attended the same state university prior to 1996. Adair distributed surveys to over two hundred students, and she selected twenty students to interview about the impact that the 1996 legislation had on their families. Through the interviews, Adair provided a space and a voice for women who had their educational goals and aspirations destroyed by this devastating legislation. This study illuminated the ways that gender, class, education, and federal policy and legislation intersect: "Since Congress enacted its sweeping overhaul of welfare policy, recipient students have been forced to leave college for low-wage jobs. Even as our nation passionately embraces the conviction that access to education is the pathway to social and

economic mobility, poor women are denied access to education that could positively alter the course of their lives" (Adair, 2003, 248). Adair describes her work as the process to "rename and reclaim our complex relationship to the academic classroom and to prolific misrepresentations of our own class identities" (Adair, 2003, 2). It is this process of renaming and reclaiming while furthering our understanding of poor women in higher education that my study undertakes.

Critical Race Theory

This research project also uses critical race theory as a foundation to frame the narratives of Filipina participants. Broadly speaking, Teranishi explains key ideas in critical race theory in education in the following way: "Conceptually, critical race theory in education challenges ahistoricism and the uni-disciplinary focus of most analyses and centralizes race and racism in education by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods" (Teranishi, 2002, 146). More specifically, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identify five key elements to a critical race methodology in education: "(a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, 24). Delgado & Stefancic further suggest that there are two main types of critical race theory scholarship. The first uses a "view of race as expressing material interests of elite groups, and they set out either to understand, analyze, criticize, or change conditions that afflict communities of color" while the second is more in line with discourse analysis that "focuses on the system of ideas and categories by which our society constructs and understands race and racism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 120).

In their overview of critical race theory (CRT) as a methodology, Solorzano and Yosso explore the ways that the use of CRT as a framework brings the race, gender, and class to the forefront of narrative and personal experiences. Delgado suggests the community-building aspect of narrative: "Stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a deeper, more vital ethics" (Delgado, 2000, p. 61). Along these lines, critical race theory relies heavily on "counterstories," which are defined as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, 32). Counterstories are able to capture experiences that are raced and e-raced: "Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 38). Counterstories are can also be productive and powerful: "We participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it" (Delgado, 2000, p. 61).

Despite the growing scholarship on critical race theory in education, there is a very limited number of works applying the critical race theory framework to the education experiences of Filipina/o American students. Teranishi's (2002) research on the college-making decision process for Filipina/o and Chinese American students in high school is an example of how critical race theory can be used in education research to illuminate and understand the racialized experiences of students of color, and specifically Filipina/o students. Teranishi designed a study that utilized both in-depth interviews and short surveys with 160 (80 Filipina/o and 80 Chinese) high school students in California schools with large populations of Asian and Pacific Islander students (Teranishi, 2002). The process of including two different Asian American ethnic groups in the study problematized the way that multiple Asian ethnic groups have been traditionally clumped together into the monolithic Asian American category. The use of two different ethnic groups demonstrated the disparate ways that the ethnic communities and the students themselves were perceived by other students and teachers. This difference based on ethnicity had a profound effect on the students' college choice process. For Teranishi, "applying a CRT lens allowed students to challenge the discourse of Asian Americans as a monolithic and prolific model minority by unveiling the ethnic and social class

diversity among Asian American ethnic groups through their narratives" (Teranishi, 2002, 147).

In his study, Teranishi (2002) found that Filipina/o and Chinese American students were subject to different types of racial stereotypes, and that these were a contributing factor to their ability to access pre-college information and guidance: "Chinese students reported feeling that they were treated as a model minority, with high academic expectations placed on them by teachers and counselors" (Teranishi, 2002, 148). They were more likely to be the recipients of college preparatory efforts, such as being placed in advanced placement classes and have access to college counselors. The students interviewed were mentored and supported in their schools as they prepared to make their college decisions. In contrast, "Filipino students, on the other hand, felt that they experienced a lot of negative stereotypes from teachers and counselors at school. Many of the Filipino students felt that they were viewed as delinquents or failures" (Teranishi, 2002, 149) and as such, the Filipina/o students in Teranishi's study reported that they were counseled to start at community colleges.

Buenavista, Jayakumar & Misa-Escalante (2009) also use CRT to examine representations of Asian Americans, specifically Filipina/os, in higher education research. Like Teranishi (2002), Buenavista, et al. argue for the more complex and holistic frame that critical race theory can provide: "CRT is a useful framework for moving beyond the critiques of the model minority stereotype and toward a deeper understanding of the sociohistorical contexts of how Asian Americans are racialized in the United States and how consequent racial constructs often shape their educational experiences and outcomes of Asian American college students" (Buenavista, et al., 2009, 72). Their overview begins with an exploration of the notion that Asian Americans are overrepresented on college campuses. The concept of overrepresentation relies on both the model minority myth (which suggests that Asian Americans as a whole have found tremendous success in education and subsequently, they are undeserving of support services or resources to assist in their quest to enter and succeed in higher education) and the consolidation of all Asian American ethnic groups into one overarching racial category (Buenavista, et al., 2009, 72). To address this conceptual oversight, the authors attempt to disaggregate the ethnic groups to reflect their diversity in terms of immigration status, socio economic

status, etc. They also integrate the impact of colonization and discriminatory immigration practices and policies into the racial constructions of Filipina/os in the US (specifically in American educational systems) and how their categorization as "Asian America" contributes to their invisibility: "Pilipino American college students face similar retention issues as other students of color, but their experiences remain obscure, and postsecondary institutions consequently fail to provide the recognition and invest the resources to address their concerns" (Buenavista, et al., 2009, 77). The authors also introduce the concept of liminality of Filipina/os, which refers to "the historical positioning of Pilipinos between status as foreigners and colonial subjects, being second-generation college students but not having the benefits of parents who understand how to navigate the U.S. educational system, and status as racialized people of color who are often marginalized by other people of color and whites" (Buenavista, et al., 2009, 75). This is similar to the transnational struggles discussed earlier but also reflect Filipina/o American feelings of invisibility when it comes to being able to access services to support their college aspirations. Lastly, Buenavista et al make an academic suggestion: "researchers should use CRT to analyze the actual experiences of diverse individuals and subgroups within the Asian American population as valid points of interest in and of themselves. Indeed, it is critical that research challenges the dominant paradigm and honors the unique individual and group experiences within the Asian American population" (Buenavista, et al., 2009, 79). In this regard, I take up the authors' suggestion to examine the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and education in my examination of individual education narratives.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This research study uses qualitative research and a Critical Race Theory in education lens to examine the personal educational narratives of low-income Filipina American college graduates. In this study in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Filipina American college graduates who were categorized as low-income while they were in college. These interviews resulted in the creation of individual cases, educational counter-narratives, personal stories and experiences that provide an alternative to the dominant narrative that tends to group these women as part of the stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority, the false perception that Asian Americans are a monolithic set of high achievers academically, economically, and socially. The Filipina American women in this study had the opportunity to share their personal stories, perhaps for the first time, and recount the resources and barriers, both inside and outside of formal school structures, that they encountered in their elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational journeys.

The participants in this research project are women who self-identified as Filipina/o – defined as having ancestry traced back to the Philippines – who have graduated from a large university in Hawai‘i in the last ten years, after the year 2000. By focusing on more recent graduates, this study allowed participants to better recall their educational and college experiences. Purposeful or purposive sampling (which draws from a specific group with specific characteristics) (Merriam 2009) was used in the study, and the research participants were selected from a pool of participants in the Access Program, a student affairs program designed to support low-income students in college. The Filipinas who were interviewed for the study were all former Access Program participants who currently vary in age (ranging from 25 years old to 45 years old), marital status (some are single and others in committed relationships), occupation (including teachers, office administrators, and stay-at-home mothers), and immigration generation (1^{st}, 1.5, 2^{nd}, and 3^{rd}). Prior to contacting the participants for the study, I obtained approval from the university institutional research board to conduct my research. Participants and interviewees were informed that they could withdraw from the research study at any time without prejudice. A list of community support services were provided

to all participants, and although none of the participants exhibited psychological distress, referrals to appropriate counseling services were made available.

To narrow the study to a reasonable number of participants (minimum of five), the Coordinator of the Access Program reviewed all program graduates and identified potential participants for this study. The Access Coordinator agreed to allow me to make initial contact via email to determine if Filipina program graduates were willing to participate in this project. All of the women who met the criteria for this study did not agree to engage in this research study. I followed up with everyone who tentatively agreed to participate via telephone or email to schedule a date, time, and location for the initial meeting. Once meetings were scheduled, I provided an introduction to this project and shared the research abstract including institutional research board approval. I was able to conduct interviews with seven of the eleven participants who initially agreed to be part of the study.

The first in-person session was spent briefly introducing myself as the researcher, explaining the study, and discussing any questions that participants had about the project. At the meeting, I discussed the research process for the project, which included a series of several in-depth interviews, and a review of the written transcripts from each interview to check for accuracy. This substantial time commitment as well as life and family challenges narrowed the field of women willing and able to participate in this study. For example, after the initial meeting one potential participant experienced a series of health challenges and subsequently was unable to be part of the study, another potential participant accepted a new job and relocated to another country. During the initial meeting, participants were asked to review and sign a written consent form, as well as a brief questionnaire to provide biographical data and contact information (i.e. ethnicity, generation, age, year of graduation from high school and college, email and mailing addresses). In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, the consent and biographical forms were coded and kept in a locked file drawer in a separate location from other research materials. After this introductory conversation with all of the women interested in this study, I also attempted to narrow the field of participants based on who I believed would be able and willing to clearly recount their stories and articulate their

personal experiences. Once 7-10 Filipinas were identified as willing to take part in this research project, I began the interviews.

The following chart provides a list of the potential participants who initially agreed to participate, and indicates those who were interviewed for this study. Participants were able to name and list their own ethnicity using the terms that they self-identify with, which resulted in multiple terms being used for a similar ethnic identity (i.e. Filipino, Filipina, Filipina American).

Name	**Ethnicity**	**Postsecondary Education**	**Agreed to Participate**	**Interviewed**
Maria	Filipino	CC, BA	Yes	Yes
Gabriela	Filipina American	BA	Yes	Yes
Christina	Filipina, Native Hawaiian, Japanese, white	BS	Yes	Yes
Debbie	Filipina, Native Hawaiian, Caucasian	BA	Yes	Yes
Rebecca	Filipino, Japanese, Haole	CC, BS	Yes	Yes
Lauren	Filipina, Chicana, Hawaiian, Native American	CC, BA	Yes	Yes
Angel	Filipino, Puerto Rican, Portuguese	CC, BA, MA	Yes	Yes
Emily	Filipino, Japanese	BA	Yes	No
Louise	Filipino, African American	BA	Yes	No
Anna	Filipino, Chamorro	BA	Yes	No
Luna	Filipino	CC, BA	Yes	No

Figure 1.1 List of Potential Participants

The majority of the data was collected through a series of two or three semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview was between 1.5 and three hours long, and each was recorded and field notes were taken. Follow-up interviews were

scheduled at the end of the initial meeting. After each meeting, the field notes were written up and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Recordings were coded and kept in a secure location separate from the biographical forms and other research materials. Throughout this dissertation, pseudonyms are used for all participants (and for any family, friends, and teachers named in the interviews) as well as school and program names. The names of specific geographic locations were also altered in order to maintain participant's anonymity. A code book was used to link forms and pseudonyms to participants, including pseudonyms for all individuals, schools, and places mentioned in interviews. Member checks were conducted by sending complete interview transcriptions back to research participants after the final interview so they could check for accuracy. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the project through the use of code numbers and protected files.

Interview Guide:

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information about the participants' elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational experiences through college graduation. The interviews were also designed to reveal the various people, entities, and structures that supported or hindered the educational progress of the Filipina participants. Lastly, the interviews were intended to uncover the potential influences of race, ethnicity, gender, and class in the educational journeys of the participants. The following questions were used to guide the interviews, however depending on time limitations, not all questions were used during the course of the interview:

- Which elementary school did you go to? What was your school like? What experiences stand out for you?
- Which middle school did you go to? What was your school like? What experiences stand out for you?
- Which high school did you go to? What was your high school like? What experiences stand out for you?
- Which colleges have you attended? What was your college experience like? What experiences stand out for you?

- What is your ethnic background? How do you personally identify yourself?
- In the experiences you described about your school, in what ways do you think that your ethnic identity affected these experiences?
- Can you describe specific examples of the ways your ethnic identity has impacted your classroom experience?
- In what ways do you think your ethnic identity impacted your relationships with other classmates and teachers?
- In the experiences you described about your school, in what ways do you think that your class identity affected these experiences?
- Can you describe specific examples of the ways your class identity has impacted your classroom experience?
- In what ways do you think your class identity impacted your relationships with other classmates and teachers?
- In the experiences you described about your school, in what ways do you think that your gender identity affected these experiences?
- Can you describe specific examples of the ways your gender identity has impacted your classroom experience?
- In what ways do you think your gender identity impacted your relationships with other classmates and teachers?
- In what ways are your experiences similar to and/or different from your siblings, cousins, and other family members who did not go to college?
- If you were able to go back in time to your 10-year old self, what advice would you give yourself?
- What role(s), if any, have your family played in your educational experiences?
- What role(s), if any, have your community played in your educational experiences?
- What resources have you used to help you on your educational path?
- What connections do you maintain with your family and how do they feel about your educational achievements?

Researcher Statement

Using a CRT lens focuses on the centrality of race and racism in examining the experiences of Filipina college students and it is also inherently an examination of the dynamics of power and relationships: "The practice of narrative inquiry considers the individual act of storytelling as well as how researchers select, shape, and present stories to stimulate engagement with a broader audience" (Holley & Colyar 2009, 680). Using narrative methods, my own power and positionality as a researcher are at the forefront, and it was necessary to provide a critical analysis of my role in influencing and shaping the outcomes of the research. Holley & Colyar explain this idea in the following way: "Textual decisions communicate authorial understandings of participants, their subjectivities, and their experiences. Authorial decisions also communicate a writer's understandings of power and position" (Holley & Colyar, 2009, 685).

In my professional role as the director of a student affairs office there are power issues that may have potentially occurred because of personal and professional power dynamics. Throughout the project, I tried to remain cognizant of these dynamics especially throughout the process of the interviews and the narrative analysis. I had limited professional involvement with the Access Program. From 2000 – 2002, I was a campus resource person for the Access Program, assisting in outreach and helping students to enroll in the program. This was a volunteer position in addition to my regular job, and although my role as resource person ended in 2002, I continue to play a minor supporting role in the program. Although my contact with Access Program students has been limited, for this study I have dual roles as a former campus resources person and as a researcher. It is possible that I worked with some of the research participants when they were students, however the majority of their experiences with the Access Program would have been with the program coordinator and not myself. As a former staff volunteer for the Access Program, it is very likely that some participants still viewed me in that role, and I tried to be careful to not use that privileged position to inadvertently pressure women to share stories or experiences that they did not want to expose. I often emphasized to the participants that the focus of this study is their personal experiences and narratives, and it is not a review of program effectiveness or even program participation. I remained committed to honoring the Filipinas' educational stories and

narratives in their original form by engaging participants in member check reviews of their personal interview transcripts.

As a brief note on my positionality, I come to this project as a Yonsei (fourth generation Japanese American) and second generation Filipina. My maternal great-grandparents immigrated to the U.S. from Japan in the early 1900s and they lived in a rural, predominantly White community that had a small, tight-knit Japanese American community. My father is from Cavite, a Tagalog speaking region of the Philippines. Like many other Filipino men from his generation, he joined the U.S. Navy in the Philippines when he was a teenager, and for most of my life, he was the only person in his family in the Unites States. I was born in Hawai‘i, but grew up in a predominantly White community in the Pacific Northwest, so I was always made keenly aware of my status as an Asian (American) "other." Summers were spent with my maternal grandmother, so I learned Japanese American community cultural values and norms. My identities as a middle class Japanese American and Filipina American woman have informed most of my research and academic endeavors. Being Filipina American, I may have insider knowledge and some understanding of ethnic and cultural issues that participants in this study might discuss, but I am also Japanese American and was not raised in a "typically Filipino" (Robillard, 1996) household. Many immigrant families continue to use their heritage language in the home, for participants in this study that would be Ilokano, Tagalog, and/or Visayan. English was the only language spoken in our home, so I am at a distinct linguistic disadvantage. Thus, potential class, cultural, and linguistic differences simultaneously make me an outsider in this study.

As discussed earlier, I am fully aware that the analysis and interpretation of the data is influenced by my personal race, gender, and class identities, and I attempted to remain cognizant of how my status as both insider (as a Filipina American woman) and outsider (as a middle class Japanese American woman who grew up outside of Hawai‘i) that may have impacted the project. Because of my positionality and my focus on narrative, I am keenly aware that my experience "is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). Yet, I also know that the ultimate goal of this

project is "aimed at understanding and making *meaning* of experiencing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data relied on reviewing interview transcripts and respondent validation, document analysis, and checks with Access Program staff. This combination of methods to gather and analyze data provides a way for participants to be engaged in the act of representing their own experiences and educational counter-narratives, without creating the burden of excessive work in order to be part of the process. I also utilized four peer debriefers throughout the project, particularly to reflect on the interviews and my interpersonal dynamics with participants. Three of the peer debriefers were Filipina/o American and the other was White and three were female. All of the peer debriefers had graduate degrees, two were faculty members and the other two were staff at State University. They were chosen because of their familiarity and professional experience with low-income and traditionally underrepresented college students. Cooper, Brandon and Lindberg (1998) describe the benefit of using a peer debriefer who can assist the researcher in the following way: "deciding how to use the research findings or simply struggling to interpret them to participants, a peer debriefer can aid in clarifying the issues encountered" (Cooper, et al, 1998, 278). My peer debriefers lessened the impact of my positionality and personal biases by offering "feedback from an alternative perspective" (Cooper, et al, 1998, 274), while also assisting me to remain focused on my research questions. While adding another layer of process to this research endeavor, I believe that this technique ultimately strengthened the credibility of my study.

Narrative

This qualitative research study also employs narrative inquiry to document the educational experiences of Filipina participants. Cooper and Heck define narrative inquiry in the following way: "Because it focuses on experience and the context surrounding educational life, narrative inquiry is situated within the discipline of qualitative research. It is philosophically aligned with work in experiential philosophy, psychology, critical theory, critical studies, and anthropology" (Cooper & Heck, 1995,

197). Furthermore, Merriam defines qualitative narrative inquiry as "the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end" (Merriam, 2009, 32). As a method, narrative inquiry is an excellent companion to critical race theory, with its multidisciplinary positioning and its emphasis on counternarratives and nonmajoritarian stories.

This project uses narrative analysis and critical race theory as the primary analytical frames. Josselson suggests that in narrative analysis, "the researcher endeavors to obtain 'data' from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant's life" (Josselson, 2007, 539). In addition, I am interested in ways participants tell their educational life stories. As Merriam notes, "Stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (Merriam, 2009, 32). I am also interested in the metaphors participants use to talk about their educational journeys? What are the key themes? How are they representing their stories? In the end, I used "the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

Both narrative inquiry and CRT share an ability to elevate the significance of storytelling, and the layered and complex contextual interactions that embrace the personal accounts shared by my participants. As a method, narrative inquiry was a great partner to CRT, with its multidisciplinary positioning and narrative inquiry is "based on the premise that human beings are essentially raconteurs who experience the world and interact with others through storied lives" (Holley & Colyar, 2009, 680). This research project utilizes narrative as a way of gathering data, rather than as a mode of analysis. Narrative was used to frame and integrate the stories, life experiences, and histories of these Filipina American participants.

Critical Race Theory and Filipina/o Counterstories

Often marginalized due to their ethnicity, gender, and class status, this project centers Filipina voices and provides an opportunity to expand our understandings of Filipina/o American experiences in education. Following CRT scholars, this qualitative

project seeks to "challenge the dominant stories of a racist U.S. society" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, 1) by shifting the analysis to include the institutional and structural forms of racism that impact the daily educational lives of Filipinas in Hawai'i. In what follows I examine the usefulness of CRT and narrative methods to better understand the complex and dynamic processes that influence and impact the experiences of my participants. First, I will provide a brief overview of CRT, beginning with its origins in legal studies and transitioning to CRT in education, addressing the major tenets and principles of the framework and applying them to my research project. Next, I will interrogate the strengths and limitations of CRT as a theoretical lens, incorporating the use of narrative methods and focusing particularly on the data analysis process. Lastly, I will consider the limitations of my study, with suggestions for further research.

The field of Critical Race Theory in education has expanded greatly over the last decade, branching off into areas such as LatCrit (Latina/o critical race theory), indigenous critical race theory, and critical white studies. The origins of the movement can be found in critical legal studies, where CRT legal scholars argued that it was difficult, if not impossible to analyze contemporary race law without recognizing the centrality of racism in all aspects of American society. The historical and sociocultural foundation of the U.S. beginning with the genocide and colonization of indigenous peoples, continuing with segregation laws, and biased and restrictive immigration policies that are firmly grounded in racism, power and oppression. CRT scholars contend that it is essential to contextualize the experiences of people of color with this framework of inequality because of the multiple ways that policies, procedures, practices, and perceptions about communities of color are influenced by this history. Educational researcher Tara Yosso defines CRT in education as "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. CRT is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling" (Yosso, 2005, 74). Building on its starting point in legal studies, this adaptation of CRT in education emphasizes the impact that it can have to transform the lives of students of color and the ways that we know and understand their educational experiences.

To better understand the CRT framework, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) introduce six basic elements of critical race theory originating in critical legal studies: "(1) CRT recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society; (2) CRT challenges dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit; (3) CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; (4) CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary; and (6) CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, 4). Utilizing critical race theory causes a radical shift in the ways that the experiences of communities of color are understood and represented in academia.

In applying the first and second elements of CRT from Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) to my project, it is important to better understand the structural forms of racism facing Filipinos in Hawai'i, including immigration policies, labor laws and employment opportunities, and educational policies and practices in the Department of Education and the University of Hawai'i system. While it is possible that individual participants in my study may share that they were never aware of any racism or discrimination in their educational experiences, CRT tells us that they were in fact subjected to the legacy of racism towards Filipinos in Hawai'i that influenced institutional policies and practices. This leads directly into the third element of CRT that posits the necessity of a contextual and historical analysis of the experiences of Filipina/os in Hawai'i. In the fourth component of Ladson-Billings and Tate's description of CRT, the narratives and experiences of Filipina/os are recognized as a valuable contribution to our greater understanding and analysis of the experiences of the peoples of Hawai'i. The fifth element allows for an interdisciplinary approach to my research that enables me to use elements of education, ethnic studies, Asian American studies, women's studies, and anthropology for my project. The sixth, and final element pushes me to move beyond the confines of my writing and research to the real life implications for my work. How will this research project impact and improve the educational experiences of other Filipinas in the future?

