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# Overcoming the Model Minority Myth: Experiences of Filipino American Graduate Students

Kevin L. Nadal  
*CUNY John Jay College*

Stephanie T. Pituc  
*University of Minnesota*

Marc P. Johnston  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

Theresa Esparrago  
*ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career*

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## Research in Brief

Vasti Torres, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

# Overcoming the Model Minority Myth: Experiences of Filipino American Graduate Students

Kevin L. Nadal    Stephanie T. Pituc    Marc P. Johnston    Theresa Esparrago

*Filipino Americans are one of the largest immigrant groups in the United States and the second largest Asian American/Pacific Islander ethnic group. However, there is little research focusing on the unique experiences of this group, particularly in higher education. This paper presents a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Filipino American graduate students utilizing consensual qualitative research methodology. Results were categorized into domains and themes, with an example of a domain being "deficiencies and lack of resources" and an example of a theme being "Filipino Americans as different from Asian Americans." Implications for higher education administrators and researchers are discussed.*

Data from the U.S. Department of Education have revealed that total enrollment in graduate programs has increased by 62% from 1976 to 2004 (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006). During this same period, graduate enrollments for students of color increased 254%, with students from Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino backgrounds having the largest growth (NCES, 2006). Concurrently, previous studies have found that 40 to 60% of all students (which include both students of color and Whites) who start doctoral programs do not complete them (Bair & Haworth, 1999;

Golde, 2005). However, because these studies do not focus on unique experiences between students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, the completion and retention rates for specific graduate students of color remains unclear.

Attrition and retention of graduate students has been a topic of much research (e.g., Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). However, these studies that examine graduate student attrition fail to look at differences between certain populations of students, especially in terms of race and ethnicity. A call for further research on specific graduate student populations, including students of color, contends that research on particular populations will allow for the identification of group-specific barriers to student success (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006). Simply stated, it is important to examine the unique experiences of specific racial/ethnic groups in order to understand the factors that may contribute to their graduate school successes or failures.

Additionally, because higher education studies (especially those for students of color) often focus solely on undergraduate experiences, it becomes important to investigate unique experiences that may occur in graduate school, particularly for those of specific racial/ethnic groups. The purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of Filipino American

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*Kevin L. Nadal is Assistant Professor of Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice—City University of New York. Stephanie T. Pituc is a doctoral student in Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Marc P. Johnston is a doctoral student at University of California—Los Angeles. Theresa Esparrago is a research associate at ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career*

graduate students in order to better understand the unique needs of this often marginalized population and to create better systems of support to achieve greater student success.

### Who are the Filipino Americans?

In order to address issues pertaining to Filipino American graduate students, it is important to understand the history of Filipino American people. Filipino Americans are the second largest Asian American/Pacific Islander population in the United States (Barnes & Bennett, 2002). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), there are 1.37 million Filipino-born immigrants living in the United States, making Filipino Americans the second largest immigrant population in the country behind Mexican Americans. The Philippines has been influenced by several different cultures, namely Spanish colonization for nearly 400 years and American colonization for 50 years, as well as Japanese occupation and trade from China, the Pacific Islands, Portugal, and Australia (Nadal, 2004, 2009).

Due to Spanish and U.S. colonization, Filipino Americans may have a less similar historical and cultural experience than for other Asian American groups and a historical and cultural experience more similar to Latino ethnic groups with the same colonial history (Agbayani-Siewert, 2004; Mendoza, 1986; Root, 1997). This may be demonstrated through language, in that a significant amount of Tagalog words (mainly nouns) are derived from or are parallel to the Spanish language. The uniqueness of the Philippines from other Asian countries is further expressed through language, with the Philippines being one of the only Asian countries to have English as one of its national languages (Posadas, 1999), as well as religion, with Filipinos being the only Asian ethnic group to be predominantly Roman Catholic (Agbayani-Siewert & Revilla, 1995).

