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Biracial Filipino Americans In Society

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BIRACIAL FILIPINO AMERICANS
IN SOCIETY

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Designation University Honors

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This Study by: Neal A. Molitor

Entitled: Biracial Filipino Americans in Society

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Think outside the box. As I continued my collegiate studies, I became increasingly aware of this common axiom that overstates the simplicity of formulating innovative ideas. The phrase clearly implies that originality stems from the mere effort of attempting to be different. However, I wholeheartedly believe that the ability to surpass existing limitations does not readily appear. Creativity requires a special thought process, and I perceive that my unique background has fostered and stimulated this capability.

The one question on every application that continues to perplex me is often postulated as this, “Ethnic background, check one.” The boxes in that particular section then proceed to list the standard set of choices. This ethnicity question, although optional, causes mental anxiety because I do not precisely fit into those categories. My father is Caucasian, born and raised in rural Iowa, while my mother is Filipina, originally from the metropolis of Manila. I do not desire to choose one when I am equally both. Although this idea has been difficult to completely comprehend, my bicultural upbringing has positively affected my life and academic career. It positions me to not only think outside the box, but to *live* outside the box.

Since I grew up in a small and predominantly white Midwestern town, I was acutely aware of the common cultural aspects of my Caucasian side. I was able to familiarize myself with the Western cultural values, and I felt comfortable within them. My appearance may have differed from my peers’ but I was able to assimilate myself with all the local customs. However, I still felt that I was neglecting a major part of my

identity. I needed to know more about the other half of my cultural heritage, and I knew that college and this thesis project would provide an excellent opportunity to explore it.¹

Being biracial in a predominantly Caucasian society has presented many challenges and reward. I have struggled with identity issues and have not felt as if I *truly* fit in. I have always been proud of my mixed heritage and have undoubtedly gained a lot from my unique experiences, but I have always wondered if how I felt was exclusive to my life, or if others have dealt with similar feelings and situations. I did not actively begin this investigation until I enrolled in college and started becoming more connected with Asian culture. It was definitely a situation where the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn.

My curiosity and intrigue were especially ignited during the spring of 2007 when I enrolled in a class on intercultural communication. Through that course, I learned that there were others who had similar life experiences. For instance, I discovered that in 2000, the United States had an estimated 6.8 million people with ancestry that includes two or more races.² This demonstrated the fact that I was not alone, and there were several others in a similar situation.

I also discovered that there is a model of identity development for multiracial children. The first state involves a realization of a difference, followed by a struggle for acceptance. During the second stage, children “experiment with and explore both cultures. They may feel as if they live on the cultural fringe, struggling with two sets of cultural realities and sometimes being asked to choose one racial identity over the

¹ These introductory paragraphs were originally written for my personal statement for my law school application. I felt they served as an appropriate introduction to this paper and this topic.

² Judith M. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, *Experiencing Intercultural Communication: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005), 102

other.”³ During this stage, biracial children may identify with “one group, both groups, or a new group (for example, biracial people.)”⁴ The final stage of identity development culminates in self-acceptance and assertion, in which the multicultural person becomes comfortable with their identity. Of course, this is only a model and there exists several deviations from it. People may go through the different stages at various rates, some may skip certain stages, and still others may completely follow their own path.

Even though the model may not always be completely accurate, it still sparked the idea to gather and collect stories of biracial Filipino Americans. When I was young, my experience felt significantly isolated. I could not imagine anyone else possessing the same identity questions or the same questions about never fitting in. When I first heard that there were indeed people whose experiences reflected mine, I can not explain the joy to know that somebody could relate fully to me.

To formalize this study, I decided to amass oral histories of biracial Filipino Americans. Five biracial Filipinos were interviewed with questions in regards to their cultural experiences and their life journeys. I wanted to investigate whether they followed the tradition model of development or if they deviated from it. I sought to find out how being biracial has been a benefit and an asset, how it has impacted their lives, and if they felt as if they identified with one culture more than the others. Were they proud of their identities and heritages? Did they ever wish they were one or the other instead of both? I do not intend to generalize all biracial Filipino Americans by this thesis but rather contribute to this area of scholarship that investigates the lives and experiences of biracial people.

³ Ibid, 103.

⁴ Ibid, 104.

The oral history method was chosen because I did not want to reduce the interviewees to mere quotations with statistics and analysis. I wanted to make certain their stories were captured in full to ensure that their remarks were not taken out of context. This makes it possible for the reader to feel as if they know the subject and allows them to more fully relate to their stories. It adds a more personal touch to the topic and allows the reader to become submerged in the lives of the interviewees.

Oral histories have a long tradition of capturing first hand accounts of lives and events and remain an important part of academia. “Oral history interviewing has been occurring since history was first recorded,” quotes the guide, *Doing Oral History*⁵ by Donald A. Ritchie which served as a significant reference throughout the project. “Archives of oral history interviews exist throughout the world and in every state and territory of the United States.” The format I followed to most accurately portray the accounts was contained in the background reading source, *Filipino American Lives* by Yen Le Espiritu.⁶ This book provides a brief introduction, and then presents transcriptions of narratives of Filipino American immigrants. I felt that this was the method that most accurately reflected what I desired to accomplish, and by reading this source, I experienced how much can be learned about oneself by reading detailed accounts of others’ lives.

⁵ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

⁶ Yen Le Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995)

METHODOLOGY

The five interviewees in this paper are all one-half Filipino. Four of them have a mother who is Filipina while one has a father who is Filipino. Four of them are also half-Caucasian while the other is half-Korean. All interviewee's parents have lived in the Philippines for at least a brief period of time. They range in age from 17-25 and all currently reside in Iowa within communities that are predominantly white.

All of the interviews were conducted in February and March 2008 after the informed consent documents were signed. Last names have been removed and other details such as children's names have been removed in order to offer privacy. Small edits have been made in the text in order to correct grammatical mistakes that are bound to occur during oral interviews. Major insertions of words or ideas are contained within brackets. The attempt has been made to retain as much detail in the stories as possible.

The interview topics followed a general guideline of questions.⁷ The first area of questions attempted to establish a background of the subject. The hometowns, ages, and ethnicities were recorded during this section to provide an overview of the person. The next set of questions dealt with their personal experiences about being biracial. Whether it was the first time they realized they were different than their peers, or the first time somebody told them their parents had an accent, this section proved to be an intriguing and thought provoking section.

The next line of questioning examined the interviewees' relationship with their parents to further examine how they related to their families given the cultural differences that existed. The questioning then moved into the topics of school and prejudice since it seemed that where most of the racism and derogatory comments were experienced at

⁷ See Appendix, 50-51

school. The next area of discussion focused on dating and relationships. This topic provided some interesting conversations about whom the interviewees dated and whom they found physically attractive. The quotations are especially fascinating since Filipinos are not abundant in the interviewees' towns and almost all of them have to choose to have their relationships with Caucasians. The interviews then wrapped up with general comments about the advantages and disadvantages of being biracial along with any other stories the interviewee left out that s/he thought were important.

This method of interviewing provided numerous valuable insights into the interviewees' personal lives and experiences. It gave them the opportunity to freely express their opinions and investigate their own feelings. I found it personally gratifying to be able to engage in a discussion about this topic that is rarely discussed, and I think the interviewees also felt a sense of connection when I was able to relate to their stories. All of the subjects were cooperative, and they all tremendously contributed to this paper. These are their stories; these are biracial Filipino Americans in society.

CHAPTER II

Name: Dean

Age: 19

Ethnicity: Filipino/German/Irish

BACKGROUND

My name is Dean, and I am nineteen years old. I am a sophomore at North Iowa Area Community College, and studying business. I plan to get a four year degree and then go to Chiropractic school. My hometown in Iowa is mostly white, over ninety percent white. My high school was 95% white, maybe more. College is only fifty percent white on campus, but there are less than ten Asians. I don't know where I want to live when I grow older.