In their work with traditionally underrepresented students of color in colleges and universities, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) adapted CRT for educational research and the results are five key elements to a critical race methodology in education. This adaptation of CRT methodology emphasizes the impact that the work can have to transform the lives of students of color and the ways that we know and understand their experiences. According to Solorzano and Yosso, critical race theory in education: "(a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, 24). These education specific tenets expand on the elements of CRT proposed by Ladson-Billings and Tate, to include an analysis that incorporates the intersectionality of race, gender and class to understand the multiple and shifting experiences of students of color.

The first tenet firmly centers the role of racism and race in the analysis of educational experiences for students of color. The experiences of Filipina/os in the U.S. are heavy with the legacy of racist colonial policies implemented in the Philippines during U.S. expansion in the Pacific, and much of this was informed by racist policies that served to oppress Filipina/os and indoctrinate a White supremacist ideology that saw Filipinos as "little brown brothers" who were perceived as unfit for self-governance. It was believed that through U.S. tutelage and "benevolent assimilation," the Philippines would develop and eventually be able to govern themselves. This important historical context set the foundation for future immigration policies, and the social, political, and economic contexts for Filipina/o migration and life in the United States. All of these sociocultural conditions shape and directly impact educational institutions, which in turn, have the power to limit or allow access to postsecondary opportunities.

As demonstrated in the second element, the use of CRT clearly challenges dominant ideologies that purport to use race-neutral, or colorblind approaches to research. Attempts at race neutral research actually overlook the racism and the social and political realities encountered by communities of color throughout their histories. Race is an important factor in understanding U.S. colonialism in the Philippines as much as race is a factor in structuring the educational lives of low-income Filipinas. Clearly, this frame requires an understanding and interrogation of both personal and structural forms of racism. There was a participant in my study who claimed to have never encountered racism throughout her youth, because she believed in the master narrative that Hawai‘i is a multicultural paradise where there is no majority ethnic group, so there’s no racism and instead, there are “harmonious race and ethnic relations” and “equalization of opportunity” (Okamura 1998). Using the CRT framework will enable me to include the historical context of Filipina/os in Hawai‘i, which includes race based immigration policies, institutionalized discriminatory educational practices, and racist and derogatory stereotypes about Filipina/os. Obviously all of these factors have an impact on the educational experiences of Filipinas, but if I attempted to use a neutral approach to my research, it would be easy to overlook, if not intentionally disregard, all of these influential factors.

The third tenet of a CRT approach emphasizes a commitment to social justice and liberation. How will my research project on low-income Filipina Americans influence and transform the racial, gender, and class oppression encountered by my participants, and those like them in the broader community? What are the real life implications for my work and how will it inform and impact educational experiences of other Filipinas in the future? On a micro level, I hoped my participants would feel empowered by the opportunity to contribute their narratives as an important and valued part of the Filipina/o experience in Hawai‘i. On a macro level, I hoped that this study would foster a better understanding of the challenges and obstacles facing Filipinas in Hawai‘i school systems, so administrators and faculty can better support other Filipinas in the future.

The fourth element of CRT in education emphasizes the centrality of experiential knowledge and shifts our analysis from a deficit model to one that recognizes the strengths and “wealth” that communities of color contribute to campuses and

communities. The fourth tenet shifts our analysis from a deficit model to one that recognizes the strengths and wealth that communities of color contribute to student experiences. CRT challenges a deficit analysis for communities of color, explaining that deficit thinking "takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (Yosso, 2005, 74). Over the years, anecdotally I have heard many explain that the reasons for the academic failure of Filipina/o students in the Department of Education are because the parents are too busy working to spend time with their children after school and the families do not value education because they do not attend various school functions. CRT enables us to re-frame the critique and both examine the economic reasons why Filipina/o families are trapped in low-wage service jobs that require them to have multiple jobs in order to rise barely above poverty, and also examine the structural inequalities within the school system that values dominant, majoritarian roles and behaviors, rather than acknowledging and valuing the strengths and contributions of Filipina/o students. Yosso's work on community strengths discusses the ways that "community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, 77).

One of the ways individuals and communities are able to share their knowledge is through the use of counterstories or counternarratives, which offer an alternative perspective to dominant narratives in education. Because race and racism continue to be important factors in life in the United States, "it is, therefore, important for CRT scholars in education to tell these counterstories to challenge the story of white supremacy" (Ladson-Billings 2006, 4). For my project, counternarratives will provide a way for low-income Filipinas to share their educational experiences while examining how race and racism influenced and structured their educational lives. By placing value on their lived experiences and narratives, we can create a context in which to re-examine the idea of "cultural capital" and community wealth – this is similar to Yosso's re-reading of Bourdieu's notion of "capital" in which she questions whose culture has capital. She suggests that "capital" is often from the perspective of middle class whiteness, which

then usually disregards communities of color as being deficient. The fifth and final tenet for CRT in education calls for utilizing an interdisciplinary approach that allow me to use elements of education, Asian American studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, anthropology and history for my research.

Solorzano and Yosso introduce the concept of counterstories as part of CRT methodology in higher education. They argue that counterstories "is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse - the majoritarian story" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 475). Critical race theory relies heavily on the use of counterstories or counternarratives, which offer an alternative perspective to the dominant narrative in education. It provides a space for marginalized communities and individuals to express their experiences with educational institutions and processes and how race and racism help to structure their educational lives. Critical race theory in education recognizes that these counternarratives can manifest themselves either through the sharing of experiences, stories and narratives from individuals and communities, or via the construction of an aggregate story that is a semi-fictional composite narrative account. These aggregate stories incorporate history, literature, and first person narratives to create a contextualized narrative within the dynamics of race and racism: "Racism is still a pervasive part of the American landscape. It is, therefore, important for CRT scholars in education to tell these counterstories to challenge the story of white supremacy" (Ladson-Billings 2006, 4). In my opinion, the strength of CRT comes from giving voice to previously silenced individuals and communities, however it is not necessary to create constructed realities and non-majoritarian fictions to prove a point.

In their research on the experiences of Filipina/o American college students, Buenavista, Jayakumar, and Misa-Escalante note that "CRT is a useful framework for moving beyond the critiques of the sociohistorical contexts of how Asian Americans are racialized in the United States and how consequent racial constructs often shape their educational experiences and outcomes of Asian American college students" (Buenavista, Jayakumar & Misa-Escalante, 2009, 72). I hope to expand on this work using CRT and narrative to interrogate the ways that racism and its consequences impact and structure

the educational lives of low-income Filipinas. For example, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the educational experiences of Filipinas, it is important to capture the narratives and voices of women who have successfully graduated from college. The notion of voice is integral to CRT: "The 'voice' component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice. As we attempt to forge links between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV 2006, 21). Filipina students in Hawai'i are severely underrepresented at this point in the educational pipeline, and this study will allow a better understanding of some of the significant events, supports and challenges that have propelled them to the highest levels of education.

In his work on the college aspirations of Asian American students, Teranishi (2002) uses CRT to examine the experiences of Chinese and Filipino students. In addition to Chang's pioneering work on Asian American Legal Scholarship 1993), Teranishi's work is part of a small body of literature that uses CRT in examining the experiences of Asian Americans. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the actual educational experiences of Asian American students, Teranishi discusses the need to disaggregate the "Asian American" racial category for a more realistic perspective on the multiple and very diverse ethnic communities subsumed under the larger label. The racial category of Asian American is composed of dozens of Asian, and sometimes Pacific Islander ethnic groups with extremely different cultural, historical, and political backgrounds and relationships with the United States. Through interviews with students, Teranishi discovered the unequal forms of institutional racism facing Chinese and Filipino students in several high schools on the west coast. His research found that Chinese students were, for the most part, positively stereotyped as "model minorities," or high academic achieving students who don't require any special student services or supports. These students were more likely to be tracked into college prep courses and were encouraged to apply to highly competitive colleges and universities (Teranishi, 2002). Filipina/o students, on the other hand, were likely to be negatively stereotyped as low-aspiration troublemakers, or gang members. Filipina/o students were typically not tracked into

college, but instead into trades or community colleges. Teranishi argues that both of these oppositional stereotypes are problematic because of the way they dangerously generalize student lives, gloss over any special supports and services that the students might need, and they also grossly limit the academic potential of generations of students based on their race and ethnicity (Teranishi, 2002). In addition, Buenavista et al add, "CRT permits the conceptualization of how the notion of this group as a model minority is more than just a myth; it is also a pervasive paradigm that has been used in educational research to perpetuate white, middle-class, hegemonic notions of merit and dismiss the educational disparities and overall educational experiences of Asian Americans (Buenavista, Jayakumar & Misa-Escalante, 2009, 73).

Educational researcher Buenavista has focused her work solely on Filipina/o students in higher education and developing a Filipino Critical Race Theory in Education (similar to African American CRT, LatCrit, and TribalCrit). Echoing Teranishi's call to disaggregate the data on Asian Americans by specific ethnic group, Buenavista explains, "The educational barriers faced by Filipino youth are underexamined, as their issues have been hidden by their racialization as Asian Americans" (Buenavista, 2010, 116). She notes that the benefit of using CRT to examine Filipina/o communities is to expose the specific experiences of Filipina/o students who have different histories and contemporary conditions: "CRT, when brought to bear on U.S. Filipino experiences, demonstrates how these factors intersect to influence student educational trajectories. Through CRT, we can contextualize Filipino experiences in the Unites States as a result of the neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines" (Buenavista, 2010, 123). Thus, CRT attempts to fully interrogate and integrate the historical, social, economic, and political frames that structure Filipina/o lives.

The field of Filipino CRT is still emerging and developing into a more widely used methodology. As such, similar to Buenavista, I propose two critical elements that had a significant impact on the history and development of the contemporary Philippines and on Filipina/o Americans – the occupation and colonization of the Philippines by the United States, and American militarization, which suggests the continuing neo-colonial relationship between the US and the Philippines and its continuing influence on Filipina/os in the United States. Along these lines, Buenavista states, "Although Filipinos

in the Philippines are insufficiently indoctrinated into White American culture, such exposure has created a workforce on which the United States continues to rely and has led to the mass movement of Filipinos to the United States. As such, the injurious relationship between American (neo)colonialism and the Philippines warrants further examination, particularly through an understanding of the contemporary experiences of Filipinos in the United States as vestiges of this relationship" (Buenavista, 2010, 116). The US-Philippines colonial relationship also impacts Filipina/o identity formation (an important aspect of Filipina/o educational experiences): "In the case of Filipino immigrants, the cultural, economic, and political relationships between the Philippines and the United States – imposed and maintained during the ninety-plus years of colonial and postcolonial rule – have provided and continue to provide the context within which they construct their identities" (Espiritu, 1995, 26). In addition to the continuing US-Philippines colonial relationship, the impact of the US military on the Philippines and on Filipina/o migration to the United States should not be underestimated. The US military has been an important avenue for maintaining the US-Philippines colonial relationship: "Even after the Philippines' formal independence in 1946 the U.S. military installations remained, and the Military Bases Agreement of the following year allowed the United States to lease five major bases and at least twenty minor military installations for ninety-nine years at no cost" (Espiritu, 1995, 14).

Filipino CRT can also highlight issues that can often be overlooked when Filipina/os are grouped with other Asian Americans. As she notes, one of the greatest challenges for largely immigrant communities like Filipina/os is language: "Bilingual Filipino students face challenges in improving their English comprehension not necessarily because of their parents' unfamiliarity with English or the diversity of Filipino languages, but rather because of the shortage of qualified teachers fluent in the languages and/or who are formally trained to work with these students (Buenavista, 2010, 119). This is an example of how CRT pushes educational researchers to re-frame the issues and conditions facing students of color. Rather than approach the issue from a deficit perspective that charges the individual, family and community for being at fault, it instead examines the structural conditions that continue to leave unmet needs for students form immigrant communities. Buenavista also introduces the needs of undocumented

Filipina/o individuals who immigrated to American under various conditions and reasons, but who remain invisible and particularly marginalized because of tenuous nature of their presence in the United States: "Although policies outline the legal right for undocumented people, particularly the absence of institutional support required to make educational access a realistic opportunity for all" (Buenavista, 2010, 119).

Buenavista also highlights the social justice aspect of CRT: "CRT enables education practitioners to better consider the complicated relationship between factors that shape educational opportunities for students not necessarily on the higher education track" (Buenavista, 2010, 123). As illustrated in Chua's work using 2000 Census data on the demographics of Filipina/os in the United States, the low-income Filipina participants in my study are somewhat representative of the socioeconomic conditions for Filipina/os in Hawai'i, where Filipina/os comprise 21.8% of the overall population (Chua, 2009, 10). Despite the extremely high cost of living, Filipina/os in Hawai'i find themselves overrepresented in low-income families with a per capita income of $14,545, while the per capita income of $21,998 for the general overall population in Hawai'i is slightly higher than the national average (Chua, 2009, 12). Even worse, Filipina/os are overrepresented as compared to the overall population in terms of families living below poverty in Hawai'i, with 7.9% of Filipina/o families as compared to 7.0% of the overall population (Chua, 2009, 12). In Hawai'i, 6.8% of general population households utilize public assistance income and a devastating 11.3% of Filipina/o families use these same social service benefits.

Why is this data on the Filipina/o community in Hawai'i important, and how does it impact the Filipinas in this study? Buenavista found that "Generally, SES (socioeconomic status) affects the college access and retention of students of color, as research demonstrates that students from low-income backgrounds have lower educational aspirations and rates of persistence and educational attainment" (Buenavista, 2010, 120). Buenavista's focus on socioeconomic status suggests that there are structural aspects of race and racism in education, institutionalized as differential access to power and resources. In Hawai'i, structural racism plays out as a public school/private school divide and racialized inequality in terms of access to quality education and post-secondary opportunities (see Okamura 2008). Thus, given the economic situation of

Filipina/os in Hawai‘i, schools and colleges need to go an extra step to overcome structural racism and ensure that students from this community make it to the next level of education. Postsecondary education is the key to securing a viable career and leaving poverty, and the community as a whole can not afford to neglect the needs of at-risk Filipina/o students.

While the participants in my study might not name the legacies of colonialism and militarization in their educational narrative accounts, it is important for me, as the researcher to be cognizant of the broader history and context within which they are experiencing education. This is particularly significant because of the participant's location in Hawai‘i – another site of American colonialism and militarization, and deeply embedded structural forms of racism. This research project uses the lens of critical race theory and narrative to expose the unique educational life histories of its participants. By shifting low-income Filipina women from the peripheries to the center, and elevating their voices and experiences, we can gain a fuller understanding of the complex dynamics involved in the education of these students.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to my study that suggest a need for more research. While my study examines the intersections of race, class, and gender, it is conducted through the examination of the personal experiences of a very small, selective group of Filipina American college graduates. Even among this selective group, we cannot get a complete account of their educational lives because we are limited by the selection of stories that each individual woman both remembers and chooses to tell. Although reliable and generalizable to a certain degree, this project is focused on these specific women's stories and cannot be completely generalized to cover the educational experiences of all Filipina/o Americans or Asian Americans.

Another limitation of my study is the single institution sample of Filipina American college students who *successfully* navigated the educational pipeline and graduated from State University. In other words, this study engages Filipina Americans who successfully navigated their educational journeys through college graduation. What about those who had difficulties persisting and did not graduate? What were the factors

that influenced these differing experiences? What about the experiences of low income Filipina American students who did not become pregnant or had children while in college? Are there similar experiences and support programs for students who are low income but do not qualify for services like the Access Program? Would the experiences of low income Filipina American college students be different at a private institution? Similarly, what about the experiences of Filipina Americans who attended community colleges? What if they began at a community college, but unlike my study participants, did not successfully transfer to a four-year college or university?

Some externally imposed constraints on this study are the geographic, historical, cultural, social and political limitations specific to Filipina/os in Hawai‘i and Hawai‘i society in general. For example, it is important to provide more information about the social and economic climate in Hawai‘i during the period when may of the women were college students. According to Okamura (2013), because of the impact of the recession and tuition increases there was a drop in Filipina/o enrollment on college campuses in Hawai‘i during the time my study participants were in college. While these are important conditions to note, they had minimal impact on my Filipina American participants, because all were part of the Access Program. Full-time participants in the Access Program are simultaneously engaged in relevant state human service agencies, which provide a range of financial supports, which include full tuition and fees at State University. Nevertheless the locally-specific study constraints points to a need to further explore the experiences of Filipina Americans in different regions in the United States and to investigate the similarities and differences for the different historical, social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of each location.

CHAPTER FOUR: NARRATIVE CASES

This chapter outlines the educational life histories of the seven Filipinas who were interviewed for this project. In what follows, I outline each participant's personal background and what I considered to be significant parts of their elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational journeys.

Maria

Maria is a self-described Filipino who grew up as the middle child with an older sister and younger brother, who were later joined by a *hanai* (or adopted) sister that was informally brought into their family through family networks when she was in college. The family lived in a small, isolated rural community in Hawai'i. Her mother immigrated from the northern part of the Ilocos region in the Philippines, and settled in this rural community with a large population of Filipinos who had originally been brought to the area to work as agricultural laborers. Her paternal grandparents also immigrated to the United States from the northern part of the Ilocos region of the Philippines. Her father's large family also came to work in the islands' agricultural industry, but their family lived in a more urban community, finding employment outside of agriculture and in the service industry.

Although Maria's parents have strong ties to their rural community, they also owned and operated a business in a nearby town, so she and her siblings attended both private and public schools outside of their neighborhood. Maria had few memories from her early years in a small, private Catholic school, where the majority of the teachers were Filipino and many of her classmates were also Filipino. What she remembered from this early educational experience was her defiant attitude: "I went to a really strict Catholic school. I was so defiant. I rebelled so much 'cuz I hated it there. I used to tell my mom - oh, today is free dress day, we don't have to use uniform, and they would send me home. And I used to have a potty mouth. I would just get called out of class and be sent home. I was really defiant at school." Maria explained that her negative attitude and actions were because she really didn't want to go to school and just wanted to be home with her parents.

After third grade, her private school closed and she attended a larger public elementary school in town, near her parents' business, rather than the one in their community. Once at her new school, her attitude quickly shifted, where she went from being bold and defiant to being painfully shy: "I wasn't social. I didn't want to participate in class. I don't know why. I think it was terrifying for me. I was a shy, shy kid… I was really quiet in elementary school. I used to always go, just to get away from the kids, so I didn't have to be social with the kids, I used to volunteer in the special ed. classes. I remember just volunteering. So, during recess, I used to go to their classes and just kinda hang out with the special needs kids." As she continued her social adjustment to her new school environment, Maria was able to do well academically.

Maria's parents, particularly her father, emphasized the need for all of the kids to be successful in school, no matter what. This forced her to confront her fears and face the challenges posed by her new school. Maria's new public school had more ethnic diversity in the student population, where there was still a significant number of Filipinos, but the ethnic profile of the teachers changed dramatically, with very few Filipino teachers to be found. "From elementary school, I had one teacher that I really, really liked – Mr. Ibarra. He was one of my homeroom class teachers. I was in the KOLEA program, and in each class they pick two students, and he picked me. Then, they pick two students who did really well in KOLEA and send them on a trip to the city to go to a big concert at the stadium. Maybe that's why I liked him, because he chose me (laughs). But, he was Filipino." The majority of Maria's teachers in school were Japanese, and Mr. Ibarra would remain one of the few Filipino teachers that she would ever have.

Maria had an easy transition to intermediate school, where she became more engaged socially: "I was actually a good kid. All the way up until high school I had good grades. My favorite topics were language arts, I think I liked math and I liked the sciences… because you're doing stuff. It changed a lot when I went to intermediate school. I don't know what it was. I don't know if it was change again, but then I started becoming more social starting intermediate." She credited becoming more social to a larger school environment that included new personalities and students from different geographic areas. As she emerged socially, Maria became more involved in a number of extracurricular activities: "I started band in middle school, and I was in clubs. I was in the

Language Club, Business Club, and the Wolverine Club. We did fundraisers and community service, and all that kind of stuff. I played three sports, and dance. I danced Polynesian all the way up until high school and I danced and was in drill team from elementary school all the way up until I was in high school." The successful balance of these social and community engagements with her academics provided a foundation for Maria's education.

In high school, Maria continued to do well academically and was involved in multiple afterschool activities. Her father continued to emphasize school as a priority, he wanted to see her graduate and attend college. Unfortunately, Maria received very little college guidance during high school, and she had to rely on friends as resources for information: "I remember it being scary and not knowing what to do. You know, what to do, where do I go, how do I get started… I think it's because the resources weren't at my high school, it wasn't like now. I did the SATs only because one of my friends told me – 'eh did you take your SATs?' It was only because of that that I took it. So, I knew counselors were there, but I think it wasn't like they offered guidance or direction as far as, you know, this is what you need to do in order to go to college. I remember just doing everything on my own." Maria had the drive to get through school and she knew she wanted to go to college, but she was still unsure what her academic goals were beyond that, including whether she would go to a four-year campus or a community college.

Maria's self-reliant attitude would serve her well, as her pipeline through higher education was challenging and filled with unexpected obstacles. After graduation, she went to Eastside Community College, a large urban campus located far from home. Maria made the move to the city to go to school with her high school boyfriend, but after one semester, he decided to return to attend a much smaller community college campus near home. She followed him, but found herself unfulfilled academically and wanting to return to an urban environment: "I figured I might as well finish up my pre-reqs, stayed there for two semesters, and was like, I can't get anywhere here. So, I left and he stayed. I knew I wanted to go to some four-year, but I don't think I was ready to leave home. I knew I needed to end up at some four-year university because I wanted my bachelor's, so that's when I went to State University." The transition to the university was far from

smooth, because Maria learned she was pregnant the summer before starting at State University.

Even with her pregnancy, Maria's family remained very supportive of her academic goals. By the time she gave birth, Maria and her boyfriend had broken up and she was more determined than ever to complete her college degree: "I got pregnant the summer before I started State University. Because right after I gave birth I went right back to school. So, I knew ok, I'm pregnant and I gave birth in the beginning of summer. I started at State and took like 18 credits, 'cuz I knew – holy crap, I have a baby. I need to start working, you know? So I did. I never went below 15 credits and I went to summer school both sessions every year until I graduated." Maria carried a full course load, worked a part-time job, and was a new mom living in a new city. In addition, she was embroiled in a difficult two-year long custody case with her ex-boyfriend.