Because of this unique cultural and historical experience of Filipino Americans, previous authors have posited that, although all-encompassing, the umbrella racial term "Asian American" obscures the uniqueness of Filipino Americans as a group (Nadal, 2004, 2009; Toribio, 2005). Moreover, other authors have cited that Filipino Americans are often marginalized within the Asian American umbrella, are often viewed by other Asians as being at the bottom of the Asian hierarchy, are the targets of ethnic jokes, are ignored for leadership positions, and/or have their ethnic-specific issues ignored by the larger Asian American group (Espiritu, 1992; Okamura, 1998). As a result, the experiences and disparities of Filipino Americans are often invisible within the Asian American group as well as within larger society; accordingly, further research must disaggregate Asian American populations in order to understand between-group and/or ethnic differences and their impact on educational experiences.

### Experiences of Filipino Americans in Higher Education

Asian Americans have traditionally been viewed as the "model minority" in higher education, which defines Asian Americans as being well-educated and successful citizens in the United States (Sue & Sue, 2008; Suzuki, 2002). Although the myth may be a stereotype that is detrimental to all Asian Americans, it may appear at first glance that Filipino Americans may fit with this myth. Studies have shown that there is a high percentage of both Filipino men and women in the United States who possess a bachelors degree or higher (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997). However, these data mask two very important issues. First, the data do not specify whether these degrees were received in the Philippines or the United States. Secondly, Filipino Americans do not have the same levels of income and are often at a lower

occupational status when compared to other groups of similar educational qualifications (Okamura & Agbayani). In addition, although these newly immigrated Filipinos are seemingly well educated, it cannot be guaranteed that their children and future generations will be able to replicate these patterns in the United States, often due to cultural differences between generations and structural barriers that can restrict access to higher education and further persistence (Okamura & Agbayani).

Further research shows that a major issue plaguing the Filipino American community is the high percentages of high school dropouts (Okamura & Agbayani, 1997; Posadas, 1999). Additionally, second-generation Filipino Americans have achieved lower rates of college admission and retention than have East Asian Americans (Okamura, 1998). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1994), 22% of second-generation Filipino Americans completed a college degree, in comparison to 51% of Chinese Americans. One study found that, although these two groups share similar immigration experiences and socioeconomic statuses, many of the differences in educational attainment could be explained by different racialized experiences of Chinese and Filipino American youth (Teranishi, 2002).

Additionally, authors have supported that Filipino Americans may have different cultural values than do other Asian Americans. One study found that Filipino American college students maintain varying levels of "Asian cultural values" when compared to Chinese, Korean, and Japanese American college students (Kim, Yang, Atkinson, Wolfe, & Hong, 2001). This supports the notion that, although Filipino Americans may have similar experiences with East Asian Americans (e.g., balancing a bicultural identity, combating the model minority myth), their different cultural values may result in unique experiences. Additionally, because

Filipino Americans are often mistaken for Hispanics/Latinos (Rumbaut, 1995; Uba, 1994), they may receive similar stereotypes as Hispanic/Latinos would. As a result, previous authors have asserted that perceptions of racial discrimination for Filipino Americans may be different than that for East Asian Americans (Nadal, 2004, 2009; Teranishi, 2002), and that Filipino Americans may undergo a racial/ethnic identity development that is different than their East Asian American counterparts (Nadal, 2004, 2009).

Given these aforementioned factors, it is important to recognize how these unique racial experiences for Filipino Americans may lead to a different experience for Filipino American undergraduate and graduate students. These studies have focused on Filipino American youth and undergraduate students, leaving a dearth of research on Filipino American graduate student populations. Given this lack of information and the previously mentioned void in examining specific racial/ethnic populations at the graduate level, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Filipino Americans in graduate school, including challenges faced, systems of support, comparative experiences to graduate students of different racial/ethnic groups, and reflections on possible improvements to better support Filipino American graduate students.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized a qualitative method to examine the experiences of Filipino American graduate students. Online surveys, advertised through the Filipino American community, elicited open-ended answers in order to allow the participants to express their experiences in their own words and perspectives. Supporters of qualitative research purport that open-ended questions are necessary to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when

gathering data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Patton, 2002). Online surveys were also utilized in order to reach out to a large sample of Filipino American graduate students from different geographical areas. Although there are limitations to the depth available from an online survey, the benefits of including a more diverse sample (in terms of geography and discipline) outweigh those of conducting case studies or individual interviews in which the experiences of smaller numbers of participants may not be generalizable to a greater Filipino American graduate student population. Additionally, because Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the highest percentage of home computers and Internet access out of all racial/ethnic groups (Newberger, 2001), conducting an online study was a convenient way to gather information in nonintrusive ways.