My dad is Caucasian, German, and Irish. My mom is Filipino. I don't know that much about my dad's history. I know he lived on a farm in rural Iowa, and his ancestors came from Germany and Ireland. My mom's ancestors came from Spain, the Philippines, and China, and she lived in Manila. I know she came over in the 1970's but am not exactly sure what year. I think she was in her twenties. She came to New Orleans at first and lived there for less than ten years.

AWARENESS

I was first aware that I was biracial at a very young age, maybe five. I knew this because of my different skin when I started going to preschool. I thought, "I don't look like everyone else." It made me feel unique and out of place.

I first learned my mom had an accent when other people started telling me during middle school. They would tell me bluntly, but I didn't know what to say and didn't say anything. When I'm at my dad's gatherings, I don't ever feel "not white enough." I just

feel like I'm part of the family since it's always been that way from the start. Even when I'm with a group of white people I never feel "not white enough." I have only been with a family group of Asians, and I didn't feel "not Asian enough." I have never been with a group of Asians that weren't family because they weren't very abundant. If they were abundant, I would be with them more.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The cultural differences between whites and Asians are the way the families interact. Asians are more touchy I guess, I don't know how to describe it. Whites are more keep your distance and stay to yourself. I don't feel a big difference with the proper way to act around the two different sides of my family. I use to a little bit because it's always one way with one family and another way with the other, but I never really found it confusing.

I don't think there were huge differences in how my parents raised me, just the way they acted when they disciplined me. My dad is more aggressive and my mom is more passive. It's probably because of both the male/female difference and culture difference because males are more aggressive. But I see how my grandparents are on both sides and that's how they are.

RACISM

I have experienced minimal racism, nothing substantial. Nobody has really said anything derogatory. I don't really sense racism either. I didn't stick out as much in college, but it didn't matter. I think there is more racism at college because there are a lot of teenage people without any regard for anyone. There is a lot of hatred toward blacks, but not especially toward me.

On my baseball team at college, my teammates consider me more white since I am part of a sports team. They treat me like a typical person on a sports team. However, I'm not as big, and they make references to how small I am. I think it's more so because I'm small, and that's partially because I'm Asian. I don't think being Asian hurts how I am judged in athletics. All you have is a number anyway; they don't really look at what you are. I've also been involved in orchestra, piano, and all the other sports, but I never felt more racism in one area. It depends on the group.

IDENTITY

I feel more Caucasian at school because it's rarely ever referenced. I don't think about it very often, hardly ever. I don't ever wish I was one or the other instead of both because I like my identity, and I've always liked my identity. The only stereotypes I have experienced are to be smart and eat rice I guess. I don't feel it's hard to live up those expectations, though. It didn't factor into when I figured out a career. I felt free to make my own decisions.

When I'm with my mom, I think people can tell she's my mom. When I'm with my dad sometimes I think they can tell. He's white, and I'm not. People may sometimes partially think I'm adopted, maybe. It's an awkward feeling, a little bit.

DATING AND MARRIAGE

I'm not dating anyone right now, but in the past they have been Caucasian because they are the most abundant group around. Perhaps I would date an Asian, it depends who it is. I am probably less attracted to Asians because I haven't been around them as much.

My girlfriends have accepted my heritage. They never mention it. It's understood I guess. They never had any questions about the differences or brought it up. They've only asked me, "What are you?" It doesn't bother me that they don't talk about it. I would talk about it, but they haven't asked.

My heritage could possibly be an important point to discuss before marriage, but I haven't done it yet. I will probably give my children Caucasian names because I don't even know any Filipino names. If I marry a Caucasian, I'll still promote that they are Filipino. I'll let them know that's why they look how they look and share some of the food. I will encourage them to date whoever suits them.

I'll raise my children with more of the Filipino aspect of respect because it's better. I don't speak or understand the language, and I've never been to the Philippines. I don't particularly want to go to the Philippines. It might be somewhere I go someday, but not any time in the near future. I wouldn't mind living in a place with more cultural diversity, but it's not absolutely mandatory.

FITTING IN

I could fit in to an extent with the Filipino culture, but I wouldn't know all the details. I think I could easily fit in with Caucasian culture, except for the skin. If there was more diversity, I would join some Asian groups or gatherings. I'm not involved at all right now, but maybe will be someday in the future.

INVESTIGATION

I have done almost no study into my Filipino heritage because I'm not that interested right now. I might be more interested someday, maybe. I'm not more interested in my Caucasian side either. I'm uninterested in that too because I know the

general things, and I don't really care for specifics too much. I probably identify more with my Caucasian side because it's the dominant side that I am around more. I don't think I'll ever identify more with my Asian side because I'm not ever around those people.

I've never thought about being biracial before. It's just there, and it doesn't really consume my thoughts. It doesn't affect my day-to-day life to the extent that I need to stop and think about it. I don't think it ever will. It could be a factor when I apply for a job, but I hope it's not. The culture in America is getting much more diverse instead of all white or all something. I never really fit in exactly with any group ever.

DISADVANTAGES AND ADVANTAGES

No matter what group you're with, you're always the odd person out. You never look exactly like anyone else, and you get looked at differently by those people. It bothered me when I was younger, now it doesn't anymore. When I was a preteen and early teen it bothered me, but it changed sometime in high school. I decided that I'm glad that I can be part of everything instead of just one. You get to see a lot more cultural differences and experience a lot of different kinds of celebrations and everything.

Being open to different cultures, like Filipino, is a big advantage to being biracial. I tell people I'm a mixture of everything and then they laugh. They think I'm Asian more so. I have been called Mexican jokingly sometimes. When a white person tells me I'm Asian I sometimes tell them that I'm white too. An Asian person has never called me white and only my family has ever said I looked white. I think I look like a mixture of white and Asian, and I like that.

CHAPTER III

Name: Galaxy

Age: 25

Ethnicity: Filipino/German/French/British

BACKGROUND

My name is Galaxy, and I am 25 years old. I was born in Waterloo. I finished my high school at Expo High School in Waterloo, and I started my college at Hawkeye Community College where I took general studies. I've gone there since 2003. I am originally from Oelwein, Iowa and moved back to Waterloo in 2002.

My mom is from the Visayan Mountains, and she was born there. Normally they don't know when people were born or their ages or anything, but her grandparents were from the town so they kept track of things like that, even her birth date. She went to school over there and she spoke Visayan, but at school she had to learn Tagalog since that's the main language. She came to the U.S. in 1981 and my parents were married at a courthouse.

Then my father was transferred back to the Philippines when he got to meet my grandfather [on my mom's side]. My mother was expecting me at the time so she didn't go back to the Philippines with him. She didn't fly with him on the plane so she went to Independence, Iowa, and stayed with my relatives here on my father's side until after I was born. When I was three months old, though, my brother, myself, and my mother went back to the Philippines to meet back up with my mother's family.

My mom is now a stay-at-home mom. There are still three kids at home out of eight. She had worked on and off, and she enjoyed working to kind of get away from us rug-rats. I remember when I was in elementary school she would clean the house all day,

and then we'd get home and trash it. Then she started working after she had the sixth child and was only able to work a couple of years at IBP when she received a surprise that she was expecting again. She left work for two years to take care of my younger siblings.