With a strong support system, including a new boyfriend, Benito, Maria was able to succeed academically: "I always had family no matter what. In the beginning, when the baby was born, my sister lived with us, and then after she got married, my brother lived with us, and after that he wanted to go off on his own. Then my other *hanai* sister graduated high school and came to live with us. So I always had family. You know my parents were always back and forth from their place to ours. If it wasn't for them, no way. And of course Benito. If it wasn't for him, no way. 'Cuz we started dating when I was pregnant. I think I could do it because I always had family, I always had Benito. They just allowed me to do whatever I wanted to do." She credits her Filipino family's deep commitment to education for her success, that her degree was the result of a strong network of familial love and sacrifice. However, Maria's greatest sacrifice was her health. All of the stress from school, work and her personal life took a serious toll on her, and Maria began to suffer from some serious chronic health issues that would hospitalize her multiple times and continue to plague her years later.

Gabriela

Gabriela is a self-described second generation Filipina American, the third of four children, with two older brothers and a younger sister. She grew up very aware of gender-based cultural disparities within her family, and mentioned that this inequality was often

a motivating factor in her drive to succeed academically. She has immigrant parents from the Visayas, in the central part of the Philippines. She relayed her family's immigration history in this way: "Both parents came from the Philippines. They came at different times though. They met because they had the same networks and they met here. Crazy, yeah? Usually they meet in the Philippines and they both come and migrate over together, or one person comes and then the other. No, they both met here." Gabriela's working-class parents divorced when she was in middle school, and she lived primarily with her mother and siblings.

Gabriela's family lived in an urban, economically depressed community that has a large Filipino population and many other immigrant communities. She attended the large, local public schools in her neighborhood before attending college. Since she was a very high academic-achieving student, Gabriela was regularly placed in advanced classes from elementary school through high school: "At an early age I think I already knew I liked learning. I was always placed in advanced classes, like math class and all those English writing classes. Because I guess the teachers notice the kids that tend to advance a little bit faster than what they're teaching, so they have to put you in a different class because everybody else is left behind. So, I liked learning. I always knew that I wanted to continue my education as much as I can." Gabriela excelled in the classroom and thrived in her elementary school environment, surrounded by many other Filipino students and mainly Japanese and white teachers. She entered and won district-wide competitions in math, and felt a camaraderie with her classmates in the advanced classes. Her family emphasized the importance of education and encouraged her to participate in other academic activities, but they did not allow her to join extracurricular activities, like sports, that were not academically based.

Gabriela had a somewhat turbulent move into middle school, as she found herself torn between her desire for social acceptance (with being Filipino playing big part) and her intellectual abilities. Through her new friends in middle school, Gabriela discovered the worlds of fashion, beauty, and cheerleading. She was both concerned that her new peers would discover her self-described "nerd" status and frustrated that teachers and peers underestimated her intellectual abilities because of her appearance: "Don't judge a book by it's cover dear. Just 'cuz I look like a cheerleader, doesn't mean I have a brain

like a cheerleader." And further: "The cheerleaders always talked about beauty and boys… my classmates that were in the advanced classes were always talking about colleges." Her family still prohibited non-academic extracurricular activities, so Gabriela had to be content just being friends with cheerleaders, because she was unable to try out for the squad herself. The constant tension between being popular and being smart would continue to be significant and important throughout her educational pipeline.

In middle school, Gabriela continued to be engaged in more demanding and rigorous classes, and for the first time, she found herself challenged by the course materials and her peers. She explained the role of ethnicity in these challenges, and described how she often found herself contesting the classroom stereotypes and low expectations for Filipino students. Gabriela was also very aware of the fact that her academic abilities were oftentimes surprising to both her school and family.

When she moved into high school, the stakes were higher as Gabriela learned to navigate a bigger school and began to prepare to go to college. The high school environment was different: "Of course it was another culture shock 'cuz it's an even bigger school than middle school. And the reputation that you hear back in the day – it's like it's dangerous, so be careful. I used to be around when a lot of fights broke out, and then you would have to run away and get out. Well, basically get out of harm's way 'cuz there's a big riot that's about to happen. No, seriously, back then it was all about gangs. Unbelievable, but yes… I was a little bit worried about adjusting, but I wasn't too worried about, like being hurt or bullied, or anything like that." The large public high school that she attended had a reputation for gang violence, high crime, a low graduation rate, and even lower college attendance numbers.

Despite the negative influences at school, Gabriela persisted in the advanced classes, where she worked hard to adjust. Again she noted the role of ethnicity in her high school environment: "I guess 'cuz in high school, maybe parents might have thought that this was more serious, so they transferred the Japanese and Chinese kids somewhere else… I'm guessing because they weren't in my math classes… but a lot of Filipinos were, so that was easy to relate to. There were no Polynesians in my classes, for the advanced classes, I didn't see any… I think in the schools it was mostly Filipinos… And the teachers were Japanese, Chinese… a white lady. I don't remember any Filipino

teachers, unfortunately, mostly Japanese." From an early age, she understood that ethnicity was a perceived marker of intellect, and knew that the teachers often fell back on stereotypes to judge students' abilities. Gabriela knew that education was going to be the key to advancing her life and she worked hard to impress her teachers and fight the perceptions of Filipino students: "I always knew I wanted to go to college. I always knew I had to, to get a better life 'cuz I wanted to get out from where I was… I think the teachers that was in high school were the ones that actually pressured me – like, just do it. Just do it. You can do it. They're like – it'll all turn out." It was critical that Gabriela get this type of positive encouragement from her teachers to counteract her mother's negative view anything other than work or marriage after high school.

Gabriela knew that she wanted to attend college, but she faced strong resistance from her community and family. She noted the negative perceptions of Filipinos that both Filipinos and non-Filipinos had: "When you're Filipino you're underprivileged 'cuz they look at you as, oh, you're not that smart. Oh, you don't come from money. And you're poor, so you're not going to succeed. So, I was always viewed like that." Despite her participation in advanced classes, Gabriela received very little college guidance, and she had to rely on information and advice from friends to navigate her way into State University. She explains that because of her good grades and high test scores, she was easily accepted to the university, but was ineligible for the various transition programs that assist first-generation and underrepresented students like herself. She fell through the cracks and was forced to educate and advocate for herself during her transition to college.

As a first-generation college student, Gabriela struggled to explain the value of higher education to her family, and oftentimes had to rely on a network of friends for support. She remarked on the difference between her own aspirations and that of her family, specifically her mother: "There's always good things that come up from learning. That was the energy I got. But it was difficult for me to get school because we were from a low income family. And my parents are so old school. My dad was like, I'll support whatever you do, but my mom was like – no. Because she never graduated from high school, so she was like, no. After high school you should just work and then in a couple years you can be manager. I struggle with her. I used to always say, but I don't want that for myself, I wanna get school. And she used to say it was because I was copying my

friends, so I said no, in fact, a lot of my friends are not going to school. It was hard." Unconditional family support would have eased many of the pressures that Gabriela faced during her first year at State University. She had to prove herself both in the classroom and to her mother.

Unsure of her academic goals, Gabriela focused on taking general education requirements through her first two years in college. She was also enjoying the social freedoms and activities of a college student: "At the end of sophomore year, I got unexpectedly pregnant. It wasn't planned and I was going through the whole – should I keep it? Should I not? I'm so scared. I'm only twenty-one, I have my whole future ahead of me. And then the whole Filipino tradition. Oh my god, it's so embarrassing – you're pregnant without wedlock. Feeling the pressure of that, and something inside of me told me, just do it… I mean things happen for a reason, so just deal with it. Roll with it and see where it takes you. Got pregnant, decided to keep 'em because I thought that the partner was going to be there for me… I was always hopeful, I wanted to think the best." Faced with the surprise of an unplanned pregnancy, Gabriela's mother told her if she wanted to stay home and go to school, she would have to have an abortion. Instead, she decided to forego school and hoped to build a family with her boyfriend, who had just gotten out of the US military and was returning to his home in Puerto Rico.

She followed him to Puerto Rico, but had a very difficult time as a new mother in a different country with a new culture, a language that she barely understood, and no personal support network. Her relationship with her boyfriend became strained, and she wanted to go home. A family death brought Gabriela and her infant son back to Hawai'i, where she planned to stay because her relationship with her boyfriend was over. Back home, as a single mother, she knew that she needed to support herself and her son, and that college was the key to their future: "My family was like – see, told you. You wasn't gonna amount to anything. You just wanted to act like you wanted to go into college, and look. You didn't finish, you got pregnant, and there goes your career… I'm not proud of myself for being pregnant out of wedlock, with all our cultural issues, but I'm saying that's not gonna deter me from getting what I want. I was ultimately unhappy being pregnant and not finished." Once again, her self-reliance paid off, and she was able to

navigate a path back into State University and she found support from student affairs programs to help her along the way.

Once back in college, Gabriela turned to her family for help. Unfortunately, her mother took a tough stance with her and refused to help with childcare. Already faced with enormous challenges, Gabriela felt that she would need a major that would lead to a lucrative career to support her son, so she decided to let go of her dreams to do fashion design, and instead went into business, believing that a Business degree would provide a more stable foundation and increased job opportunities.

Despite the absence of family support, Gabriela is very understanding when she reflects on her family's attitude towards her and her college aspirations. She noted the lack of access to information and a generational gap led to the disconnect: "Because they never went to college. Because I was first generation. So, because they never had the experience and the knowledge about college, they couldn't share it with me." As a result of her experiences, she often serves as a college resource for other family members with post-secondary educational aspirations. Gabriela was the first in her family to attend a university, and she has established a pathway to higher education for generations to follow.

Christina

Christina describes her ethnicities as mostly Filipina, Native Hawaiian, Japanese and white. She is the oldest of three children, with a middle sister and younger brother, who were raised by young parents in a deeply religious Christian family. Her mother's family is Hawaiian and Japanese, and her father is second-generation Filipino in Hawai‘i. Her father's parents were both from the Philippines, but he grew up with a white stepmom on the west coast. She noted that she wasn't exposed to too much of her Filipino heritage: "It's funny because Filipino is actually the most that I have, But I don't know the language. I don't know the culture. I didn't grow up with my Filipino side… The Japanese and Hawaiian side is the side I grew up with. So, maybe that's why I identify with that side." Growing up in Hawai‘i, her mother's family provided a strong support system for them, offering childcare and meals to the struggling young family.

Christina attended a mix of public and private schools, including small religious institutions, a campus with a specific ethnic designation, and a large public high school. Her education began at the local public elementary school in her neighborhood. She spent one unmemorable kindergarten year there before starting kindergarten again at a highly selective, academically rigorous private school at which she often would get in trouble: "I used to get in trouble a lot when I was younger. Mostly from my mouth. Well, I got glasses when I was in first grade, and I've always had an overbite. So, you know kids aren't always exactly the nicest people, so I used to get teased a lot. And I think one day I just had enough then I just started mouthing back. I used to get in quite a bit of trouble for saying things to people. Yeah, and the guidance counselor knew me by name. I would always get into conflicts with people." Beyond these personal, more behavioral challenges, Christina was a self-described average student, who never particularly enjoyed school. She remembers doing the bare minimum that was required to pass her classes because she never felt stimulated or inspired to do more.

Christina remembers that it was not until sixth grade when she had "a great teacher" who gave her the tools to be organized and academically succeed, and who moved her to do better in school: "I had a really good teacher. He was like the overall teacher. He was really organized and kept us accountable. He made us write in our planners when things were due. And we had a folder that we had to take back every week and our parents had to sign off on it… He would write on the board and we would copy it in our planners. And I guess he taught me how to be more organized in terms of school. Very good skills, I think that's when it turned around… I think he was the first person to actually, well, that I remember, to talk about college." She remembered being inspired because this teacher asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up, and then he had them research what they needed to do to reach that goal. Christina felt more engaged in her education, and started getting better grades: "You know, once you get an A, your parents are going to expect you to get A's forever… My grandparents had this thing where, if you get an A, you get $20 for each A. I think after my sixth grade teacher, I really wanted to do good in school… No matter what, I would still get my school stuff done." The academic shift into becoming a good student became permanent and Christina

would continue to do well in school throughout her education, despite facing numerous challenges.

In eighth grade, Christina's parents gave her the opportunity to leave her large private, academically rigorous school to attend a much smaller Christian school that was affiliated with the family's evangelical church. Both of her parents were working at the church and school, and she saw it as an opportunity to develop spiritually rather than academically: "We were very heavy into church. I think we started going when I was five… They asked me, do you want to leave? I said sure, I just felt that was where I needed to be at the time. To get closer to God… For me it wasn't the academics part, because the academics part was fine… I guess it was really more for the spiritual side… School was easy. It was out of workbooks, so it wasn't anything academically rigorous. It was more the chapel and the staff like that. And I guess just getting to know people since we were at the church all the time. Getting to know other people who were at the church all the time." Christina got to be extremely close to her family and church, and was feeling personally and spiritually fulfilled. Unfortunately, the church was going through a transition, and her family had a falling out with the religious institution.

In ninth grade, Christina's parents decided to move to the west coast to be nearer to her father's family and to find new job opportunities. The family intentionally moved to a neighborhood with good public schools in a predominantly white neighborhood located far from their family. That led to cultural challenges: "It's definitely a culture shock, 'cuz it's not like we actually visited. I think we saw my grandpa once or twice growing up. It was weird, it was very different. Like, public school first of all. Getting to wear non-uniform. All my life I had to wear a uniform… it took some getting used to. I mean, I don't think I ever felt that lonely before… I guess moving up there was the first time I've ever experienced racism. You know. Coming from Hawai'i it's like, - oh whatever. And I didn't know I was brown because in Hawai'i, I'm considered really light (laughs)." These first encounters with overt racism, coupled with being the new kid at school, left Christina very vulnerable: "A lot of people thought I was Mexican, or at least part. I guess the Filipino part too. You're like – we know you're not white completely, but you're also part Asian. Are you Mexican too? But then it got better 'cuz when people find out you're from Hawai'i then everybody wants to be your friend. But if they don't

know, I'm not white enough to be white, but I'm not dark enough to be black, but I'm brown enough to be Mexican." She soon learned to negate the personal impact of racism by capitalizing on and highlighting her origins in Hawai'i. However, not everyone in her family was able to do the same: "Oh my brother… he dropped out of high school. He was having a really hard time, going through some stuff… Moving to the mainland was hard for him. He was only five or six and he had a hard time fitting in. You know, he's the dark kid and we lived mostly in a white neighborhood, and people were kinda mean. It's like, you're the dark Filipino kid… Like, he knows more about being Filipino and all that. He's darker than me and my sister, so he had a hard time." Christina and her family continue to support her brother through his struggles, and she still encourages him to finish school and start college.

While she was able to somewhat minimize the impact of racism on her high school experience, Christina continued to have social challenges. Oftentimes she had a hard time making friends: "Growing up I never, I wasn't anti-social, I just had a difficult time in the social arena. I think high school is when it changed a little bit. I had glasses from when I was in first grade. Towards the end of freshman year, I got contacts and I dropped a bunch of weight because I was just depressed in the beginning. Not a good reason, but it, you know, I got rid of the glasses, I was skinnier, and that was better… That's when things started to change. Yeah, I got more friends… I think that's also partly when I started my rebellious stage." Her rebellious stage included a new and strong interest in boys and acting on her blossoming sexuality. From the beginning, her mother was very frank with her, despite their deeply evangelical roots, and she wanted to ensure that her daughter engaged in safe sexual activity using birth control. She did not want Christina to follow in her footsteps of being a young teenaged mother. Christina craved and enjoyed her newfound attention from boys, and spent lots of time with her new boyfriends, while staying focused on her academic goals of graduation and college. In high school, she was able to take advanced placement courses to gain college credit, and she set her sights on several prestigious universities on the west coast.

Upon graduation, Christina was accepted into a few highly competitive universities. Similar to when she was in middle school, Christina was faced with choosing to attend a large, elite, academically-respected public university near her family,

or Revival College, a lesser known, small private, Christian college located hundreds of miles away from home. Guided by her faith, she selected the Revival College, and left home after graduation.

Christina quickly adjusted to college life, immersing herself in her schoolwork as she decided to be a science major. She also wanted to accelerate college graduation: "My goal was to get out in three years 'cuz it was so expensive. I overloaded the first year… I had a few classes knocked down because of the AP credit. I think the first semester I took like 18. And then 20 or 21 the next semester. All I did was study. That was my life… Now that I look back, I should have had more balance… They had dorm activities and I never went to any of the stuff. All I did was study, 'cuz you know, I gotta do good and I gotta get out of here. And then, after my first year, that's when I found out I was pregnant." Her boyfriend from home was still in high school, but they managed to maintain the relationship through regular visits. It was during summer break after her freshman year when Christina discovered she was pregnant. Her pregnancy was unexpected: "That was very hard to swallow at first. I didn't know what it meant – I was like, ok, I'm pregnant… I was making plans to do stuff when I got back to school… They were going to start some kind of science lab, and I was talking to the guy who was doing it. He was like, yeah, when you come back we'll start this stuff… Then I ended up finding out I was pregnant. I think that was the biggest blow to the academic part of it. It just shattered all of my plans." Christina struggled to comprehend the impact of her pregnancy on her education: "And then I realized, oh, I can't go to college. What was I thinking? Yeah, it was pretty messy. Even between my boyfriend and I, 'cuz we weren't going out that long. Less than a year… My mom's like you can't go to college down there, right? What are you going to do with the baby? What are you, how are you going to go to school pregnant? I'm like, oh yeah, I didn't even think about that. I'm just like, oh, have this baby, ok, whatever, and go back to my life. But I guess the ramifications of actually getting pregnant… She's like, you know you're going to have to stop school. That's way too far for us to take care of you over there. So, I think that's when it hit me, and I'm like – shit." She withdrew from school and moved back home to have the baby. Her relationship with her boyfriend became very strained, and she eventually had to take out a temporary restraining order against him. Partially because of her situation,

Christina's family decided to relocate back to Hawai'i, where they felt they would have a stronger support network.

After having her baby, Christina was still living at home, working a part time cashier job at the mall. Her mother's experience as a teenaged mom tugged at her: "I didn't want to end up like my mom. Bitter, because, oh, I had kids. I didn't get to finish school and life sucks. I was like - no, I gotta go back to school. It's something I'm good at, it's what I know will help me… I was starting to think, growing up I had to watch my parents struggle and I do not want that for my kid." She resentfully applied to State University, and tried to figure out how she would be able to juggle college with motherhood and work. Christina worked hard to be able to attend the college of her choice, and State University was never a choice, and for her, it held strong negative connotations. However, because of her life events, Christina had limited options, and she needed lots of help to be able to go back to school. Her mother decided to only work part time so she could provide childcare to Christina's daughter for the first two years of her life. With support from her entire family, Christina was able to be a fulltime undergraduate, majoring in science at State University. She credited her perseverance to her young daughter: "I've come too far to quit. I think about my daughter. I want more for her. I think that's what really got me through. I want more for her, I want more for me. I think just knowing that there's a light at the end of the tunnel really helped. That it sucks, but one day it'll get better. One day soon." Even more, she credits her desire to inspire others: "I think too what keeps me going is that I know that it's not all about me. That I'm just one person in this huge world, and if I can help other people, then it will all be worth it. If twenty years down the road I find someone in my exact same position, it'll be like – hey, it's ok. You know, you can do it. And I think that'll be the greatest joy. When I think about that, it's like, even if I just help one person it's worth it. I can do it." For Christina the journey was far from easy, but she recently graduated and has her sights set on graduate school or medical school.

Christina's journey in higher education has also inspired her family. Her younger sister aspires to go college and her mother has returned to school: "My mom, she went to community college, and now she's at North State… Her first semester there, her and my sister. But I guess, since I went to college, and I'm the one that graduated, I'm kinda the

go-to person for college… Every time registration comes around, they meet with me. I'm their ad hoc academic advisor, making sure they have financial aid… Maybe it seems like I'm more legit 'cuz I actually graduated (laughs). It seems like I inspired them." As a result of her experiences, Cristina's family is on an exciting new path that includes higher education and a wide range of possibilities.

Debbie

Debbie describes herself as Filipina, Native Hawaiian and Caucasian. She is the oldest of two children, who grew up in a small, tight-knit rural community in Hawai'i. Debbie's mother is a second-generation Filipina and her maternal grandmother immigrated to Hawai'i from the Philippines when she was a child. Her Filipino family immigrated to Hawai'i as agricultural laborers, and her grandmother and mother grew up in the plantations. Debbie's father's family is Native Hawaiian and Caucasian. Her parents separated during her senior year, and afterwards, her mother relocated to the west coast with her younger brother.

Debbie went to the local public elementary school in her community. Her memory of elementary school was a little fuzzy: "I think it was more Hawaiian… but you see Asians like Japanese, you know… I don't have that much memories of it… I remember fifth grade. Had this – who could do the most recycling, like getting newspapers… I told my mom I wanted the most. I think it's because my teacher gave a prize. We went around and we collected so many newspapers. And I remember it was my fifth grade year and I won. But I don't remember anything about academics." She describes herself as an average student who was not particularly engaged in academics, but enjoyed the social aspects of school. Debbie's brother was born when she was in fifth grade and until this point, Debbie enjoyed the attention of being an only child.

It was during intermediate school when Debbie really started to think about her academic and professional future. In middle school, she made up her mind what career she wanted: "I decided I wanted to be a lawyer… I remember, like going through intermediate then high school. I was determined to get my degree." Debbie was much like a first-generation college student because her family had very little experience in

higher education – her mother attended a few community college classes, but did not complete a degree or certificate, and her father attended culinary school.

During summer breaks, Debbie was sent to live with her maternal grandmother. It was her time with her Filipino grandmother that shaped her understanding of what it means to be Filipino in Hawai‘i: “In the summer, my mom would usually send me to stay there. When we were in intermediate… And my grandma was just so funny. Like, she’s one of those Filipino ladies. Like, that used to make weird food and just smoke… what’s funny, is that my mom and her mom didn’t have a great relationship… My grandpa ended up leaving my grandma, and left her with six kids. And he remarried a younger, white, my step-grandma. Step-grandma, yeah. So, it was just a lot of things… because my mom never knew what family was.” This disjointed sense of family often led Debbie to feel closer to her father’s Hawaiian family because she felt they had a stronger sense of culture and family.

Debbie attended a large public high school located near her home, where she struggled. She attributed these challenges not to intellectual ability, but because she frequently missed school and classes: “I think high school is really when, freshman and sophomore year, I didn’t do that great at all. I remember, social probably… I used to go to a lot of Saturday school to try to make up my absences.” In hindsight, Debbie lamented the fact that she did not fully dedicate herself to her academics: “I was an ok student. Like, now that I think about it, I wish I would’ve pushed myself more. My mom would support me a lot in school, and making sure I do my homework… I remember how they segregate the students, like the not AP… Yeah, it’s kind of weird.” Unfortunately, Debbie was never able to take advanced placement courses and she had very little college preparation in high school.