## Participants

Participants ( $N = 29$ ) included Filipino Americans currently or recently enrolled in U.S. graduate school programs. Fifty-two percent of the participants ( $n = 15$ ) identified as female, 42% of participants identified as male ( $n = 13$ ), and one participant did not report gender. Twenty-eight percent of the participants ( $n = 8$ ) were between the ages of 21 and 26, 31% ( $n = 9$ ) of the participants were between ages 27 and 30, and 41% ( $n = 12$ ) of the participants were age 30 years and older. Fourteen percent ( $n = 4$ ) of the participants identified as living on the East Coast, and 14% ( $n = 4$ ) lived in the Midwest. Sixty-two percent ( $n = 18$ ) reported living on the West Coast, and 7% ( $n = 2$ ) lived in Hawai'i. One participant's geographic location was not reported.

Participants represented various disciplines and a variety of graduate programs of study. Five participants identified as belonging to Asian American studies or history programs, and 4 participants identified as being in

psychology or counseling programs. Three participants were in education programs, three participants were in law programs, and another three participants were in public policy programs. The remaining participants identified as students in the following fields: astrophysics, business, communication, critical studies of cinema and television, english/cultural studies, literature, medicine, public health, social work, and sociology.

## Procedure and Instrument

An online questionnaire was created and available using the web service *Free Online Surveys* (KwikSurveys, 2010). E-mail advertisements were publicized via e-mail listserves to different Filipino American and Asian American organizations throughout the United States; these included community centers and graduate student organizations. E-mails were also sent to general listserves in higher education. An Internet study was utilized in order to survey a representation of Filipino Americans from different geographic locations. Furthermore, by using a snowball sampling methodology in which participants were encouraged to inform their peers of the survey, it was hoped that participants would share the survey with their friends and family members (involved and uninvolved in community organizations). The online survey was made available for 1 week, as the maximum number of participants desired for this qualitative analysis ( $N = 20$ ) was reached instantaneously.

Before beginning the survey, all participants were informed that their responses would be confidential and secure. Participants were then asked to answer five open-ended questions. The five-item qualitative questionnaire inquired about participants' experiences in graduate school, with questions focusing on challenges and positive experiences as Filipino American graduate students, available support systems,

and thoughts about how their graduate school experiences differed from other racial/ethnic groups. Participants had an unlimited amount of time to complete the instrument and were given an option to save their answers and complete the survey at a later time if necessary. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked, given a contact e-mail address if they had any questions, and were encouraged to share the survey with their family and friends.

## Analysis

Four research team members followed the consensual qualitative research (CQR) methods (Hill et al., 1997, 2005) in analyzing the data. By utilizing the CQR method, reliability is increased, as the method employs a "checks and balances" approach in which all analysts must consensually agree on the data analysis. This is important because researchers are aware of each others' biases, assumptions, and expectations about the sample and the data, which is helpful in minimizing partial or biased analyses. The three general steps to CQR are:

1. Responses to open-ended questions from questionnaires or interviews for each individual case are divided into domains (i.e., topic areas);
2. Core ideas (i.e., abstract or brief summaries) are constructed for all the material within each domain for each individual case; and
3. A cross analysis, which involves developing categories (or themes) to describe consistencies in the core ideas within domains across cases, is conducted. (Hill et al., 1997, p. 8)

Hill et al. (1997) also described generalizability categories that are used to code data, including "general" (applies to every case), "typical" (applies to half of the cases), or "variant" (applies to less than half but more

than one case). Given the exploratory nature of this study and the goal of allowing under-represented voices to be heard, we decided not to include these generalizability categories in this analysis. This choice is further supported by the utilization of an online survey method in which researchers were not able to inquire further for clarification or elaboration.

For the current study, a three-person research analysis team reviewed all of the raw data individually and created domains based on general similarities in participants' answers. Next, these three analysts regrouped to share and consensually agree upon the domains based on their independent efforts. The analysts then submitted these domains to the auditor (the principal investigator who is also an expert in the subject matter), who then provided feedback about the groups' domains. The analysts accepted the auditor's feedback and agreed upon the following domains: (a) deficiencies and lack of resources for Filipino American graduate students, (b) positive experiences as Filipino American graduate students, (c) experiences with support systems, (d) experiences due to race/ethnicity and racism, and (e) recommendations for improving Filipino Americans' graduate school experiences.