My dad is half German, a quarter French, and a quarter British. He's originally from Minnesota, and they still have a farm out there. They still have family reunions there. He's currently employed at Quickstar in Oelwein. He had a few good jobs but I don't know why he left them. At AMCI, a milk factory where they make powdered milk, he had a supervisor position where he just stood around and made sure everything was running. I think he had that position because he was the only one with a college degree at the factory, but he ended up leaving that job.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The biggest difference in culture is money. Over here, money is more stable. If you want a job, you just keep looking for one and you'll have one. Over there, if you want a job, even if you have a college degree, you may still end up becoming a plumber. I think that difference comes through. My mother, when I was a kid, if we were short on money, she wanted to sell stuff. That's how they do it in the Philippines. They just sell their personal possessions to have food to eat. If we were short or had debt, she just said to sell things. My dad had a *Time* magazine collection, and she managed to sell all of them, and he was upset about that. In that sense, I kind of have a split view [of the cultural difference].

There are some things that are important to me, mainly clothes from school that have my name on the back from track or cross country. I probably have washed them 600

times in the past so many years. Personal possessions, otherwise, I don't need to keep a lot of things. I don't own a lot of stuff.

I guess with all children they want to be the opposite of their parents. My grandparents wanted a clean, empty house. My father went the other route, he collected everything. In America, you're allowed to have that. You're allowed to have fixations on some things and make a collection out of it. You can make it your life. In the Philippines, you just have your family and nothing else matters except feeding your family.

LIFE IN THE PHILIPPINES

I lived in the Philippines for five years, my first five years. I remember quite a bit about it. We lived in Ormoc City, that was where two of my brothers were born. I think another one of my brothers was born in the Manila. We lived in two different places, off base and then we moved on base. Most of my memories were from living on base. We started preschool while I was there [on base], and I realized that I was different than everyone else. I was thinking, "You Americans get out of my country." It just kind of gave me an idea about the girls with blond hair and blue eyes. I had red hair at the time, and I noticed from looking at my skin that it was different than theirs, and I started forming assumptions.

There was one day that we were playing with Play-Doh and cookie cutters, and one girl just buried all of her cookie cutters. That just gave me a bad idea that they just wanted to take everything. It was "they" not just that person that were separate from me.

On base it was white people. When I rode the bus there were a lot of Filipinos, but at the school everyone in my grade was white. I don't know why. I felt like these

people were in my country. It was kind of strange, but my father was working a lot at the time, and sometimes he would be away for a long time. I don't know if he came home every night or even every week. I don't know how his job took him, but it seemed like I didn't really know him for the most part. It seemed like maybe he was around, but maybe he was only there once every three months. He was there, but I just don't remember him most of the time.

In the Philippines you do things leisurely, but here you're on a mission. A lot of people here are in a hurry. In the Philippines you do things just to enjoy the ride. I had to develop that. I need to take time out.

LANGUAGES

I use to speak Tagalog and Visayan but not any more. Before I left, I took an English course, and that could have been what preschool was for. When I came to America, I was feeling like I didn't know any language because I was starting to forget Tagalog and Visayan. I had left there and everyone around me was speaking English, but I didn't quite know it yet. My mom only speaks Visayan with her friends and she likes that I don't know what she's saying with her friends. It's kind of like "uh, are you trying to keep secrets?"

COMING TO IOWA

I think it was in September when we came to Iowa. We went to school, and the other kids had already started. There were some kids that were Mexican or half-Mexican, but as they got older they died they hair blond and it was hard to tell what they were. Over here, we take a lot of things for granted. If a toy breaks you throw it away, you don't try to fix it. If you loose a piece of puzzle, you throw it away. In Philippines, you

never lose those things. I'm speaking on the point of materialism, when you're a kid, your toys matter.

KEEPING THE FILIPINO IDENTITY

I try to make it to all the Filipino parties. I need to hold onto that background even when I'm at parties or dances with Americans where they dance really fast. Filipinos like to dance really slow, and we have our own traditional dance and stuff like that. I like to stick to that background. I don't really consider myself knowing how to dance [in the Filipino style], but you dance slow.

When I'm at the parties, they're usually Filipino so they have that culture in them. The women hold the Filipino culture to their families, including their husbands. Even if their [non-Filipino] husbands don't like it, I'm sure they make them eat sardines for supper. I noticed that with the men who are Filipinos, they like to hold onto that background.

FAMILY DIFFERENCES

I try to visit my aunt and uncle at least once a year on my mom's side. They get mad if I don't. On my father's side, I actually don't like his side very much. They ask for large amounts of money from me and never pay me back. I'm like, "oh my goodness, I still love you and all, but keep your word." On my mother's sides, well one of the things I noticed, you don't call someone unless you need something. In the Philippines, you call them up to ask them how they're doing, but then you cut to the chase. Whenever I call my aunt, she always asks what I need. On my father's side, they actually ask for stuff. In this culture, integrity doesn't matter as much. I don't know if that's Americans in general or just his family.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In fifth grade I joined my first sport, basketball. I was also taking piano lessons, but I didn't get much out of it. It was cutting into my Saturday morning cartoons. All of our games were on Saturday mornings, and I got to play the first half, and then in the second half, I had to be rushed to piano lessons so I didn't get much out of it since I didn't play too much. I wanted to stay a part of that.

Some kids I went to elementary school with, twin boys, they would make fun of my mother and my skin tone even though they didn't know my mother. I think a lot of that came from their parents. Usually kids that age don't know how to treat people unless their parents talk about it. I think a lot of things from other kids stem from their parents.

It started to end by the end of middle school with the whole tanning age and me not having to tan because my skin tone was olive. They started seeing me as an exotic person instead of that dark girl or that oriental. My classmates that use to make fun of me in elementary and middle school started to change.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

When I was working at Wal-Mart as a cashier, the customers would think I looked Mexican. Some Mexican customers would start talking to me in Spanish, and I would think to myself "Why did I drop that class?" A lot of American people, especially the people I work with, just thought I was white girl with brown hair. I'm like, "You thought I was white?" My classmates growing up thought I was something else other than white.

I have never felt "not white enough." I guess my biggest problem was my name. I was like "why can't I have a name like Jenny?" I have felt "not Filipino enough." I wish

I had darker skin, and I wish I knew more of the language. I wish I could connect better when I am at the Filipino parties. Being a minority has helped me get a job and in other areas. It helps me in general. I've grown into everything. It's a process.

DATING AND MARRIAGE

I guess I've always dated Caucasians. I would probably date a Filipino but there aren't enough around here. I don't like how Filipino guys come onto me. It's not very respectable. You don't give someone your number and say, "Call me." I'm like, "I just met you; let me see you a couple more times first."

I guess I find myself more attracted to white guys because I'm here and they're here. I only see Filipino people at the parties or in large mass. I don't make it to many parties so I don't get to hang out with them.

In my future house, I would have a lot more Filipino furniture to make it look more oriental to bring that back on. I don't want to lose that. I was thinking the names [of my future kids] would be more along the lines of British like my grandmother who is British. Like Gerald, or Harrison, or Lera. It's probably because I don't know too many Filipino names.

DISADVANTAGES AND ADVANTAGES

I don't think there are disadvantages other than when you're at school and kids make fun of you for looking different than them. It actually makes you stronger, though. Then you actually need to look inside yourself for who you are, and it's not just your skin color.

I'm learning that my younger sisters don't really look at themselves as being half-Filipino, and sometimes when I talk to them in Tagalog with phrases they're like, "This is

American, get with the program. I never lived in Philippines so who cares.” It’s kind of upsetting because they don’t treasure the same things I do. They have never eaten some of the foods I have eaten

I have two countries. Sometimes when I talk to co-workers I tell them I can’t wait to go back home to the Philippines. I’m happy with my identity, but I wish I knew Tagalog and Visayan so I could go over there and relate with the people better. Being able to relate has allowed me to be interested in other people and wanting to connect with them. I think because of my background I want to connect with people and break down the barriers.