During her junior year in high school, Debbie’s family urged her to participate in a local community Filipina pageant. Because she is of mixed ancestry, she described her experience in this way: “They would try to do my makeup to make me look more Filipino, even like added my mom’s maiden name. ‘Cuz that’s how it is, you add my mom’s maiden name because that’s not my middle name, but they added it in. So, I wanted to dance hula, but they said no. You need to do a Filipino dance… They made me do a dance, so I absolutely hated it. Towards the end, they’re already saying they know

who's gonna win. Like, it's all politics. And the Filipino community in this area is very particular… So, the girl that won, her family had really strong Filipino connections. Very strong." Despite the dynamics of the pageant, Debbie was not deterred. She says that unlike most of her fellow competitors, she participated for her family, and not for the win: "It's just funny, I just think about it now. There's all these girls and they're just wanting to win, and to me, I was just running for my grandpa. So, I didn't win… That pageant was good because it allowed me to, you know, my grandpa wanted me to do it and whatever… but I wish I would've learned more about my other culture from my moms. 'Cuz it would've been great to know about my family." The pageant provided an opportunity for Debbie and her family to collaborate on an extracurricular activity where she learned a lot about her culture and developed a greater appreciation for her Filipino heritage.

Debbie's parents separated during her senior year and this had a significant impact on her plans for the future. Her parents' separation shaped her family aspirations: "I didn't want to get married. I didn't want to have kids… Wanted to get my degree, wanted to make my own money. I wanted to be very independent… Because I saw my mom and my dad, like going through so much problems together… A lot of my issues stem from their relationship. So, I think that's where I was determined. Like, 'imma do everything by myself. With my own money. 'Imma do this, and I was determined to just do things on my own and get my degree. So that was what my major was gonna be going to State, was Marketing. That was going to be my degree." Debbie viewed postsecondary education as a means to attain financial freedom and independence.

During her senior year of high school, Debbie was accepted into the Pipeline Program at State University. The highly selective residential program brings first-generation college students to State University the summer before their first year of college to prepare them for school. Before she began the summer program she began to experience sickness: "I got into the Pipeline Program, I got a scholarship, everything, ready to go, ready to, you know, and then… I started getting sick… I went to the nurse's place over there then I told them I feel sick. You know, first I had a bladder infection, and then they told me, oh yeah, you have a bladder infection and you're pregnant. I was like, what?!? I was crying… So, that was like of course a huge disappointment, right? Huge!

So they let me stay to finish up the program. But I didn't pass my classes 'cuz I had a hard time going to class. I was always in the dorms." This surprise pregnancy discouraged and disappointed Debbie, who returned home to her boyfriend to have her baby. Shortly after her son was born, her father passed away unexpectedly. The shock of his tragic death pushed Debbie closer to her mother. She wanted to be closer to family, so she and her boyfriend and their baby moved to the west coast to reconnect with her mother and brother.

Once the family was reunited, Debbie's mother and boyfriend supported her return to college. She was able to enroll in school and attended a larger private university, where she majored in Communication. After some time, the challenges of living on the west coast and away from their familial support network, the entire family decided to return to Hawai'i. The move happened before Debbie completed her degree, so shortly after the move, she enrolled at State University, where she originally began her postsecondary journey, to finish her coursework. Debbie had little regret as she reflected on the detours she had taken in her educational pathway: "I would think about what would have happened if I did finish the program and I went to State, and knowing how calm I am now. I think I would've eventually ended up hitting rock bottom. I didn't do enough 'cuz I was too busy socializing, out, you know, freedom. So my son did ground me a lot. And my life is so different because of him. So much different. Would I have wanted to wait? Yes. Definitely. But I think I even never really planned to have a family." Debbie and her partner have another son now, and she recently started a master's program. "Overall, what I want to accomplish, is just to show my sons what is achievable. Especially when I had them, and I want them to have a family and I want them to experience life… I would want them to experience it. Everything that I want to do… just to be more educated, and to be not limited." Through the support of her family Debbie has paved the pathway to higher education for her children and this ensures that the following generations will have more access and opportunities for postsecondary education.

Rebecca

Rebecca describes herself as Filipino, Japanese and Haole. She and her younger sister grew up in a multigenerational household in a largely working class, predominantly Filipino urban community in Hawai‘i. She grew up with her maternal grandparents, a Haole (Portuguese, Norwegian, and Dutch) grandmother and a grandfather who immigrated from the Philippines (who provided an immigration pipeline for multiple family members who migrated to the United States). Her maternal grandfather shaped her understanding of Filipinos: “My grandpa’s Filipino, so he built the massive house where every single family member lives in there. I think sometimes it’s awesome, but sometimes it’s kinda rough.” Her father was a Japanese national who met and married her mother when she was working in Japan, and came to live with her in Hawai‘i. Rebecca’s parents divorced when she was only three years old, and her father returned to Japan, so he was not much of a physical presence. Over the years, she visited him only a few times throughout her childhood and his absence had a lasting impact on her life.

Education was a priority for Rebecca’s family and her mother made significant sacrifices to ensure that her daughters received what she believed was the best possible education at private Catholic Schools. Rebecca’s mother was a strong supporter of her getting an education: “I think it was a little different for me because my mom, well, I guess in my family education was always really important. My mom’s also a single mom too. But she put us through private school, so I pretty much never saw my mom growing up because she felt so strongly about education that she would work, you know, two jobs so that we could go to school.” Rebecca’s mother worked hard to provide opportunities for her daughters, but for Rebecca, this created a deep resentment towards her because of her absence in her everyday life.

When Rebecca started elementary school, she attended a small private Catholic campus located close to home. The majority of the resident nuns were from the Philippines, as were many of her classmates. This early educational experience was not positive for Rebecca: “It was private school, it was Catholic school, so we had a lot of nuns for teachers. I think I really hated school because they were so strict. Like, it’s my way or the highway. Very authoritarian, and I didn’t realize it then, but now that I look back on it, it was like – ugh, I hate school. And then, put on top of the pressure, you have

to do good in school… I don't think I was exceptionally, really smart in school, but I don't think it was something I couldn't do. I just didn't want to do it. You know how it's like if you don't like it, it's really hard to do something." Rebecca found it hard to be academically motivated, partially because of the strict doctrine of the church and school, and her school performance suffered. It was ironic that she was sent to a religious school, when in fact, it was only her grandmother who was a practicing Catholic. The use of corporal punishment contributed to Rebecca's negative attitude towards school: "I remember piano lessons. And oh, it was so scary because you know, while you're practicing, the nun would stand on the side with a stick and every time you made a mistake, you would get your hands wacked. So, after that, I never wanted to learn how to play the piano anymore. But it was pretty rough."

In addition to the stresses from school, Rebecca felt conflicting pressures from her family because of different gender expectations. Rebecca felt that there were specific expectations for girls: "I feel like I had to do well, but at the same time, I also felt like they have this real, you know, hierarchal society type thing, and it was like that in my family with my dad. So I also felt like, not only did I have to do well, but I also had to play the good daughter, and kind of the subservient role and, like, serve your family. So, that created some crazy tension in my head pretty much my whole life growing up. So, um, that was a little rough. Because you know, every time I was gonna be finishing and doing something, then, I would think in my head, like I'm not supposed to do that, 'cuz only boys do that. So, it was kind of crazy." Despite her father's absence from her life, Rebecca felt an overwhelming need to live up to what she thought were his academic expectations for her.

When Rebecca was in elementary school, the school's campus was sold to another non-Catholic faith group. Some students stayed on at the new school, but many transferred to Our Lady, a significantly larger Catholic school located in a different part of the city. Because Rebecca's mother worked so much, her grandparents handled school transportation and childcare after school. The girls were split, her younger sister was partnered with their grandfather and Rebecca spent time with her grandmother, where a very special bond formed. Her grandmother served as her primary maternal figure, influencing much of Rebecca's young life: "My grandma was so wonderful. She would

help all of my screwed up family members. So, anytime there was crazy abuse or something going on, she would take in the cousins and stuff. Throughout the years we would have people living with us in our family." In addition to the role of caregiver, Rebecca clearly remembers the tumultuous relationship between her grandparents and and the coping mechanisms that they each adopted: "Because they would fight in front of us, and then immediately after, my grandma would go and we'd go to the store and buy sweets, and grandpa would drink alcohol." Rebecca's mother was largely absent from her life, even during times of crisis, because she was constantly working to pay for the large private school tuition bills for her daughters.

In describing herself academically, Rebecca says she was average. "I was just another kid. You know, just another kid going through the motions… Just average kid." Once she transitioned to Our Lady, she began to find her way academically: "I remember my science teacher. Seventh grade, he was a cool teacher. You know, like one of those zany, cool scientist guys. Maybe that had something to do with my love of science… I also remember my art teacher. And she was another one that, you know, didn't belong… I'm wondering if that's the reason why my two favorite things today are science and art. Yeah, I think with the science teacher, he was really encouraging and he was a positive, you know, male role model. You know, 'cuz every other teacher was pretty much a nun." After finally finding her footing in the classroom, Rebecca's personal life was thrown into turmoil with the sudden and unexpected death of her dear grandmother when she was in eighth grade.

Dealing with the terrible combination of middle school angst and overwhelming grief from the loss of her emotional anchor, Rebecca began to act out in negative ways at home and school. There was a noticeable shift in her behavior: "I was naughty at Our Lady… They're like, don't come back. And so, my mom had to switch schools… it was right around the time, right after my grandma died. I just went nuts. Because she was like my support system. And then my mom was, of course, never there, because she was working. And so after my grandma passed away, I just felt like I had no one. So I just went off the rocker… I cut a girl. We were having a tiff and I got mad. So, I just took, like, I had a little razor and I cut her leg. And so, they were like – don't some back. Yeah, I think I was really angry at that time." Immediately following this violent episode,

Rebecca was expelled from Our Lady and her mother had to scramble to find a school for her.

Rebecca's mother transferred her to Holy Cross, a smaller private Catholic school nearby, so she would have a fresh start and be able to graduate from high school. Changing schools was not the fresh start her mother had envisioned: "When I switched from Our Lady to Holy Cross, I think I was viewed as the troubled kid, the one with all the issues and problems. Because, well, I had issues and problems… I think I was viewed as the bad kid, like the rotten apple or the bad seed… when I did the switch to the new school, because they know that information already when you go in. I felt like that followed along with me… I got into all kinds of trouble at school. My mom was just going nuts, you know because I was driving her crazy and she was driving me crazy too. I was like, I don't wanna be here, so I just ran away from home. I did the whole crazy, stupid things… right after my grandma passed away." Rebecca has no recollection of her schoolwork during this period because her unresolved grief and anger led to a constant stream of discipline issues. Her behavior was spiraling out of control: "The internal trouble was the fuel that kinda pushed me to the crowd that I ended up eventually running with. Of course you put yourself in bad company, and bad things happen, right? I don't think that they were necessary for me to act out. I would've acted out anyway. But because they were, you know, dabbling in bad stuff, it just made it easier for me… Just like drinking, you know, drugs… High school bad stuff, just a little early." This series of negative behavior created a lot of tension at home, resulting in a bigger split between her and her sister, and led Rebecca's mother to try a variety of disciplinary solutions, including grounding her, reporting her to the police, and eventually institutionalizing her. All of this further strained her already fragile relationship with her mother and family.

Despite all of the challenges, Rebecca knew that there were serious family expectations. She felt that her parents expected her to continue her education, and more specifically, her father wanted her to become a doctor. "I guess I love science, but I felt like, at the time I didn't realize it, but I was doing it for all the wrong reasons. You know, so I was just miserable." Eventually, Rebecca held up academically and she made it through to graduate from high school.

Unsure of what to do, Rebecca got a full-time job with a media agency and she enrolled in a local community college. Early on, she was not fully committed to college: "I did school for a little bit… I went to South Campus Community College. And that was the first time I was gearing towards a science track, so I did all the science pre-reqs, and you know that basic AA that gets you ready to transfer? But right before I finished, I needed two more classes and I just ditched it. I think that's the first place I was like, I don't know if I can do this, you know? So I didn't finish and then I went to Japan." Rebecca dropped everything and went to Japan in an attempt to reconnect with her father and his family. Once there, she developed a strong relationship with her paternal grandmother, secured a full-time job, and was living on her own. Rebecca was settling in, finally finding the family support and stability that she longed for, when she discovered that she was pregnant: "I was kinda like, what am I gonna do with the rest of my life? You know? I have a child I have to take care of. You know, I was really scared, I didn't know what I was gonna do… My mom was really supportive. My dad, not so much. He wasn't thrilled because, well, number one, the guy wasn't Japanese." Her family in Japan was not supportive and she was estranged from the father of her child. After giving birth to a daughter, Rebecca decided to return to Hawai'i to live with her mother.

Upon her return to Hawai'i, Rebecca rejoined her family in their multigenerational household. She was also at a crossroads: "Then I had to make a hard decision. What am I gonna do? I can either choose to work and be like my mom, and work two jobs and never see my child, which I hated… I could either just work, or I could go to school and try to get a job… I had a job offer and I wasn't sure. I wanted to go to school, but I didn't have the daycare thing figured out yet. I was about to make the decision, and tell them I would work, but then State University came through and they said there's an opening at their daycare, so I put her in." With the support of her mother and other family members, Rebecca jumped back into her postsecondary journey, determined to build a solid future for her daughter.

Rebecca started State University as a science major, but she quickly determined that this was not her academic strength or passion. She started taking family development and communication courses and found the courses provided personal fulfillment and they changed her at the very core of her being: "After I took that P for C class in college, it

just totally shifted the way I view education… major paradigm shift. Philosophy for Children. And it differs from, I guess, traditional, like when I went to school, education. The teachers viewed knowledge as something that needed to be transmitted, and this P for C believes that knowledge is shared. And everyone knows something different, and if you're allowed to open up and share about those things, it allows for deeper learning. I guess, deeper understandings, better experiences… That's the class that, really allowed me to finally stop being, you know, in the box Rebecca. It really got me to think outside of the box… Because I took that class, it changed the way I parent, the way that I interact with her. And the way that I approach school and learning." She was able to graduate from State University and is now considering graduate school. Rebecca has developed a strong relationship with her own daughter and she makes a conscious effort to be supportive and present in every aspect of her life.

Lauren

Lauren is a self-described Filipina, Chicana, Hawaiian, and Native American woman who grew up in a working-class community in a large urban city on the west coast. She and her younger sister were raised by their single mother, who is Filipino, Mexican and Hawaiian. Culturally and linguistically, she is unsure where she belongs: "I never really fit anywhere culturally because I've had some Spanish and a little bit of Tagalog, but I didn't really know my culture. I didn't even know our full bloodline until recently. We didn't even know we had Hawaiian blood. I knew I was part Mexican and Native American from my dad's side, but even that, I don't know what tribe… I never really fit in, I think people just assume what I was. Like, when I got to Mexico, Mexicans don't accept me for Mexican because I don't speak good Spanish. They're like against me and treat me differently because of it. And then it's kind of the same with the Filipino community. It's like - oh well, you don't speak Tagalog. You didn't grow up in the traditions, so you're different." Lauren spent most of her life living in diverse communities, surrounded by people of color, searching for her identity and her place in the world. She explained her identity journey in this way: "I don't speak Tagalog, and I grew up with Filipinas and Filipino people, but I grew up with people of color. And the thing is, it's like, with the Filipino community, it's like, you're not really in the Mexican

or Black, and you're not in the Asian… I think lots of Filipinos, with my generation, and the newer generations, are so disconnected from our roots."

Lauren never knew her father who was Mexican and Native American because he broke up with and left her mother when he learned that she was pregnant with Lauren. For a time when she was young, Lauren's younger sister's father and his parents were the family in their lives. However, that relationship had a familiar ending: "Then he abandoned us too… We moved back to the west coast and that's when his family disowned us. They blamed my mom for taking the kids away from them. And blamed my mom for the fact that he was really gay and he couldn't be in a monogamous, heterosexual relationship… I still remember the day that he left. I remember consoling my mom, and I remember my mom being hysterical. I remember my mom reading the letter. At the age of three, this is one of my earliest memories. Traumatic." Lauren's mom recovered quickly from this break-up and despite the challenges of raising a family on her own, her mother focused on getting re-acclimated to their west coast neighborhood.

As a single mother herself, Lauren follows many generations of women before her who were parenting on their own. She describes her Filipino family's history in the following way: "My mom's dad was full Filipino and he was from the Philippines, and I have his last name. And he enlisted in the US Army, but was a citizen of the Philippines, and he was on the boats and stuff. My grandmother lived where the boats came in and docked, and you know… My grandmother got sick and she ended up in the hospital with pneumonia, and that's when the children got taken away… So when my grandmother got out of the hospital, she goes to port to go and locate, you know the father, and the guy that she's been with for years, not married, but they've been living together and they have kids together. The Sargent ends up telling her – I'm sorry to inform you, but he just went back to the Philippines to his family of nine children. She's left with, the kids are gone, the guy's gone. And then my grandmother had a hard knock life on the streets too. And then my grandmother was the one who, prior to that, she found her mom hung after she committed suicide, at the age of thirteen."

Lauren's mother was committed to providing a solid education for her girls and building a community of friends to nurture their family. Lauren characterized her mother as an integral part of her family's history: "My mom definitely was a huge instrument for

change in the generations. She was a very compassionate person. Very caring. You know, was in the hood and stuff… She had a lot of knucklehead friends, but my mom was the safety home, and a lot of them had broken families and didn't have a family structure, or dads. A major factor is a lot of families that didn't have fathers around. And we all gravitated towards each other 'cuz we created our own support system, or after school care, or helping each other where we could." Lauren's friends from the neighborhood created their own community that provided the nurturing and support of a family. The idea of family is important for Lauren: "Filipino families are really close knit. That's why I see the connection with the Latino community and the Filipino community. Because it's not about money, it's about family, and sticking together, and just very close. You know, and sharing good food, and it's not about the material stuff."

As a child, Lauren attended the public school in her diverse working class neighborhood. Elementary school was enjoyable for Lauren: "I liked school when I was in elementary school. I got a little bullied 'cuz I was teacher's pet, but not that much, 'cuz I was so quiet… I just was a good student and I loved learning and doing my work. I think that is true that I've always had a quest for knowledge and my own way of processing, and my own philosophy, and the way I see the world." Lauren enjoyed learning on her own, but she did not always do well in highly structured school environments. In middle school, socializing started to take priority over academics and Lauren was no longer the teacher's pet, and she was often in trouble at school: "When I was younger, I was really smart and interested in education. And then when I got into the hormonal and emotional stuff, I was really more, it wasn't that I wasn't interested… I was rebelling against the structure and institution, but I was still learning. I was still reading (laughs)." Even when she was in trouble, Lauren found ways to feed her intellectual curiosity and this was noticed by many of the adults in her life who saw her potential and cautioned her about many of the choices she was making. There were antagonistic race relations in her school and neighborhood: "So what was scary, they had the race riots… It was the Blacks against the Mexicans. And we had crazy shit going down in middle school. Yeah, that's when I started getting a taste for the real world, out of elementary school. And more of an urban kind of education, and you know, like getting tough skin. It started in about seventh grade. So, I was at school. Yeah. I got

people were getting stabbed and shot, and I got threatened a bunch of times. And I was like, a goody-goody girl. Like, you know so that was my intro into middle school. And my mom was a single mom and worked all day." Fortunately, Lauren was never harmed physically, but she was often left on her own while her mother worked, which provided many opportunities for experimenting and trouble.

Lauren remembers teachers and other school officials warning her about the people she was spending time with. When she was in middle school, administrators cautioned her about her friends: "The Dean would see the high school guys, and he's like – I know who they are, and you better stay away from them. You guys are good girls. And he was Filipino too. He was like, I would hate to see you guys go down this wrong path. All in all it was really innocent fun. I wasn't experimenting with sex, I wasn't experimenting with alcohol, I wasn't experimenting with drugs. I probably smoked a cigarette or something with the guys that were part of the gang." The types of friends she had did not necessarily match her self-image as a "girl" and a student: "All of us were nice girls… I did end up finishing out that middle school on time and I had honors classes… I was still doing good in school, I was just changing more of my image, I guess. And that was part of the whole hormonal changes… So, high school, my mom decided that she would move to the suburbs so that I could go to a better high school. Ruined me… She moved us out there, took me away from all my friends at a pivotal time in my life, of developing. And I was starting to rebel already. So by the time I got to ninth grade, I hated her. I had no friends. I started high school not knowing one single person, which was devastating to me at the time." Lauren experienced tremendous pressure of adjusting socially to a new community and the move created a rift between Lauren and her mother.

The relationship between Lauren and her family only grew worse when she and her sister were sexually assaulted. She described sexual assault and its consequences in the following way: "The summer between junior high and high school, my sister and I got molested at the beach by a stranger… Being robbed of a certain part of my integrity, and body, and sexuality, and all that stuff. It was hard on me, but it was harder on my sister at the time because my sister was in elementary school… my sister got into therapy, I resisted completely. I was such a bitch to them… I closed myself off to the world. And I

had a lot of anger deep down inside. And the fact that my dad abandoned me at birth was coming up through my hormones. So, I was just trying to find myself, and then this. A lot of confusing things in my life." At that time Lauren was still enrolled in high school, but she rarely went to classes and the trauma of the assault led her into a life of very risky behavior outside of school: "Tenth is when I was out of control. Out of control! Like, I ran away from home, I went to Juvenile Hall, I had warrants because my mom was trying to get me in all these programs, and tough love. And I was so angry at her. I took out all my anger about the abandonment of my father. I hated my life and I hated myself. And I wished my mom had just had an abortion. 'Cuz my dad wanted her to have an abortion when he found out she was pregnant… he had a girlfriend… so when she got pregnant, he was like, no way, you gotta have an abortion. Then he denied that I was his… When I was a teenager, I always used it against her. Like, you should've just had an abortion. I fucking hate my life… I don't even want to be here." Despite all of her trouble with the law, Lauren still remained connected to her school. Her teachers did their best to keep her at least minimally engaged: "I was still actually in honors classes… I would even go to class drunk. And the teachers would know, but I was so smart compared to everyone else, that they were like, well, you're still doing the work. We don't really want her to not finish school… I started running away when I was fifteen. And that's when I started experimenting with harsher drugs, and getting with even worse kind of people. And dealers, and being at places with drive-bys and my life being in danger… I got involved with some girl from Juvenile Hall, and then we both ran away from the group home that we were placed in. That was some scary shit I put myself through."