The analysts then reconvened, reviewed the narratives, and produced themes that were applicable to each domain. Themes (along with examples of themes) were then presented to the auditor, who then provided feedback one more time to the group of analysts. The team accepted the feedback, and all four members reconvened to finalize all domains and themes.

## Researchers

The researchers for the study consisted of a principal investigator (a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology), one researcher with a master's degree in counseling, one researcher with a master's degree in higher education, and

one master's student in sociology of education. All of the researchers identified as second-generation Filipino Americans. The principal investigator had been trained extensively on qualitative research and had previously conducted and participated in several research projects utilizing the CQR method.

Because the role of the researcher is the central means of data collection in qualitative explorations, the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases are required at the initial onset of the study (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 1997). By identifying one's values, it is hoped that bias will be minimized and that results will not be influenced by the investigators' expectations or hopes. While every effort is made to ensure objectivity, it is acknowledged that these biases may shape the way data is collected, viewed, and interpreted.

Consequently, the four researchers convened prior to analyzing data in order to discuss their biases, assumptions, and expectations. Some of these biases and assumptions included hoping to validate the unique experiences of Filipino Americans and differentiating Filipino Americans from other Asian American groups. Some of expectations included hoping the research would lead to policy changes and recognition of Filipino Americans as an invisible, underrepresented racial/ethnic minority group. By acknowledging these biases, each of the researchers was given the task and responsibility of challenging oneself and each other to be aware of how one's biases may shape the data analysis. As a result, every effort was made to minimize the influence of bias in interpreting the raw data.

## RESULTS

Results are presented as domains and themes. The five domains include (a) deficiencies and lack of resources for Filipino American graduate

students; (b) positive experiences as Filipino American graduate students; (c) experiences with support systems; (d) experiences due to race, ethnicity, and racism; and (e) recommendations for improving Filipino Americans' graduate school experiences.

### Domain 1: Deficiencies and Lack of Resources for Filipino American Graduate Students

Two major themes that emerged related to deficiencies and a lack of resources for Filipino American graduate students. The first theme was a lack of relationships, connections, and social support. Participants described experiences akin to alienation, such as "being the only [Filipino American] in my program," a major challenge being "finding a community or network of other Filipino graduate students," and the "lack of support from faculty; lack of mentoring (i.e., no Filipino or Asian American faculty mentors)." The second theme that emerged was a lack of concrete academic resources, such as institutional support, financial aid, and faculty positions for Filipino American specialists. Many participants pointed out the lack of financial aid or scholarships from Filipino community members and/or designated for Filipino students. One student's response described the lack of faculty:

One of the major challenges that I have experienced as a Filipino American graduate student is trying to find [Filipino American] faculty to work with. It's difficult since there are so few of them to begin with and because the few that are at major research universities have trouble getting tenure or are overburdened with all sorts of commitments. It is also difficult trying to find classes on different aspects of the Filipino American experience to take since there aren't enough professors to teach such classes.

## Domain 2: Positive Experiences as Filipino American Graduate Students

In addition to describing the myriad of challenges they faced, the participants noted positive experiences as Filipino American graduate students. The first theme was the experience of connecting with other Filipino Americans and the Filipino American community. Though this may seem to contradict the findings from the first domain, this theme highlights the significant impact that this connection has on students when a community is available. For example, one student said, "With the few [Filipino American] professors to help me, they have been more than supportive and inspiring." The second theme that emerged was an appreciation for the exposure to and interaction with people from diverse backgrounds; participants spoke of the exchange of ideas and experiences with other people of color. One participant said of positive experiences: "Having dialogues with people other than [Filipinos] about culture, race, [and] discrimination . . . learning from differences and finding similarities in many other nonmainstream cultures." Participants also described personal development as a result of their Filipino American identity, which represented a third theme. For example, one student shared her growth as a result of being a Filipino American graduate student:

I've had to develop a very thick skin and be my own mentor, and in turn that has helped me understand the diversity of opinions and mindsets and overcome the challenge of wanting to run out of the classroom screaming. In terms of being my own mentor, it's really helped me to be in touch with myself and check my own feelings about being in a situation where I was the minority and making the most of a bad situation.