CHAPTER IV

Name: David

Age: 17

Ethnicity: Filipino/Korean

BACKGROUND

My name is David, and I am seventeen years old. I am a senior and in the 12th grade at a public school. It is very predominantly white. That can be said about the whole town of Carroll. Comparing demographics with the high school and community, I think there might be a higher concentration of whites in the high school.

I was born in New Haven, Connecticut. I lived there until I was two years old, close to three. I don't have much memories living there. I moved to Iowa for most of my memorable life. I lived in Knoxville, Iowa. It's a small town, and I attended their school from preschool until fifth grade. I also lived in a neighboring town, Pella. It was smaller and primarily a Dutch community. You kind of have your stereotypes about the Dutch as hard working and very clean people. Living in that society has shaped me because they were such hard working people. It was a really good place to grow up and get really good morals.

After fifth grade, my parents changed their work and we moved to Johnston, a bigger town because it was neighboring Des Moines. Then you started seeing a whole mix of white cultures. There were people with German and Italian ancestry. There were very few Hispanics and blacks in Pella. In fact, I don't remember seeing any Hispanics or blacks in Pella. There were a few Asians, though. There were Filipinos. We were definitely a small minority. After eighth grade, I came to Carroll as a freshman which

was good because everyone was new and nobody was adjusted to it. It made the transition a little easier.

PARENTS

Both my parents are psychiatrists. My father is Korean, South Korean. People always ask, "Which Korea is he from?" and it's funny because I've never met a North Korean. I guess in their minds they think "one Korea is communist so that must be bad, and then there is a Korea that we're friends with," but they don't even really realize which Korea that is. When I say my dad is from South Korea they'll ask if that's the communist Korea.

My dad came straight to America. I think he liked the decision he made coming to America. I get a lot of my values from him, more than cultural [values], generational [values]. He was born in the 1930's and the way he was raised is so much different than our generation today. He was respectful and he wanted to go to school to learn. He worked very hard to learn. He would take a train two hours to school every morning and would only take a small lunch with him. He'd be so tired by the end of the day that he'd fall asleep on the train and miss the last stop so he'd have to get woken up.

I think that in Korea they didn't have as much opportunity as the children do today, but they didn't take it for granted. I do the same thing. I take education for granted. I go to school, and I don't really want to be there, but then I think what my dad was able to accomplish with the little amount that he had.

My dad thinks highly of his father. There was so much respect. Whenever he tells me about his father it's always positive; that he was a handworker, and that he could

do all of these things. I think that it's kind of this concept that we're losing with the youth today. They get frustrated with their parents and rebel against them.

I know my mother's side about the same as my dad's side. She is from Mindanao. The city of Davao. I know about my grandmother. My mom has talked a little bit about her farther back ancestry. It wasn't what they did because I don't think she knows as much about them. Her father died when she was two so I don't know much about him. I don't hear much about him. I do hear what the family says about him. That he was very generous, that he was a doctor, and a good person. They always speak highly of their elders.

My friends can't tell the difference in my parents. They think my parents have an accent. My mom kind of does have an accent but my dad just happens to talk funny around other people. I think they just seem really Asian to my friends. To me they don't seem like they have an accent.

CULTURAL ASPECTS

There are a lot of differences between the two cultures. The biggest difference is the role of spouses. In Korean society, the male is the head of society and makes all the decisions. Women, they support the males. In the Filipino society, the females tend to run the household, and the males tend to be submissive or quiet and really good natured.

I think Koreans and Filipinos are different because Koreans are a little tight with money, like to eat lots of food, and like to find bargains and not pay too much money. I've noticed that with Korean society. Filipinos like to have fun. They enjoy throwing parties and don't mind spreading the money around. They are not as tight as Koreans. They might not have a lot, but they still try to share it.

Children-wise, the societies are similar because both societies teach them to always respect their elders and do what they tell you to do. The big difference is between the Asian societies and the American society. In the Americanized society you're seeing the discipline problems of children.

I noticed Asian children tend to have Asian friends. I have tended to stay away from the Asians for some reason. I think it's because I've been brought up in so many white communities I guess I have become "bleached." You just go to the people with similar personalities. We have exchange students from Asia and they will only group together. I think it's because they don't speak very good English. In bigger cities, the Asians will hang out with the Asians, the blacks with the blacks, and the whites with the whites, but that really wasn't the case for me.

AMERICAN CULTURE MIXTURE

What's interesting about the American culture is that it's different wherever you are. In certain parts of America, hamburgers and things like that aren't the culture they were brought up in. There is a conflict in being in American society all the time. You are mostly American and living American culture in everyday day life. The Asian culture is the second side of yourself and you practice it in silence. Because you don't practice it everyday, you kind of lose it a little bit so really I am Americanized, I do everything American. I'm going to be just as American as the person sitting next to me in class no matter how white they might be.

HERITAGE KNOWLEDGE

I don't speak my parents' languages. My father has lost his ability. When he visits his relatives, they would speak Korean to him, and he would wonder why they

insisted on speaking Korean to him. My mom speaks Tagalog, and I can't. I'm not necessarily good at learning the new languages, but I've never really had the initiative to learn. It's not like I can go and practice speaking Tagalog so there's not a big desire.

I have not been to either Korea or the Philippines, but I think this summer I'm planning on going to the Philippines with my mom. I think it'll be really good to see my culture and not just see it as a skin color because there is a heritage. I know a little bit about the Philippines. If you compared me to a Filipino, I would know about what a second grader in the Philippines would know minus the language.

I think my heritage is the best way for me to stand out in a predominantly white society. I don't know much South Korean history. I know it's really old, been around for 5000 years, but that's really all I can say about it. Here I am in America, learning American history it's not like they're going to teach you that [about Korea]. We stay away from it. America is always politically correct, so before we start seeing things about Asian history, we're probably going to see things about Africa. We haven't pissed off the Asians enough to where we have to start teaching their history.

REALIZATION

I didn't realize I was different for awhile. I think it's a wonderful thing when you're a child because you don't necessarily see people for their race. You're without bias. You don't know the stereotypes. Making friends was easy. We never brought up the whole race thing. I think somewhere toward elementary school, they realized I looked different. It's one of those things where you know you're Asian, but it's like being left-handed, you just kind of forget about it in your everyday life even though you're doing it everyday.

I actually think being Asian was only a problem when people would make fun of you for being Asian. When you're a young child and everyone around you is white, you're going to see the world as white, and you are a minority to them. It was never really that bad. I am thankful that I was in community where race wasn't such a big deal or problem. I was very sociable as a child, and I didn't really have any other characteristics besides looks.

When I think about an Asian, I think more of my relatives who speak the language and haven't conformed to this society. It's the same thing when my parents and I meet a white family. We sometimes think they talk funny and sometimes make fun of the way they talk. The funny thing about white people is that they may not have the accent but the vocabulary they choose is funny. It goes both ways.

DATING

It doesn't matter, but I find myself more physically attracted to Caucasians. I definitely think it's a societal influence. I think my physical attraction would go Caucasian then blacks then Asians then maybe Hispanics. I don't know why it's like that. With Asians, I just don't have the same feelings of attractions. With white people, you're use to them, but with Asians, you kind of have to adapt to them. I think it's a societal influence.

FAMILY INTERACTION

I don't feel the need to act more Korean around my dad's side. I don't understand Koreans enough to pretend to be Korean. I try to be respectful, but that's what any child would do. I think I act just like any other American would act. It's different though. I

think my dad, who can't speak the language, kind of feels like an outsider. To me, I don't have to be Korean. I am an American, and I just have to remember my heritage.

On my mom's side, it is more difficult. Filipinos and some parts of its culture are similar to American culture. They are not really as strict with obedience. They like to just have fun and not be so strict with anything. It's really difficult to figure out how to be more Filipino. I think being Filipino is being harder than being Korean.