Lauren's life changed the following year when she met two teachers, one who inspired her to channel her anger into activism and the other who helped her to fully embrace her passion for art. She described the first teacher in this way: "Mr. Morita was my American History teacher… A-mazing! Changed my life forever. He is one of the first ones that got me into activist work… I'm surprised he never got booted out or the feds never came after him. 'Cuz he was such a revolutionary activist. The way that he did it, though, was brilliant. He changed my life forever." At the time, Lauren was spending a significant amount of her time socializing and partying, high school was the least of her concerns. She never stopped long enough to even consider her future: "We would go to

ditching parties, and I got involved in the Latin dance house music scene. We had party crews and we had ditching parties with kegs, and there'd be drive-by shootings sometimes, fights." Despite this lifestyle, she connected to be involved in school and her teachers remained supportive: "There's not much the teachers could really do, because even though I was ditching, and I was using and partying, I always finished the work… and it would be kick ass work. And they would feel like, if they didn't pass me, or got me in trouble, then I would just drop out… So they would keep me after school. They would always give me pep talks." Her art teacher pushed her to reframe her understanding of art and the ways art and identity connected: "My art teacher, my art teacher was the first one to acknowledge that I was an artist. And prior to that, I didn't consider myself an artist. I was a tagger or a bomber… I was a street artist before it was cool. Before there was any, you know, how it's accepted now… She was like - I think graffiti's art. You're an artist. You're an amazing artist and I want to see more… She was always pushing me by giving me extra homework and spending extra time with me away from class and the kids… I really was trying to find my identity and myself. And when I put the two together and was accepted by an adult for my talents, it made me accept myself and my talents even more, and believe myself even more. Without her help, I probably would've gotten more of the trouble aspects, the breaking the law stuff, rather than the artistic visual parts of it." Lauren also began to see art as tools for both personal and political commentary: "Graffiti art to me, is also a very political statement. Because a lot of what we're saying, it wasn't really about art. It was also about making a political statement about corporate America and money and beautifying our community with color, and putting messages on the walls for youth." For Lauren, her teachers were integral to her development and to providing foundations for her future: "I think at the very end, it was teachers like my art teacher and it was teachers like Mr. Morita that didn't give me a choice not to think about the future, and not to think of the talents that I really had. Or the fact that I was really gifted and talented intellectually. They wouldn't let me not. They would make me meet them after class, and talk to them. Talk about my life, and I appreciated it because I respected them in a different way."

When Lauren started to think about her future and what she wanted to do with her life, she knew that she wanted to continue to learn more to develop her passion for art.

However, Lauren also had some self-doubt: "At the very, very end, right when I was graduating, I said I guess I could try community college and test it out. Because I am an artist, and I do want to learn some more art stuff. But I don't want to apply to university. That's not for me. I can't afford it, I'm low income. And I didn't know about scholarships. I'm not good enough for university. I can't get into UCLA or USC, like there's no way. And so I didn't think I would qualify. I started out at community college, and again, all these art instructors saw me and took me under their wing." When she was in community college, one of her instructors sexually harassed her and the anger and emotions from when she had been assaulted as a child resurfaced. Lauren confronted, but never reported the instructor, and then she dropped out of school.

Soon afterwards, Lauren got a job working as a personal assistant for an art curator who managed graffiti artists. The burgeoning urban art scene proved to be very lucrative and Lauren was soon working as a personal assistant and an artist in her own right. At this point, her life in art was on the rise: "I was nineteen, I got my first apartment on my own. I am blowing up on the art scene. I had this guy who manages all the top graffiti artists, who was a curator for all the top underground urban art shows, take me under his wing and teaches me how to curate, how to basically manage artists. I worked as his PA… He was well known in the art community. Well respected by normal curators and the urban underground hip hop community… I didn't even have a job. I was just an artist, working for him, and I was making a good amount of money. And I was making art and it was great." Lauren could have been content with her new lifestyle, but she did not feel fulfilled. She was restless and decided to leave the art scene and the city to move to another state with the woman who married her mother's foster dad. At the time, this woman became key to Lauren's spiritual awakening: "Nobody could understand why I was leaving my career behind to go live in the mountains… I don't know, I'm on a spiritual path right now. And I was all into yoga and meditating, and holistic health. I was vegetarian, and on a different kind of identity search at that point in my life. When I got there, I realized what my journey there was. She was a grandma, but she would wake up at five in the morning. By the time I would wake up, which would be later, she had already done yoga, played guitar, played piano, did chores and was ready to go to a theater show or an art class, or something within the community. And I was like,

dang, this lady is younger than me. Like, her spirit. She has more energy than me and I'm like, I'm a kid. So she taught me soooo much. It was a fabulous time in my life, because I was so open at that time, and impressionable. And the things she taught me were life lessons, like one of the main things I remember her saying is – you gotta roll with the punches. No matter what happens in life, you gotta roll with the punches."

Lauren's spiritual awakening coincided with her consciousness of gender identity. This journey also involved a cultural awakening: "I realized that I was becoming a woman. I was on a vision quest. I was on my soul searching thing, where I wasn't a kid anymore, I wasn't a teenager anymore, and that all these decisions were my decisions now, of how I wanted to live my life. As a vegetarian, as an artist, as a gypsy, as whatever was up to me to decide… What I realized was that she was like a grandmother figure to me, that I never had, so I loved it. And I started thinking about my family and I was on this quest to find myself and become myself. And then I started thinking, well, I need to know my roots." The personal journey to find her family origins led Lauren to Hawai'i for a vacation. During the trip, what began as a short vacation became more permanent when she met someone and got pregnant. What should have been a joyous time for Lauren as she gave birth to her daughter, was instead fraught with fear and danger: "My daughter's dad was and is a drug dealer and addict. And he was very emotionally and mentally abusive. And I never thought that I would be in a situation like that. Because I was independent, I was strong. I was conscious. I never thought I'd be in a situation like that, but I did. And I'm at the point where I'm forgiving myself for all of it. And I'm acknowledging that I don't deserve that and that my daughter doesn't." It took several years before Lauren was able to leave the abusive relationship, but she felt it was important to remain in Hawai'i so her daughter would be able to maintain a relationship with her father, unlike Lauren and the generations of women in her family before her.

Once free from her abusive relationship, Lauren decided to re-visit her journey into higher education. She enrolled at State University and dedicated herself to completing her bachelor's degree. Living away from her family and support network, it was extremely challenging for her to balance coursework, a part-time job, and motherhood. Lauren was more determined than ever to be successful because she wanted

to be a role model of strength for her daughter: “I don’t want to be a victim. I don’t wanna be in that box, ‘cuz I’m not. I’m a survivor, I’m not a victim. And I don’t want to be treated like one, or I don’t want pity. I don’t want shame. I wanna be who I am, which is a survivor. And I’m strong, and I’m powerful, and I’m smart, and I’m talented.” Like her mother before her, Lauren created a surrogate family of friends and community that would all assist her as she struggled through school and raised her daughter. As a final graduation capstone, she created an ode to the women of her family: “Seven generations of women who’ve been through turmoil, abuse, and crazy experiences… My closing piece for graduation was a seven layer altar piece that I had made as an ode to my family, and all the women for seven generations… and for my daughter, and it was a lot about my sexual abuse past… The altar piece had different levels, and that was about all the different generations of women in my family. And coming back to this sacred place, and then also going on a different level of abuse, or turmoil, then my own personal experiences, and very spiritual and generational.”

Angel

Angel describes herself as Filipino, Puerto Rican, and Portuguese. She and her younger sister grew up in a multigenerational house with her mother and her family, in a somewhat rural community with a large Filipino population. Her maternal grandparents immigrated from the Philippines to Hawai‘i, where Angel’s mother was born and raised. Her maternal grandfather was the immigrant pioneer who took in all of the family members who recently immigrated from the Philippines. Her father is Puerto Rican and Portuguese, but her parents divorced when she was young and her dad moved away to the rural community that he grew up in. As a result, Angel had little connection with her father’s side of her family, other than during the infrequent visits during school vacations. She described her multiple ancestry in this way: “I grew up with my Filipino family, so when I was growing up, I was searching and searching for that Puerto Rican, Portuguese. That’s why in college I took Spanish. Because I grew up with my mom’s family, not my dad’s… I think it’s because I only knew about Filipino. The culture growing up with my mom’s parents.” Her Filipino family was Ilokano, from the northern region of the Philippines, and they immigrated to Hawai‘i to work as agricultural laborers. As a third-

generation Filipina, like many others in Hawai‘i, Angel felt less aligned with her individual ethnic identities: “I think I identify myself more as local culture. You know, ‘cuz I lived in Hawai‘i all my life. Never been to Philippines, Portugal, or Puerto Rico.”

When she was a child, Angel attended the public elementary school in her neighborhood, where she described herself as an average student. Her elementary school was enjoyable: “I remember it being fun. You know, you don’t have nothing to worry about, you just learning, having fun. I never felt less than anybody else. ‘Cuz you know, you still young. You don’t have anybody looking down on you yet, or judging you, you know. ‘Cuz you’re still young. You don’t even care, even if they were.” She liked school, but lamented that she never had aspirations for her future: “That’s why I always ask my daughter now - like, whatchu wanna be? And then – you wanna be that, what you think you need to do? So she already know – oh, I gotta work hard. I hate reading, but reading will help you to learn what you need. I never had a mentor or guidance. ‘Cuz my mom was always working, and she was limited in her parenting ‘cuz she wasn’t really educated.” Angel is attempting to change the aspirations and opportunities of her own daughters by expanding the realm of possibilities with and for them.

At the end of elementary school, her mother met someone new and they started dating. Angel remembers that her grandfather was very prejudiced against the man who would become her stepdad because he was African American. The race of her eventual stepdad was a source of shame: “I was so embarrassed that he was African American. He used to drop us off, I used to duck down in the car. My mom sent me to a psychologist. I mean, I never went to their wedding. Because my grandfather used to always talk about – oh, your mom staying with one Black man. Like that, so it was put in my head that it was – ewwww, something’s wrong. I gave him a hard time. I was so bad. I used to make them fight. I was so horrible because I didn’t want her with him, but that came from my grandfather implanting that in my head, that this kind of different thing is wrong. ‘Cuz of course my grandfather wanted all my aunties them, to all marry Filipino. ‘Cuz that’s how it is, right? My mom used to feel hide for meeting for a date, and all that… it came from my grandfather making… He’s the one that kinda implanted in my head that it’s wrong. I wouldn’t know that anything’s, you know, like, something weird about he situation. I would have never thought that… Yeah, you don’t know, until somebody… *tells you.* Yes.

'Til somebody instills it in your mind. That, oh, something is wrong." As an adult Angel was able to recognize the discriminatory and racist nature of her grandfather's words, but as a child, she obeyed him, which created a lot of tension in the family. Angel remarked that over time, her mother's husband became her dad because he was more of a presence and a father figure to her than her own biological father, and because of this she calls him her "hero." Despite her behavior as a child, he never let it negatively impact the relationship he had with Angel's mom or the children.

Filipino culture was very important to Angel's grandparents and they did what they could to ensure the family had a sense of Filipino pride. Angel had a basic grasp of Ilokano language: "Very, very little. You know, when you learn a language, you only learn the bad words. I can go on the bus, and I can hear the Filipino ladies talking, and I know enough that I can understand what they're saying. I can express myself with words, not sentences. Like, respond, but not like sentences, fluent… Because my grandfather used to primarily speak Filipino in the home. You pick up those little here and there. After they say it so much, you kind of put two and two together – that's what it means. You're a hard head, or go take a shower, or it's time to eat, you know?" The grandparents wanted the children to learn aspects of the culture beyond the language and food. They enrolled Angel in Philippine dance classes: "I used to go Filipino folk dance. I mean, all of that… I think I was four to about sixth grade. There was a place in town, I forgot the name. We did the bamboo, everything like tinikling, and all that. And the glass with the water, and the thing. Yeah!" Angel participated in these Filipino-related activities up until middle school, when her mom re-married and moved them all out of the family home.

Around the same time, after elementary school, Angel faced a difficult transition to her new middle school. The shift from elementary school to middle school was coupled with the adjustment to an African American stepdad: "Well, middle school was when I was going through all that stuff with my stepdad… So, so the transition to seventh grade was really bad. I didn't want to change school. I had a really hard time… and my mom wasn't very supportive. Like, no real nurturing. I mean, we were safe, we had food, shelter, but no real nurturing. So, intermediate… I don't really remember. I didn't want to go. And then different friends… I started having low self-esteem. That's when it started, like, intermediate. And I never have a mom that was, you know, encouraging…" Angel's

parents worked long hours to support the family and she felt they also did not have the skills or knowledge about how to be nurturing parents, so she and her sisters were often left on their own at a time when she really needed their support.

Angel's love of dance led her to get involved with the middle school drill team. This is the only extracurricular activity that she participated in, but she never felt support from her family, especially from her mother: "When we performed, she never did come to the performances. Nothing. Ever. Even with college. Nobody was supportive, because nobody went to college. No – it was on our own. It was like I was so alone growing up. Yeah. I think that's why I'm so empowered." Her childhood experiences led Angel to become very strong and self-reliant, traits that she is working on to pass to her own daughters.

In the classroom, she identified math as one of her favorite courses early on. Math was her favorite subject until early high school: "I think math was always my favorite subject until the tenth grade. I think I got my first F because the teacher wasn't very good at explaining. So I just didn't get it. It was Algebra already, and the teacher wasn't really approachable. So I had an F and it kinda just threw me off." This bad experience discouraged Angel from further investigating or pursuing advanced math classes and it had a negative impact on her academic self-esteem that would last through graduate school. Angel's least favorite courses were those that involved reading: "I hated reading. I hate reading. Ugh. I'll read now, but I never liked reading ever. I never got to read. I never read to my kids, I'm not a reader at all… That's why going to college really helped me 'cuz that was a real difficult thing for me. To read. And comprehension was so hard. It was more challenging for me than regular, other people who went to college. I would have to read, and read, and read. And ask myself – what was that?" Once she was in college, Angel was diagnosed with a learning disability. If her learning disability had been discovered earlier, Angel felt it could have dramatically changed the trajectory of her educational life.

Angel's transition to the large public high school in her area went much more smoothly than the transition to middle school. She was thrilled for high school and saw it as preparation for college: "Where elementary to middle school, I was nervous. But, intermediate to high school, I was excited. But just to get it over with. Not because –

ooohh! High school, I'm gonna prepare for college. Like, I had no college ever entered my mind. Ever. Four more years, and I'm outta here. Really, I am not joking." Even in high school, Angel never really thought about her future plans, because she was so singularly focused on graduating and getting out of school.

In high school, her favorite subjects changed. She was no longer interested in Math and her attention focused to more art-related fields: "I really loved the photography class and food service. I don't know why. I took food service as my elective. I loved it. And the photography was so fun… I didn't think that you would need to get educated to be a chef. I just thought it as you just cook and… I never see the bigger picture. You know, like food service. Like, maybe I can be a manager of a restaurant. I was thinking more of, I'm gonna be the cook. Like, seriously. What if I could've been, like a photographer. You know, they could've pointed me in the direction of business. I could've owned my own photography business. I mean, that would have never even thought of in my mind. I couldn't think that big. Because nobody introduced it. So, I live in my limited world, you know, I'm ok being a cashier the rest of my life… Work and make money. Work, cashier, whatever. Like, I was really set on working a retail, food service, whatever. Like, that was ok for me. I never see anything other than that… I was always working since sixteen, and when I became eighteen, I always had two jobs." Angel saw friends and classmates going to get advice from the high school counselor, but this was not part of her experience: "In high school, everybody else was going to the counselor's office to talk about college, but I was never called to the counseling. So, I went one time, and I was like - oh I wanted to learn about this kind college, and the counselor was like, oh… it's only for the smart kids… I felt like, ok, so it's the same. Live in the present. Like, don't go out of your box, this is your life. Almost like, just acceptance. Accepting that this is all there is. It kinda put me in that mentality." The counselor's disregard for Angel's feelings immediately shut her down from pursuing her educational goals. That was the last time she went to the school counselor and the impact of his harsh words would be felt throughout the remainder of Angel's academic career.

With no plan for post-secondary education, Angel pushed through the end of her high school career and graduated. At that time, she did not feel the need to pursue post-secondary education: "I just graduated. And I had money. Buy me a new car. I mean, this

was the life. You don't need to go to college." Angel also met a guy at work at the same time period and they started dating. Despite graduating from high school and having a new boyfriend, the pressure to be responsible for all household duties and childcare persisted: "That's why when I was 18 to 21… That was three bad years. Because I went, crazy. I went clubbing, I did everything under the sun. Because I felt so chained up. I felt so, you know, like, let me out, let me out. So, I just went crazy." As a result, Angel's mother kicked her out of the house for disobedience and she was told that she could return only if she was willing to abide by the rules of the house. Overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibilities of caring for her two younger sisters and unwilling to be constrained by the strict housework duties, Angel stayed away, relying on the generosity of friends and acquaintances. For a while, she hopped from place to place, leaving her virtually homeless. During this time, Angel's aunt and grandmother searched for her and found her living in the city. They were able to persuade her to return, not to her mother's home, but to her family's large family home where she grew up.

Angel and her boyfriend were still together, working low-wage part-time jobs when they went to live with her grandmother. When they were there, she discovered that she was pregnant with their daughter. The circumstances of her pregnancy were a bit shocking and eye-opening: "So, what happened is, he got in a car accident, and then somebody died… So, he went to prison, our daughter was two months old. Yeah. So, when he went to prison and I had a two month old baby, I thought, what the hell am I gonna do? I can't be a cashier forever. Like, how am I gonna support a baby by myself? And I remember, I said, how can I make money for two people? And I knew that I only had enough education to be a cashier. And then, that's when I thought I have to go to college so I can get a better job. And then I also though, when he comes out of prison, he's probably going have a hard time getting a job, so I really, even more so, when he comes out to rebuild our family, I have a kid, I need the here and now, so I was thinking of the now and the future. What do I need to do? And then that's when I said – I have to go to college. And I was thinking, how am I going to go to college? I don't even know how to write a paper. And then I told my mom of the idea, and she was like, why you gonna go to college? She's like, you're working now, just go on welfare." The tragedy

that sent Angel's partner to prison forced her, for the first time in her life, to consider going to college and planning for the future.

Angel was still full of self-doubt, fueled in part by her past experiences at home and in school, but she was determined to build a better situation for her family. She was also determined not to take her mother's advice: "I was so against welfare. I don't know why. I had this stereotype, like, welfare is so shame, whatever. You know what I mean? I was, like, no, so, at that time I was working as a cashier. And I remember thinking, I know all the other cashiers, they work part-time and they go to college. But nobody ever told me, like, go to… but I remember, and then I was thinking of the concept that they work part-time and they go to college. There must be a reason why they're going to college. And then I thought, it's probably because they want, they need, more money, like. My only thing I was thinking about is I need more money. I wasn't really thinking about I want an education, too." Because she had never received any college counseling at high school, she had no idea where to even start in her path to higher education. But she was fearless and determined to get information about college: "I just went to the campus, and I think I just went to the registrar office, and I was like, I wanted to find out about college. But then I think that's when they introduced me to a counselor. And then I remember telling him, you know, I wanna go to college, but I don't even know nothing. I don't even understand what is the degrees, and… I don't even know what I want to be, but I know I need to be in college so I can get a better job and make more money. It wasn't about educating myself. Isn't that weird? That was, my, my purpose was very different from people who go to college… I was so scared. I was like, I don't even know. I only work part-time. I don't know how I'm gonna pay, or whatever. And then, that's when they come to me, about like, financial aid, and all of that, and I was, like – huh? It was so confusing to me, but I was, but I really knew I had to do this. So, I just went step by step." The counselor that Angel met on her first day at Eastside Community College connected her with a student services program for students like herself, first generation, non-traditional students, who tested below the 100 level for coursework. It was here that she developed a close network of support and friends who would stay close throughout her journey in higher education.

Angel's determination was fueled by her desire to create a better future for her young family. Throughout all of her struggles, she never lost touch with her boyfriend, and never gave up on him or their future: "He was in prison, the seven years. I was in college seven years. I got my Associate, Bachelor, and Master, while he was in prison... I can honestly say, if he didn't go to prison, right now, I would still be a cashier. Like, I would, really. I had no reason to even want to go to college. It was again, me… Forced learning. Forced, I mean, I have to be forced to better myself… I took my daughter every weekend, we were at the prison. Every single weekend, every prison. it was hard. While going to school and working. Plus, you know, you get the whole mental stress, yeah, like. And then thinking of the kid, and the dad over there." It was freeing for Angel to share the details of her situation with her new college friends and she even found classmates in similar situations, with incarcerated partners. This support network of friends and classmates would help carry and guide Angel through her postsecondary education: "I had to go through the GRADE Program… we all, like, wanted, and we support each other. I felt that whole sense of family, like, I wasn't by myself. 'Cuz, we moved together. It was a year and a half. So that really helped to grow me, and you know, think I could do this. I could do this. You know, like, I could do this, 'cuz we were all together. Not like regular college, just go all different people. We were together for the year and a half, so we nurtured each other, we got to know each other. Encourage each other. I wasn't getting that from my family, so this was like, my family. And then, because I was working part-time as a cashier, and a lot of the cashiers was going to school too, now we started talking the same language and more encouraged I got. From my co-workers." Through her struggles to pursue a degree, Angel received little, if any, support from her parents and family. She was a first-generation college student and no one in her family understood why she was bothering with school instead of simply working.

It was at her community college campus when Angel became curious about possibilities for the future. She started looking into education beyond community college and at four-year universities: "I was starting to ask, you know, like, about the degrees, like, what kind of degree is this? And they talked about the Associate's. You know, like, I'm just going do the Associate and get a job, whatever… I had a lot of friends. And then, they were all, like, going to State University, and I guess it inspired me. Like, like, going

to State, they got their Associate's, and they're moving on. It was like they were showing me this path. So, then, I was like, thinking then, I remember talking to the counselor, and saying, you know, I don't really know what kind of degree I want, but if I was to get a Bachelor's, what kind of classes, or how do I prepare myself? And then that's when I started already, I knew the college thing already. So, then I was, like, starting to do all my writing. I stayed Eastside Community College doing all my writing intensive. In hopes that I might reconsider doing a Bachelor. Reconsider doing my Bachelor's. And then, I don't know what made me say I want to do my Bachelor's. I don't know." She successfully completed her associate's degree at Eastside Community College and spurred on by her GRADE Program peers, Angel decided to apply to State University for her undergraduate degree. Although she acknowledges serendipity, she also credits her personal situation for continuing her academic journey: "It was my… really, my situation and circumstance is what really drove me to, to college, really. That's really what it was. It really was. And then, you know, not even knowing that along the way of being educated, I've learned so much more parenting skills, just learn about myself, learn about opportunities, learn about the world. Learn about people, relationships, communication, all those things that I never really grew up with. So, it really, not only give me a job with more money, or a degree. It really helped me as a person to grow. And handle my situations."