## Domain 3: Experiences with Support Systems

The Filipino American graduate students in our study reported several differences in their experiences with support systems. The first theme was turning to individual or personal supports; this either comprised "friends and family" or simply oneself. Another theme that emerged was the role of organizational and institutional supports, such as Filipino student organizations, school offices (e.g., "Financial Aid office, Multicultural Affairs, Graduate School"), and community organizations and programs (e.g., "At a national API conference I had the chance to participate in mentoring programs and was paired with a fantastic mentor"). The third theme that emerged was the instrumental nature of the support received. For example, one student said, "The support of my fellow [Filipino/Filipina] grad students through study groups and just general support has helped tremendously." Another student described how his work with the Filipino community helped him develop his counseling skills: "Working with the Filipino community in Sacramento provided support and experience I needed to help me get a grasp of issues in our community and how to reframe mainstream services so that they are more culturally appropriate." The fourth theme in this domain was the presence of social support, such as empathy and encouragement. One student described social support from peers:

I turned to the Filipino student organization (comprised solely of undergraduates), and got involved with them. They were SO crucial in helping me vent and hear me out. I was able to also have great friendships that have continued to this day.

Another participant described social support from faculty mentors:



I had a lot of support from different professionals and leaders. They have extremely benefited me personally and professionally, resulting in me to accomplish some significant things. Because there are not a lot of Filipino-Americans in my particular field, I received a significant amount of support from African American and Caucasian mentors. I think without their support, I would have had more difficulty.

#### Domain 4: Experiences Due to Race, Ethnicity, and Racism

There were three themes that emerged with respect to these Filipino Americans' experiences due to race, ethnicity, and racism. A clear theme that emerged was the expression of a distinction between Filipino Americans and Asian Americans across a number of different areas, from the disparity of Filipino Americans in academia to a unique experience interacting with others. One student summarized this sentiment: "The institution itself needs to recognize [Filipino Americans] as a group [that is] separate from Asian Americans and as such a community in need of its own support services, pedagogical approaches, etc." Another student pointedly answered in response to asking about experiences compared to other Asian Americans, "I am not Asian American." Secondly, the participants described a number of institutional barriers that they faced as a result of their Filipino American status, such as a lack of support for specialized research and study; the lack of financial resources due to assumptions about the success of Asian Americans or because of a lack of resources from and specifically for the Filipino American community; and a lack of both Filipino American faculty and students in academia. One student revealed: "I think Filipino American graduate students are still fairly marginalized within academia—and unfortunately this marginalization is a bit

invisible." The third theme in this domain was in describing non-Filipinos' perceptions of Filipino Americans. The participants described their experiences "combating the stereotypes of Filipino Americans" and working with colleagues who had little to no knowledge of the Filipino culture. One participant cited this "lack of knowledge or understanding from peers and faculty about Filipino Americans."

#### Domain 5: Recommendations for Improving Filipino Americans' Graduate School Experiences

The final domain in participants' responses concerned recommendations for improving Filipino Americans' graduate school experiences. The first theme was a call to improve institutional resources and support, ranging from "more financial aid (particularly grant programs)" to "more positions in Asian American/Ethnic Studies Departments for Filipinos," to more formal opportunities to build alliances such as "peer mentoring programs/initiatives" and "student associations." The second theme was a recommendation to encourage community building and involvement—between Filipino American graduate students, with established professionals, and with the Filipino American community-at-large. One participant said that:

Filipino Americans in graduate school should definitely network more with other [Filipino Americans] and Asian Americans to improve their experiences in graduate school. Knowing that there are other students like me out there is comforting. Also, [Filipino American] grad students should try to contact the [Filipino American] professors that are out there and ask them about their experiences with getting tenure, publishing, navigating the university's bureaucracy in general, etc.

Finally, the third theme was the suggestion for improved communication and resources,

such as information dissemination through a “centralization of resources,” various media (“a website, newsletter, listserv”), and regular meetings to network with others.