IDENTITY

Even though I was born in America people ask, "Where are you from?" I'll say, "I'm from Connecticut," and they'll think it's funny because they're really talking about where my ancestry is from. I think it's funny because we don't look at white people and their generation and say, "So you're German American," but they'll look at us and say, "So you're Korean American or Asian American." I don't really feel any more Asian then how I look.

People aren't very familiar with the difference between Korean and Filipino. In class once, somebody asked me if I was Korean Filipino and this other girl next to me said, "He's not that, he's Asian." I think she thought Asia was a country. I don't think it's on their minds, though. I don't think they need to be politically correct when it comes to Asians because I don't think they're offending us when they group our society into Asia.

If you're a Filipino who looks black, they'll group you as black. I don't think Americans care enough; it's not a big deal to them. They have personally lost their culture when they became Americanized, and I don't think they realize how important

our culture is to us. I want to stand out and I want to be unique. I think the biracial aspect makes me personally more unique.

I consider my biracial part of my life almost like a religion. You don't necessarily live it everyday, but it's a part of you. Even though other people can't see the heritage behind you, it's still there. You can practice it in silence by seeing your culture, meeting your relatives, and remembering the people in your heritage. I think it's really important too. I always say I'm Korean Filipino. When I was younger my godfather asked if I was 50% Korean and 50% Filipino, and I was really young. I said I am half Korean, half Filipino and half American. I also consider American as my heritage. I like being unique. Having that combination, they are tons of each, but how many Korean Filipinos are there? I don't ever wish I was one or the other.

CHAPTER V

Name: Amanda

Age: 20

Ethnicity: Filipino/German/Dutch

BACKGROUND

My name is Amanda, and I am 20 years old. I am a junior Anthropology major at Grinnell College. I was born in Indiana, but I grew up in Northern California. I consider myself an Iowan because I have lived here for eight years. I was in third or second grade when I came to Iowa. I don't remember Indiana very well, but I do remember California, I liked the weather a lot better there.

PARENTS AND APPEARANCE

My mom is blonde and visibly white. My dad identifies as Filipino American, but he does look really Hispanic. He often gets dirty looks from Hispanic people who try to speak to him in Spanish, and he does not respond in Spanish. They think he's going back on his people and is a horrible gringo lover when really he's Asian. He was born in San Francisco but when he was a baby he moved back to Philippines. I think they went back and forth a lot until he was twelve. He spoke English and Tagalog fluently. When he was in the U.S., his family was very into Americanizing. He kind of has a second generation suppression of the language.

I don't think I look Asian. I pass for white really well. Some people assume I am Hispanic, and I'm not too bothered by that. What I am bothered by is people making that assumption right away. I try to not make those kinds of assumptions about people's race or gender because I have an ambiguous appearance. I have brown eyes and don't really have an epicanthal fold. I have dark brown hair, but it's not as black as my dad's.

People tell me when they see me with my parents, “Gosh you look so much like your dad,” when really we don’t really look alike. It’s the contrast between my mom and me that throws people off. When I am with my mom, people probably think I’m adopted, but when I’m with all of my sisters, we look a lot alike. We don’t look like either of our parents completely. When we’re together there’s less of a concern.

REALIZATION

In Iowa at school, I think there was one black kid. Other than that, it was all white, Norwegian kids with blonde hair and blue eyes. I don’t think I really saw myself as standing out right away because that hadn’t really been an issue in California so I didn’t really notice it at first. I think there was time when I was in third grade and my mom, who comes from a Dutch German background, came to give a talk on popcorn farming because her mother was a popcorn farmer. By lunch, I think the rumor had circulated around the entire class that I was adopted because I didn’t have the same color of hair as my mom. I thought appearance really didn’t say who’s your mom, but I didn’t realize that everyone in my class looked exactly like both of their parents. That was one of the first times when I realized they don’t have the same sort of family as I do.

INVESTIGATION

I actually didn’t know what Hapa⁸ was until I came to school and started working at a multicultural newspaper. My friend and I were assigned to do a project on Laura Kina who is a Hapa artist. We were doing research online, and neither of us knew the word Hapa. We found out that it was half-Asian culture and identity, and I was like wow, I guess that’s me. It was almost an unsettling experience to find a definition of myself online that I had never used for myself or self-identified with.

⁸ See appendix, 51.

I do want to go to the Philippines at some point and see my family that's there. I want to go see where my grandparents lived. At the same time, I also want to go to Germany and see where my mom's family came from. My mom has said that she kind of feels left out of the whole identity thing because when I'm asked to identify a race, I usually say I'm half Asian instead of half Dutch. She feels like her heritage isn't as paid attention to, especially in my writing where I am grasping for an absent half of myself. As a result, I don't explicitly pay as much attention to the heritage I am more familiar with.

IDENTITY

Before college, I can't ever remember being upset about coming from a mixed race background. I can remember kind of being militantly proud. It never crossed my mind that this was something negative. I had a badge of pride about being mixed race and coming from two different traditions. A lot of my essays are about that. It was never something I really questioned until I came to Grinnell College, and they have such an open attitude about discussing issues of race, academically speaking. I was looking at race and identity in whole different way, and that really struck home for me. I had to refocus myself and realign where I saw myself. Even though I often said I was really proud of my mixed identity, I had grown up in an entirely white community, and I didn't really have much more than a superficial connection to my Filipino heritage. I think I had myself convinced that I fit in and was definitely white.

CULTURAL INTERACTION

There were times that I knew that I was separate. My cousins are either much darker or much lighter, and I think I always felt a little bit out of place. I work in the

campus bookstore and on a prospective student day, there was a father who was at the counter buying things. He asked if I knew anything about the language program, and he said, "You Mexicans have it easy learning your own language and everything. My daughter has to work for what she does." I was kind of shell-shocked. I really didn't know how to respond. Of the semi-racist things that have been directed at me, they're often directed in an anti-Latino way because people don't realize I'm Asian. I haven't gotten that side of the Asian experience. I have gotten an interesting Hispanic American experience even though I'm not actually connected to that tradition.

At Filipino community events, I sometimes don't feel Asian enough. I think part of that comes from the fact my family wasn't that involved in the Filipino community, but I definitely felt like I stuck out a lot going to the big potlucks and big Fourth of July parties. You were eating the foods that you've been told is your traditional food, but all the kids running around know each other, and I thought it was harder for me to get to know people. I felt like I was being accommodated for. Like, "that's her dad over there so it's okay that's she's here. The white girl is actually sort of Filipino."

I haven't had to assert that I am white with white people. I pass for white really easily so it's never really been an issue. I do have a white friend who made an Asian racist joke, and I feel if he was more familiar with the fact that I am Asian, he wouldn't have made the joke. It was incredibly hurtful, and I felt that in order to say it was wrong I have to assert my identity because it wasn't obvious.

With other students of color and communities of color, I feel like I don't want to assert it because I don't want to feel like I have to prove myself. I am self-conscious about that. I don't want to feel like I'm the person who wants to say their race. I want to

feel like I'm in a community that is open to everything. I feel like I try to do that less, but I do have moments where I say I am half Asian because it's not particularly obvious.

I definitely had a moment at the end of my first year at Grinnell when I realized that all of my best friends were white. Not that was something that was bad. I wondered if there was there something unconscious of how I was making friends and how I gravitated to this group. I also wondered why I saw myself more comfortable there. I really tried to pay attention to my own attitude and figure out where that was coming from.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The importance of food is a really big difference between American and Filipino culture. That and family. I don't have any concrete examples because I don't know the Filipino side very well, and my dad doesn't really talk about the Filipino side very much. I know a lot more about the Caucasian identity. I wish I could talk about more of the differences between the two, and I'm struggling to figure out how to get more involved in the Filipino side and claim that part of myself.