At State University, the financial burden was higher and the academics were more rigorous. Angel had to figure out a way to make it through college, especially given her personal circumstances: "I was working part time, but I was already, kind of like, living off of credit cards. 'Cuz never had his income. 'Cuz I didn't want to go on welfare! So I was living off of credit cards, and then, um, my mom them, that's the one thing. My mom said – you know what, the welfare is for people that needs help for a period of time… I went on welfare and I got financial aid. Yeah. It wasn't that bad though. I mean, you know, I'm a working citizen. I put into the pot. I mean, you know, but it was so hard. But I saw my credit card was racking up, and I was like, ehhhhhh! I can't do this forever. And then I guess I got into the thought of financial aid, free money. I mean, I gotta take it. I cannot pay for college, right? So then I guess I got little bit more accepting of, well, the money is there to help you." Securing the financial support for school enabled Angel to

focus on her academics where she took courses in counseling, social work, and family dynamics. The content of these courses had a much deeper impact than just classroom learning, they also influenced her parenting and relationships with her boyfriend and family. She was gaining the tools to create a solid, healthy foundation for her young family.

Throughout her time at State University, Angel remained close to many of her classmates from the GRADE program. Several of them completed their bachelor's degrees and they graduated together. She credits her GRADE classmates for providing assistance and emotional backing: " 'Cuz I never had any support, you know, from growing up. Nobody was there to guide me, nurture me, and then, it's like, how people get into gangs. Just 'cuz they accepted. Like that. Well, a bunch of people in our classes, they applied. And I was like, I'm done, I'm tired, I am fine with a Bachelor's. I mean, I never even like one Bachelor's. I was thinking Associate's. I was like, and now I did a Bachelor's, and my friend was like, just apply! I was like, no – I don't want to. So, I never. The deadline came and went. And then the next day, she said, Angel – they extended it for one week. And I was like, is this a sign? Is this a sign? So, she said, just apply. If you get in, you don't really have to do it. I was like, ok, ok. So, I had to rush all my transcripts, so, I did it. I mean, my personal statement. I never even, like, double read it. Nothing. I just went on and on, whatever. 'Cuz my heart wasn't really into it. I turned it in. So when I got the letter, I was crying. I didn't know if I was crying 'cuz I happy – I felt worthy, or crying, like, two more years of school! I remember." Angel was overwhelmed by the thought of graduate school, and despite graduating with her undergraduate degree, and being accepted into a master's program, she continued to be filled with self-doubt about her academic and intellectual abilities.

Angel had a quick and smooth transition into her graduate program. She excelled in her graduate coursework, however it was not until completing her graduate degree that Angel started to believe in herself academically. The impact of a lifetime of little support from family and negative comments from school personnel, was finally beginning to wear away.

While finishing her master's degree, Angel's boyfriend was released from prison and their young family was reunited. Upon his release, she had a different self-image that

led to relationship difficulties that escalated into violence. She eventually got a temporary restraining order, which sent her boyfriend back to prison for a year, and they still remained a couple. Despite the abuse and the fact that they weren't living together, Angel worked hard to keep her family somewhat intact and she believed that they would eventually be able to reunite under better circumstances. After her boyfriend was released from prison the second time, Angel became pregnant with their second daughter and she wanted desperately to raise her daughters in a strong, supportive family.

The couple remained close and Angel's educational journey also had an impact on her boyfriend. Angel suggested that he try to go to college too: "He was you know, changing. I inspired him to go to Eastside Community College. So, he took, like, three semesters, and then he decided he's just going to take the commercial licensing course. So, I used to help him study, and all that. And he just got his license, like, the highest commercial license. And he actually got a job at a trucking company. Yeah, like, we would have been so set. But then, it was three days after, he passed away." With a promising future ahead, and plans to reunite, tragedy struck and Angel's boyfriend was brutally murdered. Angel and her daughters were devastated by his death. She turned to church for support: "The thing that saved me, 'cuz we were going to church together, so I had my, the support of my church that really, you know, 'cuz we were both really involved… when he went to prison, I started going to, my first time I went to church, in this place in Waipahu. It's a Black church. I mean, go figure, right? So, I went to that church when he went to prison. That's how I first started going to church. But then, my family started going. They changed from Catholic to Christian. And they started going to Northside Evangelical. And they wanted us to all be together, so then I switched over." Angel is a deeply spiritual person and with her faith community to support her, she and her girls made it through the initial grieving. However, the trauma still impacts them today: "Me and my oldest daughter, kinda had a strained relationship. You know, 'cuz she only grew up with her dad being in prison. And then he comes out and then, all she's sees is the mom put him back in jail. 'Cuz she no understand. And then he comes out, does good, and then he dies. Like, my daughter was so traumatized. And at the age of ten. Like, really, just traumatized. Yeah. So, my daughter been in therapy since then… I was a widow at the age of 31. So young, yeah? That's why I had to grown up really fast. Like, I

really grew up fast. I had to. I get forced. I always have to be forced. (*laughs*) You'd think I would get it. By now. Yeah. Yes, yes, but I gotta be forced. I just don't go willingly. I kick and scream, but I come to expect the change."

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will draw several important findings from the narrative cases outlined in the previous chapter in the context of the original research questions posed in chapter one. Generally speaking, my findings suggest that ethnicity, gender, class, and culture play a tremendous role in the experiences of Filipina/o American college students. However, the study also illustrates that because of the complex relationship between race, ethnicity, gender, and class, perhaps we cannot easily draw a one to one correlation between the level of ethnic and/or cultural identification and educational experience. In other words, it is difficult to make an overall direct connection between the ways race, ethnicity, gender, and class played out in the educational experiences of the study participants. What my study does clearly show is how locally-specific racial stereotypes, prejudice, institutional discrimination, and family dynamics played key roles in the educational experiences of the interviewees. What follows is organized by the key themes that emerge from the narrative cases: being Filipina/o (including stereotypes and gender differences), family and the level and types of family support, school expectations and institutional support, experiences with violence, and parenthood and the future.

Being Filipina/o

A key tenet of Critical Race Theory is the centrality of race and racism. For all of the research participants, race and racism is an integral part of both their educational journeys and individual senses of self. For the research participants, being of Filipino ancestry (including those of mixed heritage), being Filipina, and stereotypes about Filipinos in Hawai‘i and the continental United States played key roles in their educational experiences. One of my original research questions focused on the educational experiences of Filipina Americans who were low-income college students. To certain degree, this question was about how ethnicity and education correlated. In this project, none of the participants who were interviewed described being Filipina/o as something specifically valuable (socially and academically), and this ambivalence was often informed by their family’s experiences with being discriminated against, personal encounters with prejudice and racism, their own understandings (and sometimes

embrace) of prevailing stereotypes about what it means to be Filipina/o in Hawai‘i, combined with the impact of structural forms of racism. Many times, school was one of the primary locations where the women in my study learned about the racist preconceptions that teachers and school officials had about Filipina/os as they related to their academic abilities. For example, Gabriela noted the following: “Why do I think they’re discouraged? ‘Cuz of the every day stereotype that people put on our ethnicities. Like my counselors didn’t think I would go to college ‘cuz I was hanging out with the cheerleaders. And they didn’t know my schedule for classes – that I had AP courses, right? And so they assume, by exterior… It’s unfair to be judged by the peers you choose to hang out with. I want to say to my son – follow your passion. If you know you love something, go for it regardless of what’s in your way, especially high school counselors. Especially people who want to pass judgment on you… Flip all that negativity and turn it into something positive and prove something… It’s a great feeling to prove something to other people, but it’s an even better feeling to prove it to yourself. When you do succeed and exceed in everything you do, you’ll be happy and you won’t have any regrets.” Gabriela also noted the ethnic aspect of these stereotypes and their effects of her education: “There’s this stereotype that if you’re Filipino you’re not as smart as the Japanese kids, as the white kids. So, I had that going against me. That’s why a lot of times I tell my friends that I was in National Scholar’s Council, I did participate in student council in seventh and eighth grade, it was not because I wanted to prove anything to anybody else, but it’s just that I don’t want them to think just because I’m Filipino I’m not capable of being smart, I’m not capable of learning just as easy as you. You know, my drive was mostly for myself, not trying to prove anybody, well, some parts, a little part of me trying to prove other people wrong.”

For many of the women, their own personal understandings of what it means to be Filipina/o are deeply grounded in pre-existing stereotypes about Filipinos in general. The negative stereotypes about Filipina/os are so widespread and pervasive, that it is almost difficult to identify because they are so deeply internalized. For example, For Christina, her knowledge of being Filipino was restricted to the stereotypes she was familiar with: “The only thing that I knew about Filipino people was stuff I would hear from my parents, or the stereotypes… You know they’re trouble… It was just like, lazy, and it was

almost like the same things people say about Native Hawaiians really. The same stereotypes. You know, lazy, they don't wanna work, they're not hard workers." In middle school, Christina became friends with a Filipina from the Philippines, but she seemed almost shocked that her new friend's family was so different from what her understanding of what it means to be Filipina/o. She says, "One of my good friends, when we first moved up there… she was from the PI. So, she was the closest thing to what Filipino was, but they were completely different from the stereotypes… Her parents were pretty, I guess, well-to-do in the Philippines. They had nannies… she's like, if you have a nanny, you're ok. And I'm like – do you eat dog? You know, most of my questions I would ask her, and she'd be like, no. No, really only poor people eat dog… they're my pets. She taught me a little bit of the language. I don't really remember much, but I guess it was kind of cool. You know, Filipino person that's not in a gang. Her mom makes really good food. They're clean. Just different from the stereotype. And from what I know of dysfunctional Filipinos, they weren't dysfunctional, so it was ok." This friend gave Christina her first exposure to a different type of Filipina/o, but she seemed taken aback by the idea that Filipina/os are not all the same. Christina addressed this even more directly: "My best friend actually was a Filipino from the PI, and I think that she's the one that really debunked some of the myths about being Filipino… Like the food. I never really ate Filipino food, and like, from what I heard from my dad, he's like – I don't eat Filipino unless my family cooks it 'cuz sometimes it can be really nasty. But her mom made delicious stuff and it was really good. So I was like, ok, maybe Filipino food's not that bad. I liked the Shanghai lumpia and their pancit. I've had dinaguan before. Somebody in my family made it. It was ok. Like, after I thought about that. You know, it's kinda like chocolate, not really blood. I was like, ok, I'll just try it. And it was ok. Like, I didn't get sick or anything like that."

For some of the participants, to be Filipino meant you lived in a particular area and in specific kind of house. For example, for Angel, her family fulfilled the stereotype of Filipinos living in a big house, with a big family, in a multi-generation household: "My grandfather was really, like, Filipino pride. He brought all his family from the Philippines. He was the first one here, and he brought all of them here to Hawai'i… Oh

my gosh – how many families? Our house was the house that took in all the Filipinos… Yeah. My mom still lives in the house."

For other participants, being Filipino meant you performed certain kinds of cultural practices or spoke a particular language. For Maria, doing Filipino culture was something her father did but she did not participate in: "I didn't do Filipino dancing or Filipino clubs, but my dad did. They had their own for their town in the Philippines. My dad was really active and they're a close group. So that's the only Filipino I used to be a part of. I used to go and help collect tickets for the Filipino pageants. They tried to make me go, but I was like, NO. Pageants weren't for me. Now that I think about it, I was really busy in high school." Doing Filipino cultural activities was also not something Gabriela participated in during elementary and secondary education: "I remember in a Filipino program we learned how to do the tinikling dancing and all that other stuff because it's for the minority… No, I never did the Filipino clubs." However, Gabriela had a fairly strong sense of her Filipina identity, but because she was Visayan, she often felt marginalized even among other Filipinos. When she was at State University, she wanted to take Filipino or Philippine topic courses, and she looked specifically for language courses: "We're Visayan, so they didn't offer that. I even inquired. I said – do you guys offer Visayan? They said – no, just Tagalog. Oh, ok, I'm not interested and I'm going into Spanish. 'Cuz I always wanted to visit Europe… I never knew that, well, I kinda knew that Tagalog was the national language of the Philippines, but I was like, I don't know if I want to visit the Philippines if I was to travel (laughs) so how is that going to benefit me? I wanted to learn Visayan, because that was my family and that was the dialect my family spoke. My grandparents spoke. And so, you know, if I wanted to survive in my family and have a conversation, I wanted to learn that… I said if they offer Visayan here, I would so take it. They didn't, but all my Filipino friends all took Tagalog. I just wished they had Visayan."

For many of the interviewees, negative experiences with and by other Filipinos directly shaped their own ethnic identification and understanding of being Filipina/o. For example, for Rebecca being Filipino was influenced by significant individuals from her youth, like her teacher, a Filipina nun who disciplined her using corporal punishment in school. She was also influenced by her Filipino grandfather who was an alcoholic who

was mentally and verbally abusive to her beloved grandmother, and also her Filipina mother who she felt chose work over a having a meaningful relationship with her, despite the fact that she was working several jobs in order to send Rebecca and her sister to private school, because she believed that was the best education available for her daughters.

For some of the women, despite their internalization of negative Filipina/o stereotypes and attempts to disassociate with being Filipino, their ethnic identity was something they could not run away from. For women like Christina, she was unable to escape her Filipino-ness, "Well, lately I've been thinking that I'm Filipino. That's the biggest portion of, you know, my ethnicity. But it's like the least I know of. And you know, it's the nose and the name. You know. But yeah, the name for sure is a dead ringer. Um, but I think that's like one part of me that I've kind of… for lack of a better term, disowned." This was not just a process Christina underwent by herself, but she was the recipient of an intergenerational transmission of not wanting to be associated with being Filipino, a type of cultural shame. For Christina, this cultural shame was passed down to her from her father: "My dad and I talked about when we first move, racism and stuff. You know, growing up I was always chink eyes… he didn't want to be Filipino. And that's part of the reason too – he just didn't want to associate with it. He got teased a lot… His stepmom was white, so he was trying to be white. Because, you know, it's so much easier to be white than to be what I am… The only thing that he knew about Filipino was the gangs… To him, that was Filipino. So, I think that's part of the reason, you know, don't get involved with Filipino men… and you know you're at a Filipino party when somebody gets stabbed (laughs)." Christina linked this cultural shame, the process of disowning being Filipina/o, to her grandparents. They wanted to Americanize her parents as much as they could: "My grandparents, they were first generation in America. And I guess it was during a time when being a minority was not cool. Their parents didn't teach them the language, didn't do anything cultural… They wanted to Americanize them as much as they could. So, it's almost like there's this… not hatred of being Filipino, but like, I don't want it. I'm American."

Even further, questions of race, particularly white supremacy and racial/ethnic hierarchies played key roles in Christina's upbringing: "I think even growing up, it was

like, I don't know. Maybe I had this thing where like, not that white people are better, but… It was funny because my grandma told my mom, now don't come home with no black people or Filipino people. She's like, you need to find a nice local boy. She's Japanese. She's full Japanese, but she came home with the Hawaiian. Everybody else came home with Japanese. She said don't come home with a Black guy, don't come home with a Filipino guy. She comes home with a Filipino guy."

In addition, oftentimes the internalization of the stereotypes reinforced negative impressions and their understandings of being Filipina/o. Among the study participants, the doubts about their academic abilities came directly from their families, and this was usually linked to a gendered critique. For example, Gabriela notes that despite her history of high academic achievement, once she gave birth to her son, her family was quick to judge and disparage her: "My uncles would say that – oh, you're going to be one of those girls… Yeah. One of those girls that will get pregnant before you graduate, and you're not going to even walk at graduation. I was like – ahhh! How dare! That's part of me that said, you know, I'm gonna go call you guys wrong… I just wanted to get a better life. I seen all my aunts and uncles, they're working really hard. They're in retail, they're in whatever have you, but they're at that level, and they've been there for ten, fifteen, twenty years, and they haven't moved up. I was like, there has to be some way outta there, and so I thought education was the way. More education, more money." Rather than let her family's negative comments bring her down, Gabriela used them as fuel to continue her postsecondary education. She also understood that her family's economic struggles were not something that she wanted to pass on to her son, and that education would be her way to get out of poverty.

Gabriela's story speaks to another important aspect of being Filipina/o – parents' differential treatment of boys and girls. The intersection of ethnicity and gender provided multiple points of contention for the study participants, many of whom did not fit the stereotypes and expectations that their parents and communities placed upon them as Filipinas. Some of the women discussed their resentment of these roles, and how they, for better or for worse, were different. Gabriela grew up with two older brothers, and she regularly got messages about how to be a good Filipina, "My mom always said I gotta get married… you gotta find a good husband, and somebody who makes a lot of money so

life won't be a struggle for you, but I was like, that's all nice, but I have a mind of my own and I don't like it… My mom was teaching me, you gotta be obedient, and I don't like that… What if I really like something and he tells me that he don't like it, do I have to listen to him? I don't think so. I don't think that's fair. They were just saying that I challenge a lot of things and I think my mom had a hard time with me because I always had questions. In our culture, it's like, you are to do as you're told and accept what is our beliefs and just move forward from that and don't ask questions. So when I asked questions, everybody looked at me like oh, you're such a rebel." Gabriela understood both how she was perceived because she rejected these standards and what the cultural expectations were for her as a Filipina. "What do I think? Get married. Cater to a man. Do household chores. Cook for them… My mom taught me at an early age so that I'd be prepared, so when I get married, I'm gonna know how to do it right. And I hated it!"

Gabriela also noted the difference between being Filipina in the Philippines and Filipina in the United States: "My mom would say – In America… a girl, a Filipino girl can not, will never be as successful as a man. Because they're always better. I don't know how she got like this. It's like, that why she always said that you should just find a good man and marry rich. So, I guess in their culture, maybe from the Philippines where they're at, you'll be better off if you can find a good man. And I *hated* that. I hated why do I have to find a good man to be good on myself… Even if I was to find a rich man, will I love the guy? Will I be happy? To make life easy, just find a good man. That's all I know. And then you can keep a man by knowing how to cook and knowing how to do laundry and take care of him and your family." For Gabriela, the differences between the Philippines and the United States (understood as "America" or "Hawai'i") were not just cultural, but they were also educational and occupational: "It was like, you're the girl, you have to help me take care of the boys in the house… at six years old, I remember my mom was teaching me how to fold laundry. I was like, why am I? I'm supposed to be playing dolls, why am I folding clothes? I used to haaaate it… My mom always said that it's difficult for women to succeed in America. She said that based on her work experiences too – women get treated differently… She never had a female supervisor, so she felt like, maybe we're not allowed to. Because of the limited education that she had."

For Gabriela, being Filipina/o means boys and girls are treated differently at home and at school. She explained the gender differences and the differential treatment at home in the following way: "My culture. Being Filipino American. Being female. Sometimes when you try to express yourself because of what you learn on your own, they look at you and say, well, why do you act like you're so smart? You know how it was, guys are always better and guys are always smarter, and girls aren't really. So, that kinda scared me a little." The gender differences also created a wedge between Gabriela and her mother: "The boys could do everything, and that's why I used to be all jealous. I think that was one of my biggest struggles too. Why do the boys get to do whatever they want and I can't? And that's another driving thing that got me through school and here… I don't remember who said it to me, was it my dad? If you wanna do whatever you want, you gotta be on your own… I really wanted to be on my own and get outta my mom's house, so I didn't have to follow her rules. And so, to succeed and survive, a good job." The unfair treatment became an important factor for Gabriela's drive to succeed: "I felt that difference in treatment, being that they're boys and we're girls… they treat us differently – unfair. That's probably one of the drives too, a lot of times I think as a female, not only a minority, but just female. You feel like you wanna be equal, but we're not treated that way, so it kinda drives us. Oh, for me, it drives me to wanna do more and do better." The gender-based differential treatment also manifested itself in school activities and affected her educational experiences: "My mom allowed me to be in the Student Council in middle… it was hard for her to grasp the idea that sometimes we have to meet after school. She wanted me to come home and just do my homework and that's it. School and home, school and home… Her only goal for me was to graduate from high school. As long as you graduated from high school, I'm proud of you." This was also similar to Angel's experience when she remarked: "We was really just on our own. Mmm-hmm. Always. Me and my sister, and we were in charge of the house. And when my sister was born, we was in charge of her too. My mom used to catch the bus early in the morning. We used to have to get my little sister ready, walk, stroller her to the babysitter. Walk to school, come home. Clean the house, cook dinner, pick her up before my mom. Yeah, everyday." As girls, Angel and her sister were relegated to work at school and at home:

"Do your homework, clean the house. Like, and we weren't presented anything else, you know? So, it was kinda just our lifestyle. Just do the today. You don't think of the future."

Family and Family Support Level and Types

All of the study participants talked about the significance of family, good and bad, on their ability to go to and succeed in college. For the majority of the study participants, their families did not understand the necessity of achieving a college degree, so they were not supportive of the educational goals. For a few of the women, like Gabriela, Rebecca, and Angel, their parents were not emotionally or financially supportive of their postsecondary educational aspirations, and their families openly questioned both their ability to enter and achieve in college and the reasoning behind their academic choices. Angel remarked: "Even with college. Nobody was supportive, because nobody went to college. No – it was on our own. It was like I was so alone growing up. Yeah. I think that's why I'm so empowered. Like, 'cuz I felt like where I am today, it's totally because of what I did. You know, I pushed myself through all the junks, you know, to be better." Rebecca pointed to her social network as well as her family's economic situation: "I remember a lot of, my group of friends, we weren't like super achievers. So, I remember a lot of the other kids in class, they all were, you know, like, applying for big colleges and stuff. But I think, part of, like, when I looked at school, my mom's like, if you wanna go to school, you need to pay for it yourself. So, I was like, ok… So, I was like, ok, I guess that rules out a lot of big schools. And then, um, so, that's why I ended up applying to City Community College."

The lack of support also had emotional tolls. For Rebecca, her mom's absence resulted in Rebecca's resentment and longing towards her: "When I grew up, my mom, was so not involved, because she was trying to give us a good education. And for me, there's this, I guess, this divide. You know, because part of me is grateful, for her doing that. 'Cuz if she hadn't, then I wouldn't be here. (*crying*) Sorry…But then another part of me kinda wished that I had a mom, you know?" Similarly, for Angel, her academic achievement were never openly recognized or honored by her family: "My mom didn't really say nothing. And then my dad's dad – why you wasting all your money? All your

time? You ain't gonna get nothing, blah, blah, blah. Like, he was really, downing me, but I didn't care. I was doing it. Up until when I got my Master's, my grandfather still never did never did tell me how proud he was of me. But he got my, you know, the invitation, and he put it in a frame and hung it in the house. But he never did tell me that he was proud of me. 'Cuz that's how they are."

Gabriela noted that her mother stressed the importance of education but only to a certain degree. For instance, she noted, "My mom was so backward. When I was in elementary, middle, and high school, she said education, education, education." However, Gabriela's mother strongly discouraged her from pursuing an advanced degree and going to college. "My dad was a carpenter so he was too busy working overtime. My mom was the one that says don't even go to college, just work your way up. So, I was like, if I wanna get this, I gotta do it myself, 'cuz nobody is here to help me or guide me." Gabriela pointed to the experience of many first generation college students, namely the lack of information about college, college options, and financial aid: "My dad was like, either you go or you don't, I'll support you either way. It's your decision. My mom was like, I know college would be good for you, but I don't think you should because we can't afford it. Because she didn't know about financial aid, she never supported it… She always said she never went, so she was afraid for me. Like, how you gonna succeed in school, you don't have money to pay for it… Because they weren't informed and never had experience, that's why they never encouraged me… They came, first generation, Filipinos that came from the Philippines. And no experience and the way they saw it, as soon as you graduate, you work. And they never knew about college." Becoming pregnant and giving birth further strained Gabriela's relationship with her mother: "When I had my son, I told my mom and she was so against, she was so embarrassed about the pregnancy out of wedlock. She's so hard core Filipino. I was like, this is not old school, this is new school, you know you should be more supportive. I said mom – I'll pay you to watch my son while I go to school. She said no – you decided to become an adult at a young age, you deal with it like an adult. Kinda tough love, because I learned a valuable lesson through that, that's how I became independent 'cuz she said it that way. I wish it had been the other way around, but then I had to find a sitter, and drop off the kid to the sitter while I'm in school. Yeah, there were a lot of challenges, but I knew. I was like,

just keep doing it. It's all going to pay off later." For Gabriela, the lack of support from her family also forced her to be resourceful and become more independent.

A few of the study participants found some support from their families during college and two of them, Maria and Christina, had unwavering support from their parents throughout their journeys along the educational pipeline. Maria discussed the messages she got from her parents about education from her early childhood: "They said I can give you the world, all I want from you is just to go to school and graduate. Get good grades. That was always embedded in our, well, in my head. You know, from when I was really young, but it never stopped. It never stopped. It was always, school. And every time, you know, I was in the newspaper for having straight. Well, where I grew up, they put you in the newspaper for having straight A's or whatever." Because she grew up in a small community, the pressures on her to achieve academically went beyond the confines of her family, and the entire community knew about every school award, accolade, and even good grade, that was received. Christina's family provided similar encouragement for school: "I think because I had my parents support from the get go, I mean, you know, they had tons of problems, but when it came to school and education, I think they really saw the value. Or at least they knew that this was something that you should do. You know, whether or not you choose to do it is a different story. We're gonna push you until we can't push you no more… I think for me, there's the support system of my parents pushing me. 'Cuz like I said in the beginning I was like – whatever school." The positive pressure from her family helped to change her previously lukewarm attitudes towards education into a deep love of learning. Some of the participants had high family expectations to live up to, like for Rebecca, which created pressures for them while they were in school: "I didn't know what I wanted to do, but because my parents… it was expected of me to go to school. Yeah, it was like, there was no other option. You know? And I remembered this one conversation I had with my dad one summer in Japan. He's like, you know, you gotta grow up and be a doctor and make the family proud. So that's kind of what was driving me the whole time."

The focus on family also brought out intergenerational conflict *and* convergence related to educational aspirations. In other words, for some participants their educational aspirations were in opposition to those of their parents and/or grandparents and for others,

they helped to live out the educational dreams and opportunities that were not available to their parents and/or grandparents. For example, Maria pointed out that her parents' insistence on the importance of school was related to her father's unrealized college dreams: "They've always talked about how important school was. Especially my dad. My dad, that was his main thing, was just graduate, go to college. That's all I want. I don't know if it's because he didn't get to go. Or, he wanted to go." Maria further explained her father's educational and family situation and its effects on her own experiences: "My grandparents forced him, 'cuz there were ten of them, ten siblings, but it was dad that they forced to work after high school, so he could support the family. That's why I think my dad was the first to leave them… But my dad, was the one that after he went to work, did his thing, met my mom, he left. I don't even think he, 'cuz all my aunties and uncles had a chance to go to college. They all went to college. Yeah, except my dad. My dad was the middle. So, they're all, my uncles are police officers. Uh, my aunts, some of them went to State University, 'cuz they came here really young. They came, but my dad is the only successful one. But, I don't know, maybe he resented them. That's why, with us, he always said – go to school, go to school. He didn't even want us to work when we were in college. I worked, but then, it's not like it was work, work. But, he didn't, he didn't really know that I worked. You know. I never had jobs in high school. It was just school. Even when we came here. As long as you went to school, you didn't have to work. That was my parents."

In contrast to Maria, Christina wanted to be different than her parents. Christina's parents began their family at a relatively young age and limited educational attainment: "My parents were eighteen and twenty-one, so there was a lot of growing up between them that I had to witness that wasn't so great. So, I think part of the driving thing about doing good in school is just like - I am not gonna end up like my parents. I do not wanna end up like my mom. So, I'm like, you know, college is my out. I can get a job, I don't have to be stuck with someone. You know, I don't want to be this in twenty years or whatever. I think that might be part of the reason I liked school, and maybe just because I was good at it. So, 'cuz, I wasn't good at sports, I could play it, but it's not like you know, I'm super great. I'm not a social butterfly, but I can get an A on a paper… My mom went maybe three years, and then she got pregnant with me and she dropped out.

My dad barely even finished high school. Actually, he went back and got his GED, so… Yeah, well, he didn't finish high school, but later on." Christina's mother provided her support to go back to college (e.g. childcare) and encouraged her to do well in school so that she would not follow in her footsteps. Christina's mother also provided positive encouragement that she did not receive from her own mother (Christina's grandmother who did not go to college): "I really wouldn't have been able to go back without my mom's help. To watch my daughter for the first two years… I talked about it with my mom. She's like, I really want you to go back. You're so smart. You know, you can do something. I never had that opportunity. Her mom told her – nope. You made your bed, now you lay in it… I guess her mom was kinda hard like that. So she said yeah, life really sucked. So she said I don't want that for you. You know, I want you to take the opportunity to finish. She was like, I will try to work part-time and you know, watch. She's like I don't want you to end up like me… That's really one of the only reasons that I actually got to go. She's supported me for that. With my mom, it's kind of like the encouraging, but yelling at you at the same time… The encouraging part, but then also the look what you got into. You know, it's hard, and you gotta learn… I wanna give you what I didn't have. But then I also want you to, you know, learn your lesson, so you don't pop out any more babies."

In some cases, like with Lauren, she created her own family structure and support system through a network of friends and community. Lauren redefined "family" in the following way: "Hip hop is like my family too. I'll go anywhere in the world. If I can find, you know, all those elements, then I'm at home. Like, hip hop is my home. Music. And what I love about hip hop is that it is, like it does cross all those barriers, and there's a visual aspect, a very intellectual aspect, I mean, not all the time, but… But just, you know, a means to have a voice, no matter what you're saying, you know. I'm not all about all, the derogatory stuff, or whatever, but because I was silenced for so long. That freedom of speech is so important to me." For Lauren, "family" was not just biological, or a structure or institution consisting of parents, children, and ancestors; it was a group of people that provided support, love, and community. For her, "family" was about being "at home" and not solely a household.

Barriers and Supports to Achievement and Success

The research participants listed a variety of challenges and assistance for their academic achievement, ranging from the personal, familial, and institutional. The academic expectations of their elementary and secondary school teachers and school officials had a tremendous impact on the participants' educational achievement. Three of the seven women were identified early on as academically high achieving students, and this instilled in them a confidence about their academic abilities. One of them, Lauren, was regularly disciplined in school for behavioral issues, but her academic performance never weakened. As first generation college students, these three participants sometimes had doubts about the process to attend State University, but they did not question their intellectual abilities in the classroom. For example, Gabriela never questioned her own intellect: "I knew I was smart, 'cuz I was always with the smart kids. I even entered those district competitions… fifth, sixth grade, and then I had two first place trophies in Geometry. So I knew math was my topic… The transition was like culture shock, because I was like, I'm going to a bigger school with different kids who are unfamiliar. I don't know what to do. I don't wanna get picked on because I'm Filipino. I was still participating in National Scholar's Council and student council, but at the same time I'm gearing towards these popular girls, and I couldn't let the popular girls know I was part of the smart ones." In high school Gabriela was able to take advantage of her school's resources and college-preparation culture: "The teachers from the advanced classes were always talking about college. Like, oh, you gotta prepare yourself and do well now and it's reflected when the college committee looks at you… And to me, I don't know what that means… My first generation parents never talked about it, so it was almost foreign to me. They also brought up – oh, if you're interested you can also take AP exams which, you know, if you pass with a good score, you can waive taking the class in college… so I was like, ok, I know what it is, but don't really know what it means… And then the fear was, oh, there's a fee, it costs a lot. So, that's one of the drawbacks of why I didn't take it, 'cuz my family couldn't afford it… She just said for those of you in this class who are serious about college, you know, I encourage you to take the AP exam. Ok, I guess I'm not serious – for the money thing… I think only during my junior and senior year is when we seriously think about college you know. But freshman and sophomore year it's more

about being able to socially fit in and be comfortable in your environment." Similarly, Christina went to a high-performing high school with a college-preparation and college-going culture: "The high school I went to, they were ok. Like within the district they were, they were one of the better schools. They had a lot of AP classes. So I got into those. I really liked English, so that was like my first one. And they really did push their AP program. You know, they were like, Oh – college credits. You should take these. So then I, that's how I got into the AP classes. 'Cuz they would do their little college things or whatever. The career counselor, like your first freshman you have to take career, health and driver's ed. So, that's when they're like talking about college, and talking about classes. And from then, they're always pushing the really good schools. And the requirements for that, and you know you gotta get good grades. It matters now." Angel's experience was in stark contrast to Gabriela and Christina. Angel did not remember receiving school support about her educational goals: "As an elementary student, I never … was asked what I wanted to be when I grow up. So I never, ever had that thought to think about. I was always in the moment. Like, nobody ever asked me." In high school, Angel was told she was not "smart" and that college was not for her: "I was just curious, right? Like, everybody going to the counselor. Everybody going to the counselor's office. They talking about college. I mean, even if I wasn't interested. I felt left out. So, I went to ask. And then he, the counselor guy said, well, it's only for the smart kids." These disparaging comments from a school official would have a lasting impact throughout Angel's educational life, despite her ability to perform well and succeed in postsecondary education: "My whole graduate program – I was 4.0. Straight, two years. And I thought, I am smart. But I feel like I had to, like, I finally proved to myself, like, I got it. I got this, you know? Like, it's so weird." It was not until the end of her graduate program that Angel finally began to realize that perhaps she was smart, and this is largely in part due to the comments from her counselor in high school who filled her with self-doubt. It was the director of a campus student services office that helped change Angel's self-image by providing positive advising and mentoring: "My director is the one who touted me to be a supervisor. And I was like, I can't. I can't do this. And she gave me a book that says, you know, all it starts is, it starts with believing in yourself. And it kinda took me by surprise. Like, wow! She sees that in me? Like, I don't believe

in myself. And I thought, whoa! I'm reverting back to my childhood days, like I don't think I'm good enough, and… But she was such a good mentor. I learned so much and I was a good supervisor because of her."

A surprising finding from the interviews is that the participants did not identify being Filipino as a specifically important resource for successfully navigating the educational pipeline. This demonstrates that perhaps their ethnic identity is not the most significant identity for all of the women. It is not what helped them to succeed in school – instead participants noted that it was a school support program or their friends. For example, a campus student support services program and the network it helped create for her were key to Angel's educational success: "I had to go through the GRADE Program. Yeah, that was really… I think that was the best thing that ever happened to me. Because it was so close knit, you stay with these people, and most of them, were like, old, like non-traditional. There's maybe, like twenty. So, we go in the same classes. Under the hundred level, we all in the same classes. So, it really helped, because a lot of the people here were like, non-traditional students. They were older, yeah, so we all wanted, and we support each other. I felt that whole sense of family, like, I wasn't by myself." Angel also noted another motivating factor that was outside of school and her academic network: "I can honestly say, if he [her boyfriend at the time] didn't go to prison, right now, I still be a cashier. Like, I would really, I had no reason to even want to go to college. It was again, me, I was, that's why. Forced learning. Forced, I mean, I have to be forced to better myself…Like, it's not that I'm smarter. It's that I really took the opportunity. That's really the key, I think, is. What'chu gonna do? I mean, I feel like, you know, all that time, it's because I wasn't given the opportunity."

For other research participants, their social network also served as an academic network and the college experience was life-changing. Lauren noted the importance of her friends as her community for her success: "My group of friends there were more like, artists. Like, I was hanging out with graffiti artists. I was getting more involved with the underground hip hop community. And I was getting away from all the gang affiliation and more into the artsy. I was breakdancing, and I was doing graffiti, and I was involved in photography. And that's when I started getting more into the arts stuff. And that's was ultimately saved me, was art and building a sense of community." For Lauren, it seems

that her educational journey was also part of her own therapy and healing: "Honestly, like, even the school thing, like, it freaked me out. Towards the end. I was like, no, I can't do this. No, you're not worth it. Oh, it's not a big deal. I still tell myself that right now… Well, I didn't want to walk the stage. It freaked me the hell out. Because I would rather not finish something, or like, tell myself that I'm not worth it, rather than pushing through, or really like, stepping in the power. Because I've had it taken away from me so many times. And it's more comfortable for me to, um… self-sabotage, than to actually push myself through it. So, I'm acknowledging all these feelings and thoughts, and I'm telling that, talking to the little girl within myself, and I'm healing, and, and, I'm in really in an amazing, pivotal point in my life." For Lauren, her experience as a low income Filipina American college student has been personally rejuvenating and revitalizing: "Now I understand all of it. And now graduating college does give me a lot more, um, faith in myself and, and knowing that I can accomplish something. I can set a goal, and I can accomplish it. And that I'm worth it. Life is only 10% of what happens to you, and 90% of how you react to it. That's a quote I live by. Like, cuz, you know, all of us have been through things, but it's like, how you pick yourself up. What you do with the struggles, or how… how you choose to let them affect you."

Experiences with Violence

The prevalence of violence in the research participants' lives was an unexpected theme that emerged from the narrative cases. Of the seven participants that were interviewed, five of them disclosed having experienced some form of personal violence, whether it was domestic violence, sexual assault, or school and family violence. Two women shared that they experienced intimate partner violence while in college, and both became involved in the criminal justice system as they obtained temporary restraining orders, and one even took steps to incarcerate her batterer. Another woman disclosed that she is a survivor of multiple childhood sexual assaults, by different perpetrators, at different points in her youth. The impact of other types of family violence was also significant for another participant, which greatly influenced her attitudes towards Filipina/os and her distancing from her own Filipina American identity.

The significance of the disclosure of violence by so many of the participants is significant. According to the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, "Abusive acts are typically characterized as horrible or tragic events, or resulting from bad luck or bad judgment, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time; when in fact gender violence is a historical, universal problem. It is often experienced in the context of additional oppressions based on race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, type of labor performed, level of education, class position, disability, and/or immigration or refugee status" (Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence. (2010 – 2011). Thus, these narrative cases are tremendously important because they give voice to the violence that is often experienced by Filipina women, but remains silenced. With these narratives of violence, it is also important not to generalize or make racist connections that link certain cultures, in this case Filipina/os, particularly to violent behaviors.

The trauma of this type of violence is long lasting and was still being processed by the participants, and a few of them are currently engaged in counseling and mental health services because of their experiences. For example, for Lauren, counseling helped her to understand that past feelings of hate she felt: "I hated my mom. I hated my life. I hated my circumstances. I hated having had no money. I hated everything. And now, in retrospect, it's because I got molested right before high school. That's where it all, like, started bubbling out. And, I was abandoned by my father, had no role model, had no male support or love." Lauren further explained: "My sister and I got molested at the beach by a stranger. Now that I can put all these experiences together, it's like, oh wow, it makes sense that I've totally rebelled and then started, like, drugs and alcohol, and, and partying, and you know, all, trying to find my identity again. But then being robbed of a certain part of my, um, integrity, and body, and sexuality, and all that stuff." But Lauren also wanted to avoid victimization: "I don't want to be a victim. I don't wanna be in that box, 'cuz I'm not. I'm a survivor, I'm not a victim. And I don't want to be treated like one, or I don't want pity. I don't want shame. I wanna be who I am. Which is a survivor, and I'm strong, and I'm powerful. And I'm smart, and I'm talented."

Some of the research participants also experienced partner violence. For Angel and Christina, the violence they experienced was with their boyfriends. Angel her

situation in the following way: “Seven years (in prison), and then when he came out, he was just such a different person. And I was such a different person. And I think we both expected that it would, like, it would just pick up where we left off. But no. Because now you looking at a educated person, who now knows a little more about what is positive and negative relationships. And things that never, I was tolerating prior to him going in. I wasn’t going to tolerate it any more. Because I saw the light. And certain behaviors just not gonna… You know, I did it without you, and I’m not afraid to do it without you. Kinda attitude that, he was just… I think he was intimidated by it. So, we got into a lot of problems and a lot of fighting. And then he became physically abusive. Yes! He came out, seven years, but he was on probation for three more to make ten. So, I mean, he was so abusive that I made a TRO. He got locked up again. For another, I think a year, or something. And then, he came out, and then he came out, after the year, and that’s when I got my Master’s. So, he was there, but he lived with his sister. ‘Cuz I told him, you know, I can’t do the same, I cannot. ‘Cuz now I’m smarter, right? I educated. I’m not gonna tolerate the things I used to tolerate before.” Though perhaps not as severe, Christina had a similar experience with a boyfriend: “I was on lockdown at the house. I guess my boyfriend lost it a little bit… That’s way too young to be thinking about that kind of stuff or having to deal with it… I think because of, you know, the reality of I can’t finish school setting in for me. I just didn’t even want to talk… So I just stopped talking to him for a little while. Like, I wanted some space… I guess he took it the wrong way, so things got a little tense between us… He started getting crazy. We would talk, and I’m just like, oh my gosh. And then he’d be like – I’m gonna kill myself, I’m gonna kill myself… I ended up putting a temporary restraining order on him… He wasn’t threatening me, he was threatening himself. But to do it in front of me. So, my parents were like, no. You’re never gonna see him again.”

The research participants also talked about other types of violence. For one participant, Gabriela, physical violence was a normal part of her youth. She understood physical violence at home as a culturally accepted form of discipline and punishment: “For everything you did wrong, you get lickin’s for it, right? That was, I guess that was the Filipino culture… You know, don’t do that – stay away from trouble. It’s like, yeah, but you just beat me up, so I don’t know. Should I listen to you? (laughs) But I think

some kind of discipline does help guide you, you know? To the right path and not the wrong path." Several of the women were also very cognizant of the ways race, ethnicity, gender, and class affected them and the communities they lived in, a type of economic violence. For example, Lauren discussed the dynamics in the neighborhood where she grew up and the impacts of race and class. "The whole community of people there was very interesting because you had some of the white people that lived in the neighborhood, but the majority was all bussed in kids. 'Cuz then, the people from the neighborhood started sending their kids to other places or private schools, and stuff. I lived across the street from Shepherd High School, and it was a Catholic, most of the rich kids, or the white people, went there. Yeah, but the, the schools are right next to each other. And so there was a lot of dynamics with, you know, the income gap, cultural gaps. There was a lot of racism in the neighborhood against people of color."

Parenthood and the Future

Beyond their Filipina American identity and participation in the Access Program at State University, the commonality between all of the women that I interviewed was they all had unplanned pregnancies. For these women the result of the unplanned pregnancy was that they all became low income college students, even though four of them either grew up middle class or considered themselves middle class prior to becoming parents. For all of them, becoming a mother became a driving force in keeping them focused on their academic goals in college, because they either wanted or needed to get a degree to create a better, more prosperous future for their children. As Debbie explains, "I think well, in the beginning, when I first wanted to go to college, it was for myself. It was because I wanted to… make my own money, live on my own. Get away. But I think after, after having my son I knew I had to do something to provide."

For many of the research participants, their unplanned pregnancy was the catalyst for becoming low income, which lead to greater awareness of being poor, or the first time some of them have to cope with being poor. Their unplanned pregnancy also highlighted for them their understanding of the importance of having positive relationships with their children (sometimes in direct response to the not-so-positive relationship they had with their own parents), role modeling educational behavior for their children, and how

educational attainment is vital for their futures. The following exemplifies some of the participants' recollections about education, parenthood, and their futures:

Angel noted the importance of her relationship with her kids, especially her daughter: "I'm so, so involved with my kids. Like, because I feel like, all the people in the world. I mean, am I gonna leave it to chance that they're going to grab my kid's hand and show them this bigger picture? You know, and that's why I'm always fearful, if I didn't go to college. I would still be looking through those lens. And my kids would only have those lens. You know, like, anybody ask her, what you going do after you graduate from high school – I'm going to college. Like, she's like full on. You know? It's like, like, even when, um, I said I was going to send her to private school. That was a big thing too. Nobody went to private school." Angel further noted: "I always tell, I always tell my daughter that, you know what, it's hard, but you just have to do it. I said, it was really hard for me. I had every reason to quit. I don't. I can not even take 100 level classes, my boyfriend in prison, I mean… I could've just stayed on welfare and not want more. I mean, but I just, something just made me want more. Like, just really want more. And not being poor." Angel remembers giving her daughter the following advice: "I don't have a doubt that you're gonna be successful. But, your success, the time frame of your success, it really depends on you. I don't doubt that you'll be successful. 'Cuz when she quit college, she was like, oh, I'm never gonna be another… I said, no. I said, you will be something. I don't have a doubt, you will be successful. But, WHEN is up to you. I always tell my daughter that. I'm like, it doesn't matter if you're public school. I went to public school. I mean, the road was hard. If I went private school, probably would have been easier. I said, but, you cannot say CAN NOT. 'Cuz, can. Just gotta really work for it."

Rebecca specifically notes the importance of role modeling good educational behavior for her daughter: "The other part was, for my daughter. You know, I just want to be a good role model for her, and school is really empowering for single mommy parents. Or, I'm sure for everyone, but especially for mommy parents. I think it's good for her, she sees that school is something that you can love, and it doesn't have to be the way I saw schoolwork. I think it's good because it normalizes college for her." Rebecca also remarked on her difficult relationship with her own mother and its effects on her

desired relationship with her own daughter: “The main thing, was with my daughter. I didn’t want to be like my mom. Sometimes that’s a hard truth to come by. I tell my mom that I’m grateful for, you know, all the things that you did, but really you know, we never had a relationship. And I didn’t want to be like that with my daughter.” Rebecca succinctly summarizes (and half-jokingly) her educational journey: “Education, mom, and fun. It’s the formula for success.”