I attribute how my parents are to personality differences instead of culture. In doing some research and talking to some Filipino friends, there're some things that are distinctly Filipino about my dad. He hates being woken up from a nap, and if you wake him up, he thinks this is unacceptable. I thought that was just my dad, but talking to some of my Filipino Friends, you don't wake someone up when they're sleeping. There are just some little attitude things like temper issues. Things that I don't want to say are Filipino because of race but because of enculturation and how someone has been socialized. There are definitely some little things.

It's been really good for me to have Filipino friends. Once, one of my Filipino friends and I were at a poetry reading with mostly white students. At one point, something was definitely said in Tagalog, and we both perked up at the moment. We kind of realized that we both care from the same identity.

ASIAN STEROTYPES

I don't think I felt the need to live up to Asian stereotypes because I've been aware of stereotypes from the outside, and I don't know my Filipino family very well. I've kind of rebelled against those stereotypes. What's interesting is that I can tell with some of my Asian friends is that those stereotypes hugely factor into how they figure themselves out. I haven't had to deal with that.

DATING AND MARRIAGE

I've actually never dated anyone. I'd like to say race wouldn't be a factor, but I think there is some sort of subconscious socialization of my identity and how I'm drawn to people. I've tried really hard to not have that figure into who I think is attractive. I think there is definitely some posturing that is happening when I say, "Okay, I find that person attractive."

I noticed that I tend to find white guys more attractive. At the same time, when I meet someone who is Hapa it's like, "You come from the same background as me." I do find that attractive as well. Also, there's the personality issue. I think even if I like someone's personality who is of an explicitly nonwhite identity, it might not occur to me to find them attractive as easily. I definitely don't want to think of myself as racist, but I think it's important to acknowledge those things that you notice about yourself.

I do want to get married and have kids someday. I definitely will instill Filipino values. I think because I feel like I haven't inherited as much of my Filipino identity, I would try to compensate for that even more. I really like the idea of raising a child and deconstructing the regular notions of identities that get imposed on people. I do think about what would my kids look like. They would not probably appear Asian at all [if I married a Caucasian]. This is an unfortunate opinion, but I think that if I had Hapa kids, it would be great. But that is probably a bad thing in planning out their race.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

I really like having to deal with this part of my identity. I think one of the things about white identity is that there is not a lot of culturally imposed questioning of who you are and where you came from. I think that is something that should be explored more, white cultural identity. I will easily move between different groups of people, and I feel like because I pass really easily. I have this really interesting point of view of white culture that other Filipino kids don't have.

There are a lot of difficult things about having a mixed Asian identity. It is certainly fascinating to have to assess your identity and figure out how these different parts of yourself come together. Whereas if you have a "pure identity" in terms of race and come from a homogenous background, you don't have to worry about that as much.

I hate filling out the census, and forms where you have to identify race because I have to check four different boxes and then I usually write in several different identifiers in "other." I think I make some people uncomfortable because they don't know exactly where to place me. I've had some people that tell me I speak really great English. Or someone asked me, "When did your parents immigrate because you pass for an American

really well. I'm like, "I was born in Indiana." But it's never been anything more than an annoyance issue.

CHAPTER VI

Name: Christopher

Age: 17

Ethnicity: Filipino/German/Irish

BACKGROUND

My name is Christopher, and I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1990. I lived in Hawaii for six months and then moved to Australia for my dad's business. We then moved to Florida before we came to Carroll, Iowa by the time I was two. Carroll is the only place I remember.

My mom is from Philippines, Manila. I think she first went to Hawaii, but I don't know what year and that's where she met my dad. She now works at Delevan fixing airplane parts. My dad is from Carroll, Iowa and he's German and Irish. He worked for a Kerby vacuum company selling vacuums in California, Hawaii, and Australia. That's reason he moved around so much.

I've worked at a Chinese restaurant for three months in eighth grade and now I work at Hy-Vee in the produce department. At school, I'm involved in football, track, baseball, and KINS which tells kids not to smoke. I'm going be in national honors society too. I like studying business, accounting, and marketing. After school I want to go to a four year school. I'm looking into business but that could all change.

CHILDHOOD

Everything was pretty normal growing up. I had normal friends. Nothing too crazy I guess. I grew up on south side of town, then my sister was born. Then we moved to a different house, just normal kid stuff. I was involved in sports, little league, football and all that stuff. I like sports a lot.

I didn't starting thinking about [cultural] stuff until middle school and how I was a different race than other people. I started thinking about it in seventh grade. People would call me Mexican and other racial names I suppose like black. They wanted to know where I was from. Some knew I was from Hawaii and they said, "Yeah, you look Mexican." It's really just stupid. It seriously hurt sometimes. It's like I'm different and they don't know what it's like because everyone else around me is all white. They just don't know what it feels like. When you have everyone around you calling you that, you don't know who to look to because everyone else is same. You get picked on a lot, but you just have to take it sometimes. They'll see someone on TV that's a different race and they'll say, "That's Chris," or something like that. I'm okay with it to a certain extent. They're just joking around, but they don't know what it's like. It hurt back in the day because I'm different and they just brought that out.

People are like, "You're Asian, you're good at math stuff like that I guess. I get other stereotypes too. The one that makes me mad is like when they say, "Oh, you're greasy," or something really stupid. They think I'm Mexican, that's the one that gets me.

IDENTITY

I'm closer to my mom but I resemble my dad's culture just because I'm around it more I suppose. I resemble his language, and his attitude sometimes. I don't speak my mom's language but I understand a few phrases like "I love you." My mom really didn't say many things in Tagalog to us. I don't think I really ever confused [the Tagalog phrases] with [English phrases] though. I don't know so much Filipino history. I mean, we've never really talked about it.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

I think Caucasian Americans, in Carroll anyway, are less open to new things. They don't like change, and they don't like letting new people in. They just look to the differences because it's like ninety percent white. Asians are more open to things and more family oriented I guess. That's what I've noticed.

I go to family things in Hawaii, and they'll have these huge parties with Filipino food all over and you eat everything. Here it's just more structure. If you don't do [certain things], you're not normal.

My mom's been around it so much that I think she just became accustomed to not being address with a title. It doesn't bother her. My mom's a fun person I guess and she doesn't mind it. She has tried to get me to say, "That's your Manong" or something like that. You have to do that sometimes on [my mom's] side. My dad's side it's just their name or uncle. You could say there's a difference in [addressing elders].

When my mother first came here, she said it was really tough because everyone judged her because of what race she was. They didn't really give her a chance. She said it was really hard. She would come home crying. It's because people don't like change in the community where it is just a majority of white people. She got her reputation around and gained their respect.

My friends make fun of her and copy her speech and mumble her speech. They always repeat what she said with an accent. They say she's hard to understand. It makes me mad. I feel like I can understand her perfectly. She sounds normal, but they're like, "She's hard to understand sometimes." I don't know. I think she's normal.

CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT

We've been to a couple Filipino gatherings in Manning, [Iowa] because my mom has couple Filipino friends there, but that was a couple years ago. We haven't been there in awhile, though. I enjoy Filipino gatherings just because there's a lot of Filipino food. It's just enjoying yourself and talking and rather than trying to impress anyone. You don't have to impress anyone. You're around people that are just like you and you're with family.

Caucasian gatherings are like, you have to try and live up to their expectations. You have to show them that you're just as good as them. I always have put myself up there because I'm different. You have to prove yourself a lot of times just because you're a different person. You have to prove yourself every chance you get.