Debbie also noted the importance of having a good relationship with her children and being supportive of their educational goals: “That’s one thing that I want with my children, is an open relationship, where, to give them the support. So, like, he (her partner) is, he’s very hard with them, and I’m the one that’s very easy. Where they can come talk to me. And be open with me, and… So I make sure they get what they need. So, I really took it as you go to college, overall, I would to get. One, I want them to be educated. And two, I want them to see that their mom can do all of this. Can go to school, and get her degree, and how much it betters you as a person. I love to learn. Anything that I can learn from, I love it. Just love it. And that’s why I connect them with going to school, because I can.” Debbie summarizes her educational goals concisely: “That’s my overall thing. Trying to finish my education for my babies.”

For Christina, her unplanned pregnancy opened her eyes to issues around race, gender, class, and education: “If I didn’t get pregnant, I don’t think I’d be as sensitive to social issues. And you know, if I didn’t, uh, if I didn’t get pregnant, then I wouldn’t have known about human services programs or any of those kind of services. And I wouldn’t have known that there’s a whole spectrum of people needing different things. You know, what worked for one person, doesn’t work for this person. It’s really opened my eyes.” Christina also noted the relationship between her education and past (and future) employment: “So, I worked up until, practically almost the time I gave birth. But… I worked as a cashier there and I think that’s when I was really? I didn’t want that. I was like, I can’t do this for the rest of my life. You know, I mean, it’s not a hard job, but I can’t see myself doing this for the rest of… without becoming my mom, you know? ‘Cuz my mom, you know, she regrets not finishing. You know, getting pregnant. And then, you know, hearing about how hard it is to get a job. And you have all the experience, or you’re really good at it, but I don’t have the degree, so they won’t hire me. Like that’s not

what I want." Christina acknowledges that her daughter is very aware of her role as a student and the impact it has on her daughter's own educational aspirations: "I think she knows I'm always in school… I talk to her about it sometimes, just I don't know if she really understands. Well, she doesn't understand, only when it takes time away from her. You know, but I like the fact that she's like – oh, you're going to be a doctor mommy? I'm going to be a doctor too and I'm gonna work with you (laughs). It's like, oh great! You can be whatever you want. It's nice to hear that. Like, I don't understand it, but I wanna do it too. You know, it's kind of nice to hear. It's like, you're only five, but you're thinking about college." Even further, Christina linked her own experience to her daughter's educational future: "I've come too far to quit. That was part of it. And the other part was… You know, sometimes when I actually… going to bed at night. You know, my thinking time. You know, my daughter and I sleep together on the same bed, so I was like, just think. You know, I want her to… I want more for her. I think that's what really got me through is, I want more for her, I want more for me. I think just knowing that there's a light at the end of the tunnel, really helped. That, you know, it sucks, but one day it'll get better. One day soon. Just have to… A day at a time. Can't think too far down the road." Lastly, Christina acknowledges the role of gender in her and her daughter's educational experience: "Girls are expected to do good in school. You know something's wrong with you if you're a girl and you're not doing very well. At least that's in my family… I feel like now more than ever I have this thing where I need to prove myself. It's like, see, I got pregnant or whatever. I can turn my life around. I'm going to get my master's degree, and in science, where it's super hard… I'm gonna do all I can just so people can't say it's not such the greatest idea… As a woman, I feel like I have a responsibility towards accomplishing something so that, you know, my daughter and her daughter can see that it's within their realm."

One final finding is that these women do not see themselves as particularly exceptional or extraordinary despite the obstacles they have faced. What is interesting is how they point to other women, in and out of their lives, as sources of hope, spirituality, and inspiration. Lauren points to her matrilineal line: "When I talk to people about my story, they're like, really? Oh, wow. How are you still so happy? And it's like… it's part of my characteristic as a person, and it's just, it's been how I've been able to survive. It's

been my coping. My spirituality. Like, I don't go to church, but I'm spiritual. And I believe. I have hope and faith, and I think part of it also, I know part of it also, is the fact that I grew up with a mom, a single mom, with two daughters. And I know her story, and her struggles. And then when I look back at my family history. Generations back. All these women, like, down to my great, great grandmother, who committed suicide and had nine kids, and an abusive situation. To where we're all at. That gives me hope too. To see each generation doing better." Christina points to other women, particularly mothers who were in situations similar to hers: "I'm a single parent, but I know there are other women out there that don't have as much family support as I do. For my situation, it was really ideal. If I didn't have my family, I wouldn't be here right now. You wouldn't be talking to me. I'd probably be working at the counter, handing you your lunch or something. I completely understand that. That's why, I think the most inspirational women are the ones who are out there working every day. Taking care of what needs taking care of. That's inspirational."

Conclusion

By using qualitative research, the individual and unique experiences of each participant were highlighted and by allowing them each to share their personal narratives. Their stories, however, revealed how they do not all fit into any of the clean and discreet frames that are typically presented in research on Asian Americans or Filipina/o Americans. Hopefully presenting their individual stories will give us a new perspective on the multiple and dynamic experiences of Filipina Americans. What the narrative cases illustrate is that the research participants had their own pathways to higher education, but many encountered similar challenges and supports. The narrative cases also show how difficult it is to generalize about such a unique ethnic group, let alone lumping them into the larger "Asian American" category and generalizing about their educational experiences. In the end, this study supports the need to do more specific research on Filipina/o American college students.

CHAPTER SIX: STUDY IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss the implications for practice, theory, and further research from the individual narrative cases from chapter four and findings from chapter five. In this study I have tried to encourage the participants to reflect on both their formal education in school, with the informal education that happened outside of the classrooms, inside their homes, knowledge passed from family and community, and the supports and constraints that they encountered in the communities in which they lived. While my narratives were able to depict the ways that race, ethnicity, gender, and class intersect, they also raised questions that could be further explored.

Summary of the Project

In the first chapter, I introduced the research project, beginning with a narrative case sketch based on field notes from conversations with a Filipina American college graduate who was a participant in the Access Program. Because of personal issues and family emergencies, she was never able to fully participate in this project with formal interviews, but her abbreviated narrative case closely parallels those of the participants from this project. Chapter one also provided the historical and demographic context for this project, setting the foundation and describing the need for this research project. Chapter two was the literature review, and as described there and summarized in this chapter, there is little research focusing on the experiences of low-income Asian American, and more specifically, Filipina/o American college students. It is my hope that this research project, and these narrative cases are able to fill the gap in the literature and provide insight into the experiences and the needs of Filipina/o American low-income college students.

The research methods and design are found in chapter three, which described the process for engaging the Filipina participants in this program and the reasoning for the selection of the Access Program as a starting point. This chapter describes in detail, my research process, including how the data gathering was structured, the interview protocol and guide, a description of the data analysis and narrative process engaging Critical Race Theory. This chapter also includes my researcher statement, which describes my

positionality in relationship to both the participants and to this research project. Finally, the chapter provides the study limitations, which provide a glimpse into ideas and topic areas for further research projects in the future.

The narrative cases describing the detailed educational experiences of each Filipina American participant can be found in chapter four. This includes both the formal and informal modes of education, as well as a description of their educational journey, beginning with elementary school and ending with their graduation from college. The women discussed the various barriers and supports that they encountered along the way, along with any personally significant events that were important to them as they made their way through the educational pipeline. This chapter illuminates the significance of these previously unheard narratives of Filipina American low-income college graduates, through their diverse personal stories of challenges, success, and hopes for future generations.

Chapter five re-engages the research questions posed in chapter one through the experiences of the participants, using qualitative research and through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The chapter is organized around the major themes that were reoccurring throughout the participant interviews: being Filipina/o; family and family support level and types; barriers and supports to achievement and success; experiences with violence; and parenthood and the future. Finally, this chapter provides a summary of the entire research project, along with an explanation of how this project fits within the existing literature, both supporting and contradicting previous findings. It also provided some implications for research, theory, and practice.

Implications for Research: Filipina/o American Education and Identity

One of the ways that American colonialism was ingrained in Philippine culture was through the institutionalization of the American education system in the Philippines. As described by Constantino (2003), the lasting and damaging effects of this are found in generations of Filipina/os who embrace this colonial education. The impact of the system of oppression described by Constantino, is seen in the attitudes of some of the immigrant parents and grandparents of the participants, as they reject Filipina/o culture and languages, and encourage their children and grandchildren to adopt a more "American"

way of life. This historical context is important in understanding how strong the rejection of Filipina/o culture is for some families, exemplifying how deep seeds of racism are implanted in a people and a culture.

In her research on second generation Filipina/o American youth, Wolf (1997) noted that the majority of student participants in her study identified "family" as the marker for what it means to be Filipino. Similarly, the Filipina Americans in my study all discussed the roles of family and culture, with their discussions focused on their roles as providers of support or barriers to their postsecondary educational opportunities. Wolf discusses this as a gendered process, that is often to provide support for male children, but incentives for their female children were skewed in a way to insure that they stay close to home or not go to school at all. Women like Gabriela discussed the ways her male siblings were supported and encouraged, but she was discouraged from pursuing her educational dreams, despite her history of high academic achievement.

Espiritu's (2001) research with college age Filipina/o students also found that the gendered expectations of many of their families are framed as cultural practice. There are many restrictions placed on Filipina American daughters and much of this is rooted in the ideals of virtue and virginity, which Espiritu argues is a type of control over women's bodies and their sexuality. Many of the participants in this study shared these idealized traits and these somewhat unrealistic behaviors were conveyed to them by their family members. In this study, only Gabriela's family held her to this high standard after she discovered she was pregnant. Her mother gave her two options to save face for the family, either marry her boyfriend, the father of her son, or have an abortion. The difficult choice Gabriela's mother left her isolated Gabriela from her family support network and made her economically and emotionally vulnerable.

In his Filipina Feminist Identity Development model, Nadal's (2009) work originates in the field of psychology and provides insight into the ways ethnicity and race impact traditional gender roles. I would argue that what my study's narrative cases reveal is that identity development is a much more fluid and shifting process, without a set beginning and prescribed ending point. Furthermore, the participants in my study, and perhaps even more broadly, many Filipina/os in Hawai‘i have not undergone Nadal's identity development model's stages of assimilation, sociopolitical awakening, panethnic

consciousness, ethnocentric consciousness, and integration. To a certain degree, being Filipina was not the identity my research participants chose to talk about. For many, they understood "Filipino" to be "family" and not necessarily a set of cultural practices or language, and traditions described in Nadal's model. If we did a strict analysis of the participants' identity development using Nadal's model, many would be in the beginning assimilation stage although they exhibit characteristics of other stages, like ethnocentric consciousness and pride in their ethnic group. What this suggests is that Nadal's identity development model may not be wholeheartedly applicable in the Hawai'i context. Perhaps there needs to be further research to develop theories and identity development models that do not rely on stages and unidirectional movement along a linear path.

Much of the existing research on Filipina/o American college students begins with the model minority myth, which is the assumption that all Asian Americans are academically high achieving, and how Filipina/o American students typically get lumped into that classification. The danger in this is that students who do not meet the stereotypical achievement levels fall through the cracks and receive little or no support. Academically, Gabriela fit the stereotypical role of the model minority, however, this racialization process does not necessarily hold true in Hawai'i (see for example Okamura's 2011 chapter, "Filipino Americans: Dogeaters or Model Minority," which argues that Filipinos in Hawai'i are depicted as model minority and immigrant menace). Gabriela discussed at length her understanding that teachers and school administrators in Hawai'i typically believed that Japanese, Chinese, and white students were high achieving, but not Filipinos. Gabriela often found herself working hard to prove herself to peers and teachers, to demonstrate that as a Filipina she could excel in school. In Hawai'i, Filipinos are not part of the Asian American model minority and as Libarios (2013) shows in his study, their collective educational attainment levels clearly demonstrate this.

Researchers whose work is on Filipina/o Americans in Hawai'i have identified a distinctly different set of cultural stereotypes that have influenced the educational experiences of Filipina American participants in this study. This project expands on the existing literature by providing a qualitative perspective on Filipina American college students in Hawai'i. Previously, research was mostly limited to quantitative analysis of

various aspects of Filipina/o American college experience in Hawai‘i (for example, Libarios 2013 and Bachini 2013).

Implications for Research: Class and Gender

My study also engages the literature on class and educational experience. In her work on poverty class college students, Adair (2003) concentrates on the impact of being a low income or welfare participating student while at school, primarily because of the liberatory function that a college education can provide. The participants in my research project all echoed this sentiment, that obtaining a college degree would open up their career possibilities and increase their earning potential, which they all believed was necessary once they became mothers. Adair used autobiographical narratives to convey the experiences of her participants, with the result being a rich collection of experiences from a diverse group of female poverty class college students. Even though there is more than a ten year gap in time between our projects, my research firmly supports Adair's findings about many of the social and cultural capital challenges facing poverty class students on campus. Like Adair, it is my hope that this research project can contribute, even if in a minor way, to the understanding of poor women of color in higher education.

Adair's work is important because of the way it interrogates the impact of class-based legislation and policy, specifically the 1996 welfare reform legislation, on the lives of poor people in the Unites States. While there were no similar significant federal or state policy changes that occurred during the time when my participants were attending college, there was a series of steep tuition hikes at State University, that had a devastating impact on the ability of many low-income students to access State, and some were forced instead, to attend lesser ranked institutions or community college. Fortunately, the tuition hikes had little impact on the Filipina participants in this research project because of their membership in the Access Program. Student service programs such as this are important because of the personal, academic, and economic support that they can provide. Oftentimes, the essential support needed is assistance navigating the intersecting, and sometimes conflicting bureaucratic systems of financial aid, the university, and social service agencies, all of which are necessary for academic success. The Access Program had an existing partnership with an external university human services agency, which

provided payment for tuition and fees for all eligible Access Program participants. This financial support provided an essential buffer to shield the participants in this project from the impacts of an expensive policy that placed access to the university further out of reach for many already traditionally underrepresented students and their communities. The ability for higher education to lift families out of poverty does not work if the education remains out of reach for the families who need it the most.

Implications for Research: Critical Race Theory

In his discussion of Asian American Critical Race Theory, Teranishi (2002) emphasizes the multidisciplinary nature of this methodological frame, and the need to contextualize the experiences in a sociocultural and historical context. As part of this contextualizing, Teranishi also suggests disaggregating the Asian American racial category. To this end, there have been some scholars, like Buenavista (2009), who propose to create a Filipino Critical Race Theory branch of the broader Critical Race Theory, that focuses on the intersections of Filipina/o American identity, race, gender, and class. This would be similar to the fields of African American Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory, and Tribal Critical Race Theory. By placing the unique experiences of Filipina/o Americans at the forefront of the research, A Filipina/o Critical Race Theory could better examine intersectionalities and consider the roles of historically institutionalized racist policies and practices (through colonization), as discussed by Constantino (2003), gender roles and expectations, as discussed by Wolf (1997), Espiritu (2001), and Nadal (2009), and class, which in this case is manifested in the work on poverty class and other low income statuses by Adair (2003) and hooks (2000). This project is grounded in the research based on Filipino Critical Race Theory and adds to that ever-growing body of knowledge. In addition to race, class, and gender, what my study suggests is that we also need to attend to other dynamics, like colonialism, geographic location or place, and as one of my participants suggested, language, to be able to capture the educational experience of Filipina/o Americans, similar to Soria's (2013) recent dissertation which examines Filipino students and Philippine heritage language curriculum. Perhaps future research could use a Filipino CRT framework to

explore the role of language, place, and colonialism in the educational experiences of Filipina Americans.

Implications for Research: Intersectionality

There also needs to be more future studies that investigate different types of intersections. For instance, further research can explore theories about intersectionality that incorporates the role immigration generation plays in the college experiences of low income Filipina American students. How are the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class similar to and different among first, 1.5, second, and third generation immigrants? In addition to immigration generation, it would be also useful to look at issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. How do sexual orientation and gender identity and expression impact the experiences of low income Filipina American college students? Perhaps in this regard, it would be useful in future research to compare the experiences of low income Filipino American male college students. What are the differences in educational journeys between low income women and men? And even more broadly, it would be interesting to conduct studies examining the differences between the experiences of low socioeconomic status Filipina/o Americans and those who are not struggling economically. And even further, all of the participants in this research project had unplanned pregnancies either prior to, or during their college years. So how does the identity of "mother" or "parent" figure in their sense of who they are? It would perhaps be useful for further research to examine the literature around college students who are parents and the ways being a mother or father affect educational experiences. How do these added layers of identity (with respect to immigration generation, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and parenthood) shape the experiences of students on both academic and social levels? An area that is introduced in this project and can be expanded upon in further research, touches on the question of how these multiple identities can compete and contradict one another? Along these lines, the narrative cases in this project clearly demonstrate the need to look at "intersectionality" more closely. How do we understand how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and parenthood intersect when they oppose each other?

In order to gain a broader understanding of the educational experiences of Filipinas, it would also be important to document the narratives of those who have successfully gone on to graduate and professional schools after their undergraduate degrees. Filipina American students are severely underrepresented at this point in the educational pipeline, and further research would allow a better understanding of some of the significant events, supports and challenges that have propelled them to the highest levels of education.

Implications for Theory: What is "Filipina/o"?

In a very broad sense, my study also points to a need to theoretically reexamine how we understand the categories of "Filipino," "Filipina," and "Filipina/o American." The documentation of these narratives broadens our understanding of Filipina Americans in general by giving voice to individuals within the community who were previously silenced, perhaps because of their diverse life experiences that counter the traditional images of what it means to be Filipina and Filipina American. These educational counter-narratives directly challenge the dominant stereotypes about Filipinas imposed by Filipino families and communities as well as the larger society and educational institutions. It is my hope that sharing their educational life history will support and validate these women's experiences. What happens to the individuals who fall outside of the structural limitations of these definitions? Are they considered somehow not Filipina/o or not Filipina/o enough? A goal of this project was to demonstrate the need to more completely examine the multiplicity of experiences and identities of Filipinas and move the discussion beyond prescribed cultural values and norms that somehow define what it means to be Filipina/o. What this study suggests is a move away from solely a language and culture-based theoretical framework to one that examines the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. It is a move away from understanding identities as individual experiences that are cultural and structural.

A unique feature of this study is that while the women participants all identified as Filipina/o, the majority of them identified as multiethnic, and that had a significant impact on the findings. In the social and cultural context of Hawai‘i, what does it mean to identify with multiple ethnicities? The question of multiethnicity and ethnic identification

requires further examination. If anything, it is my hope that this study illuminates the reasons why the generalizations and cultural norms typically assigned to members of an ethnic group can be problematic in the ways that prescriptively assign ways of being and knowing to our everyday existence. These generalizations can work both to put us in essentialized categories and boxes of behavioral and experiential norms, and they can keep us out of the boxes, by defining our identities in narrow ways, providing definitions of identity that keep individuals out of their own skin. Creating limitations on identity can also limit the access that individuals can have to important services and supports that might be necessary throughout their education - whether it is gaining access to student support services that provide only Tagalog language support, excluding Filipinos from other regions of the Philippines, or 1.5 or second generation individuals, or a Filipino community organization that requires expensive cash contributions, thus excluding any low-income or poverty class individuals. It is my hope that this study will further expand the ways that individuals and institutions understand and work with Filipinas, broadening definitions to include the diversity and multiplicity of experiences that construct their lives.

Implications for Practice: Campus Student Support Services

The findings from this project also provide a number of implications for practice. First, a future study focusing on the women who did not complete college would illuminate some of the roadblocks and serious challenges, whether imposed by the institution itself, or family and community, or personal crisis, would provide insight for universities and student services providers about what needs to be done to better support student success. It would also be beneficial to engage with women who did not make it far enough along the educational pipeline to get to college and interview those who did not go to college, either because they chose not to, or were not able to go for personal, financial, or academic reasons. Talking to Filipina Americans who dropped out of high school or even middle school, might provide the most valuable information about educational barriers encountered by Filipina Americans in education and the types of support services they need.

The narrative cases in my research project also point to the importance of institutional supports and programs and their roles in the students' experiences. It would be important to know how these programs and support services helped to develop their racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities. And further, it would be particularly insightful for institutional policy, practice, and programming to understand the effects of these programs and support services on the students' social and academic lives. For example, it would be helpful to know what specific events, programs, workshops, etc. were effective in insuring that students successfully navigate their college experiences, especially given unplanned difficulties and challenges?

The high rate of violence experienced by the participants in this study suggests that Filipina American women are at risk, and thus, are in need of campus support services. For a few of the women, it was not until they were in college that they realized the profound impact that the violence they experienced had on them, and as a result, they became engaged with counseling and mental health services. Sometimes survivors do not even know how to name the violence and abuse that they have experienced. Others might benefit from culturally appropriate education and support services around issues of violence.

The majority of the women interviewed for this project, while identifying themselves as ethnically Filipina American, also identified with multiple ethnicities. The high prevalence of multiethnic peoples in Hawai‘i, suggests that it would be helpful to provide opportunities that are not only limited to single ethnic communities, but offer cross-cultural engagements. Along these lines, Maramba and Museus (2012) recommend that universities be intentional about this because "they not only provide an environment that is conducive of a sense of belonging among students of color, but they can also cultivate an environment that will lead to positive outcomes and ultimately benefit all students" (Maramba and Museus, 2012, 516).

The Access Program was a commonality and a beginning point for this project, but it was much more than that for the participants of the program. It provided much needed personal and academic support services for the women and men who engage with its services. Programs and organizations similar to this continue to require university funding and support to continue.

My research focused on the educational experiences of low income Filipina American college students and the impact of race, ethnicity, gender, and class on their academic journeys, and it is my hope that through this project, campus-based student support services will continue to provide spaces to access resources and opportunities so that underrepresented and underserved students are able to successfully navigate the educational pipeline.

The diverse narrative cases presented by the participants in my study exemplify the need for further qualitative research projects that examine the experiences of those who exist on the margins, who do not fit neatly into discreet identity categories, and whose actions and lives contradict the existing stereotypes and identity models for their groups. I suggest the critical importance of including alternate voices in higher education research because of the depth and complexity that they can add to the understandings of what is a much more varied student body than ever before.

The participants in this study honored me by welcoming me into their lives and sharing their personal stories and educational histories. They not only shared their successes, but were courageous enough to allow me to know their failures, tragedies, and the difficult life circumstances that impacted their educational pathways. The Filipina American participants in this project were previously nowhere to be found in the existing literature, and that silence and void made the challenge of achieving a college degree seem even more impossible for many of them. I have nothing but admiration for all of these women who have successfully navigated their educational journeys despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles that they each faced at different times in their lives, and it is my hope that through their voices, others who have felt marginalized or silenced in the discourse of high education, can find a connection to these narratives that illuminate and expand our understandings of Filipina American experiences.

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