SPORTS AND ACADEMICS

I think it's like that in sports definitely and academics maybe. That's why I've always tried to get myself as good as I can get. In sports, you're either black or white, and you have to prove yourself all the time. The whole team is white, and you have to prove you have just as much as a white kid, if not more. Sometimes I think people don't think I know all that much about sports because they think only white people know all this information. I use examples and stuff from ESPN to show I do watch it and I do know how to play the sport.

COMFORT WITH IDENTITY

I kind of like who I am because I'm unique and different. I don't follow the group I guess. I like the way I am. Maybe I wish I was kind of taller. That's probably the one and only thing. It would definitely be easier to be white in this community because

everyone else is. It all depends on your personality because there are Caucasians that have it hard too.

There's a guy a grade in front of me who's one hundred percent Filipino. He's a smart kid too. His experiences are different than mine. He's been adopted and he has to deal with all that other stuff on top of that. He's a leader in school, and I think Filipinos just have an urge to prove themselves I think. Then there's a guy who's half Filipino and half Korean. He's way up there too. We always talk and joke that we Filipinos are going to take over. We know what it's like.

People at school see that I am Filipino, and that I am different. They think I'm going to answer a different way or something like that. Well, just because I'm around Caucasians, I say, "I'm part white, I'm part Caucasian." I'm a little bit of both. They want to classify me just as Filipino I guess, and that's not true.

Sometimes I feel not quite white enough. You'll be around your other white friends and they'll be like "It's the Filipino, he's coming in now. Watch out.". When I go to Hawaii and stuff, they've been around Filipinos for so long and I've been around white people for so long it is different. They view me as different too. Actually, they got mad because I talk so fluently. There are like, "Why would you want to talk so fluently?"

PERCEPTION

[People] view mixed race people as being different and not being like everyone else. They have different qualities, like talking differently. They view them as being smarter I guess just because that's the stereotype of Asians. I think they look negatively at them a lot of times just because in Carroll they don't like change. They've always been 99% percent white. They don't like change.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS

I guess I'm just really close to my mom, and everyone loves my mom. She's respected in the community and everyone knows her. My dad doesn't get out much so it's hard to relate. When I'm with my dad, I don't think people know he's my dad, but that's tough. People are like, "Is that his dad because he kind of looks like him, but he's like white." People might think that I'm adopted or wonder why I was hanging out with that guy.

DATING

I've only really dated Caucasian girls. I don't know why. We really don't have many other options. I don't know if I'd ever date a Filipino, but I think I would. It's just hard to say because there's not many around. I think Filipino girls are attractive in a certain way. I don't know, maybe it's just me, but it's like dating your cousin kind of.

I've always had a white something in my family. My mom never dated anyone else besides a white person in Carroll since my parents divorced. Now she's married to another white man.

I wish my girlfriend knew more about Filipino culture because it's a good culture to know. Maybe she will someday. When I get married and depending on where we live, I definitely want to get them involved in some stuff, especially family gatherings. I want them to experience all that food and socializing. I think we'll definitely have some [Filipino influences]. I think we'd go with Caucasian names for our kids especially if my wife is white.

OBERVATIONS

You're just different that's all it is. People don't understand what it's like. They might say I'm not different, and it's tough because you get made fun of all the time even when you don't want to. They're like, "Make the Mexican do this" or "Make him take back the treys because his culture is use to it." It's not easy. I try to be as strong as possible to build myself up. I never feel like I completely fit in. I'm always going to be different, especially in this neighborhood. I think it's a lot harder than people think it is. You have to deal with a lot of stuff with academics and extracurriculars and on top of that, getting made fun of too.

I think I've found that balance between the cultures. I feel as though I've gained people's respect. They know who I am. They know I'm a smart kid and an athletic kid. I've done something to make a name for myself and my Filipino name. I'm happy and content.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

As the preceding interviews indicate, the experiences of biracial Filipino Americans in society have both similar and unique qualities. They all went through some struggles with their identity, but they all ultimately expressed their satisfaction with who they are. They might have experienced some racism and prejudice, but they grew stronger from it and overcame it. It is clear that they all treasure their multicultural experience.

Since all of the participants currently live in Iowa, their experiences involved “sticking out.” “My high school was 95% white, maybe more,”⁹ Dean said. David also noted how his high school was “very predominantly white.”¹⁰ This difference in appearance undoubtedly triggered an early realization that they were different. With this respective sample group, that moment typically occurred in grade school. “I think somewhere toward elementary school, they realized I looked different,” David said.¹¹

Once they noticed their different physical appearance, they began to realize that not everyone looked alike and that they were indeed unique. This led to them experiencing some mistaken identities and racism. All of the participants were mistaken for being Hispanic at some point, and they were subject to some racism and prejudice. Christopher noted how his friends would refer to him as “greasy” and how that really

⁹ See page 7.

¹⁰ See page 20.

¹¹ See page 24.

bothered him,¹² and Amanda told the story of how a customer made a derogatory comment about her speaking Spanish.¹³

Even with their different physical appearances, the interviewees did not feel like they constantly struggled to fit in. They noted how they were able to become friends with the Caucasians and that aside from a few isolated incidents, they did not experience racism. When they were the target of negative comments, they were usually able to disregard them.

In regards to dating, it was fascinating to discover that all of the participants were more attracted to Caucasians. That was mostly attributed to the fact that Caucasians were the most abundant group around. “I would probably date a Filipino but there aren’t enough around here,” Galaxy said.¹⁴ David also said that he finds Caucasians more attractive and “definitely thinks it’s a societal influence.”¹⁵ All of the interviewees also commented on how if they would end up marrying a Caucasian, they would still keep their Filipino traditions alive. “I definitely will instill Filipino Values,”¹⁶ Amanda said and Chris noted how he would get them involved in Filipino events, “especially family gatherings.”¹⁷ This information indicates that they are indeed proud of their heritage, and that they are excited to pass their knowledge and experiences onto their children.

However, the interviewees did note that there were a few disadvantages to being biracial. “No matter what group you’re with, you’re always the odd person out,” Dean said¹⁸ and Galaxy noted how it is not pleasant to be made fun of for looking different

¹² See Page 37.

¹³ See page 31.

¹⁴ See page 18.

¹⁵ See page 25.

¹⁶ See Page 34.

¹⁷ See page 41.

¹⁸ See page 11.

than everyone else.¹⁹ However, the participants also acknowledged several advantages to being biracial. Dean said that he has “decided that [he’s] glad that [he] can be part of everything instead of just one,”²⁰ and Chris said, “I kind of like who I am because I’m unique and different.”²¹ Again, this depicts their relative comfort with their identity even if they have faced some prejudice.

PERSONAL COMPARISON

Their experiences with intercultural identity do mirror my personal development. Since I am also half-white and half-Asian, and since I grew up in a predominantly white society, I completely related to their experiences and stories. Like them, I did not realize that my background was different until grade school, and then I began questioning my identity. I found it difficult to never feel like I belonged to a certain group, and I sometimes wished I was one or the other instead of both. However, after further introspection, I grew increasingly comfortable with myself and with my heritage and I became exceedingly proud of the advantages my upbringing bestowed upon me. I know I would not be the person I am today without being biracial.

COMPARISON TO OUTSIDE SOURCES

Although there does not exist direct studies a biracial Filipino American in Iowa, their experiences do follow very similarly to the experiences of other biracial upbringings. They closely follow Martin and Nakayama’s model of Identity development moving from awareness, to a struggle for acceptance and finally self-

¹⁹ See page 18.

²⁰ See page 11.

²¹ See page 39.

acceptance.²² They progressed through these stages at their own paces, but on the whole, they remained inline with the suggested model.

Since they all grew up in a predominantly white society and their appearances were different, they also experienced some of the aspects of minority identity development. Also according to Martin and Nakayama, minorities typically follow four stages. At first, they possess an unexamined identity before they explore their heritage. They then move onto the stage of conformity where they attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture. The third stage is one of resistance and separation where they encounter discrimination and decide they want to adapt the characteristics of the minority group. Finally, the ideal outcome consists of integration where they become satisfied with who they are and become comfortable with their surroundings.²³

This model is also applicable to the participants in this study because they possessed some of the traits of being a minority. They realized they were different but still wanted to fit in, yet they did not want to lose the other side of their heritage. They explored and examined their identity and once they realized their unique makeup was an asset, they became more comfortable in their own skin and were able to look at their experiences as a positive.

Through the interviews, the differences in American and Filipino cultures also manifested themselves. In the Philippines, “direct confrontation is frowned upon and regarded in the worst light.”²⁴ This conflict was indicated by Dean who noted that his

²² See page 2-3.

²³ Martin and Nakayama, 96-98

²⁴ Alfredo Roces and Grace Roces, *Culture Shock: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette*, (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 1985), 8.

“dad is more aggressive and [his] mom is more passive.”²⁵ Again, this could partly be explained by the inherent cultural variations between the two societies, and it could be partially explained by potential gender differences.

Several of the participants also relayed examples of the big Filipino gatherings with an endless supply of food. This can be traced back to the strong Filipino tradition of fiestas. Roces and Roces even noted that “[t]here is a Philippine fiesta going on somewhere in the archipelago practically throughout the year.”²⁶ Through these fiestas, or “potlucks” here in America, the biracial interviewees were able to experience a sampling of some of the culture of the Philippines.

Other aspects of the differences between the two cultures exposed themselves during the interviews. Christopher noted how he felt when he was with Caucasians he always had to prove himself.²⁷ This can be linked the American society’s emphasis on individual survival.²⁸ In the Filipino society, “self is tightly tied to the identity of one’s family”²⁹ and that could partially explain why Christopher felt more comfortable with his Filipino family than he did with the Caucasians.

When the participants finally did become more comfortable with their identity, they were able to break through a typical American train of thought, the either/or fallacy. In that line of thinking, it is commonly believed that things can be placed into one category or the other, not both.³⁰ However, the stories in these interviews made it quite apparent that they did not follow this model of traditional thought. They were able to

²⁵ See page 8.

²⁶ Roces and Roces, 61.

²⁷ See Page 38.

²⁸ Lee, Lutie Ortez, *The Americanized Teenagers Implications for Parenting, Teaching and Mentoring* (United States, Valor Circle Books, 2006), 47.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 63.

transition from one culture to the other although they might have experienced some difficulties in doing so.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of the study, it became increasingly obvious that these particular biracial Filipino Americans eventually benefited from their experiences. They might not have known right away, and they might have gone through tough times of identity development, but they eventually came to see their unique makeup as a positive. It is important to always keep in mind that, as Pearl Gaskins noted, “young people ... have many more dimensions than [race]. Growing up, many of them struggled with the problems that plague their peers.”³¹ Their race is not what defines them; it is just another nuance to their lives. It does not always weigh constantly on their minds and David even likened it to a religion and to being left-handed.³²

This study provided excellent examples of how individuals are capable of adjusting and adapting to differing circumstances and environments. It proved that they are proficient in negotiating the differences in their cultures and that they truly cherish their opportunities to experience their varying ethnicities. Although it is difficult to fully relate the emotions and feelings of these participants, enough information has been gathered to demonstrate that the subjects have undoubtedly benefited from their diverse, multicultural, and biracial experiences.

³¹ Gaskins, Pearl Fuyo, *What are you? Voices of Mixed Race Young People*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1999), 10.

³² See Page 27, 24.

APPENDIX

1. GENERAL QUESTIONS

The Following questions served as the guidelines for the interviews. Not all questions were asked during all of the interviews, and several follow-up questions were asked. They were also open to discuss any topics of their choosing.

BACKGROUND

- Name/Age/School/Major/Hometown
- Parents' Information (ethnicity, age, etc.)

EXPERIENCE

- Have you noticed major differences in culture?
- When did you notice you were biracial?
- When did you notice your parent(s) had an accent?
- How did it make you feel to be different?
- Do you identify with one culture more than the other?
- Has it been difficult to keep the two cultures separate?

FAMILY

- How close are you with your mom's side of the family?
- How close are you with your dad's side?
- Do you notice major difference in how your parents raised you?
- Do you notice a major difference in how you interact with you extended family?

SCHOOL AND LIFE

- How were you treated in school?
- Where there specific activities where you felt stronger prejudice?
- How much has prejudice been a factor in your life?

DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Which race have you dated/would you date?
- Do you find both equally attractive?
- Which race will you prefer your children to date?

MISCELLANEOUS

- What does it mean to be biracial?
- What are the greatest advantages?
- What are the greatest disadvantages?

2. DEFINITIONS³³

Biracial - A ... mixed-race person; the product of an interracial relationship between people of two different racial groups.

Hapa – A Hawaiian word, meaning ‘foreigner,’ that has been co-opted by many racially mixed people who have some Asian/Pacific Islander heritage to describe themselves.

³³ Gaskins, 12

3. UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Biracial Filipino Americans in Society

Name of Investigator(s): Neal A. Molitor

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The study is designed to create an oral history of Filipino-Americans, their children, and biracial Filipino Americans.

Explanation of Procedures: You will be asked to discuss your life experiences during an interview that will last approximately 20-60 minutes. The interviews will be tape-recorded, used for the study, and erased upon completion of the project. The information collected will be compared to experiences found in literature and utilized in an Independent Study/Honors Thesis Presentation.

Discomfort and Risks: Risks to participation are minimal.

Benefits and Compensation: Participants will receive no direct benefit or compensation.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Neal Molitor at 712-830-4959 (molitor@uni.edu) or contact the project investigator's faculty advisor Dr. Vince Gotera at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-7061 (vince.gotera@uni.edu). You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement: Include the following statement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date)

4. UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW PARENTAL PERMISSION

Project Title: Biracial Filipino Americans in Society

Name of Investigator(s): Neal A. Molitor

Invitation to Participate: Your child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to allow your child to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The study is designed to create an oral history of Filipino Americans, their children, and biracial Filipino Americans.

Explanation of Procedures: Your child will be asked to discuss his or her life experiences during an interview that will last approximately 20-60 minutes. The interviews will be tape-recorded, used for the study, and erased upon completion of the project. The information collected will be compared to experiences found in literature and utilized in an Independent Study/Honors Thesis Presentation.

Discomfort and Risks: Risks to participation are minimal.

Benefits and Compensation: Participants will receive no direct benefit or compensation.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify your child will be kept strictly confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your child's participation is completely voluntary. He or she is free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, your child will not be penalized or lose benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your child's participation or the study generally, you can contact Neal Molitor at 712-830-4959 (molitorn@uni.edu) or contact the project investigator's faculty advisor Dr. Vince Gotera at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-7061 (vince.gotera@uni.edu). You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement: Include the following statement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to allow my son/daughter to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

(Signature of parent/legal guardian)

(Date)

(Printed name of parent/legal guardian)

(Printed name of child participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date)

**5. University of Northern Iowa
Human Participants Review
Informed Assent**

Project Title: Biracial Filipino Americans in Society

Name of Principal Investigator: Neal A. Molitor

.....

I, _____, have been told that one of my parents/guardians has given his/her permission for me to participate in a project that involved interviewing Filipino American immigrants, their children, and biracial children about their experiences.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I have been told that I can stop participating in this project at any time. If I choose to stop or decide that I don't want to participate in this project at all, nothing bad will happen to me.

Name

Date

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