## DISCUSSION

There are numerous findings that support a unique experience for Filipino American graduate students. First, it is evident through their voices that these graduate students cope with many deficiencies in their graduate school experiences. Nearly all of the participants disclosed that they lacked social support from their academic programs as well as from other graduate students. Several students cited that Filipino Americans may specifically have a lack of institutional support (e.g., not having scholarship programs or financial aid opportunities for Filipino Americans or other Asian Americans) and a lack of faculty support (e.g., not having faculty, either Filipino American or non-Filipino, to support their research interests). Although Filipino Americans are statistically an underrepresented minority group in higher education (Okamura, 1998), their educational needs continue to be overlooked by colleges and universities. Our findings underscore the fallacy of the model minority myth, which contends that Asian Americans uniformly experience academic success and personal well-being. This study illustrates the heterogeneity of Asian Americans’ experiences despite the tendency for research and practice to focus on East Asian groups (David & Okazaki, 2006). Moreover, these findings lend validity to examining the largely unmet needs and experiences of Filipino Americans.

This study also supports the idea that Filipino Americans may experience different racial/ethnic identity development than do other Asian Americans, highlighting the previous literature that suggests many Filipino

Americans may reject an Asian American identity and develop an ethnocentric Filipino identity, due to phenotypic differences, varying cultural values, disparaging socio-cultural differences in the United States, and marginalization in the Asian American community (Nadal, 2004, 2009). Through this sample, several Filipino American graduate students revealed that they do not identify with other Asian Americans, because they recognize a unique Filipino American identity. Perhaps the deficiencies they experience in graduate school (in which they feel neglected, unsupported, or marginalized as Filipino Americans) may impact their identities (or lack thereof) as Asian Americans.

For Filipino Americans who do not identify as Asian American, graduate school experiences may be significantly impacted. For example, if there are other Asian Americans in an individual’s graduate school program yet no other Filipino Americans, the Filipino American individual who does not identify as Asian may feel isolated and alone. If a graduate school program has Asian American faculty but no Filipino American faculty, the Filipino American individual who does not identify as Asian may feel disconnected and therefore unsupported by the faculty members. As a result, it is important for administrators and professors to pay attention to the heterogeneity of Asian American groups, as well as to the range of racial/ethnic identities of their students, in order to help their students to feel most supported and satisfied.

The data also sustain that, because of the lack of support that these Filipino Americans undergo, they have learned to become self-sufficient and independent graduate students. One participant wrote about having to “develop a very thick skin and be my own mentor,” whereas another participant shared that she “was really forced to be a better advocate for myself during graduate school because I did not

have the resources available to me like Filipino or Asian American mentors." Consistent with Sanford's (1966, 1968) concept of challenge and support, this type of independence can be viewed as both positive and negative. The positive view states that these graduate students have learned to become proactive and independent; they have learned to take initiative and advocate for their own needs. At the same time, these strategies may be dissonant with a preference for interdependent coping characteristic of many collectivistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Yeh & Wang, 2000); this may result in obstacles and stress that other, better-represented students (particularly White students) may not have to face. Future research should look into the potential impact that these students' ways of coping have on the individual's mental health, self-esteem, and academic performance.

The evidence also purports that many Filipino American graduate students turn to other Filipino Americans (e.g., graduate students, professors, and the entire Filipino community) for support, which is consonant with collectivistic ways of coping (Yeh & Wang, 2000). Some participants shared that the opportunity to have Filipino American professors or students in their program as being vital to their success. This finding confirms previous research that contends that Filipino American students often turn to Filipino American professors and other role models for support and/or understanding of their struggles (Maramba, 2008). Other participants revealed that meeting other Filipino American graduate students in other programs (e.g., at conferences or community organizations) has been validating and essential for mentoring and networking. Experiences with peers and mentors of the same ethnicity likely become even more valuable than for the average student due to the marginalization of Filipino American students in graduate education

and academia. As a result, it is important for admissions offices to actively recruit and admit Filipino Americans into their programs while taking measures to retain these students. Support and community building is vital so that students do not feel isolated or alone. Additionally, it is important for more Filipino Americans to apply to graduate school in order to be represented more thoroughly in academia.

Additionally, this study illuminates the various forms of racism and racial microaggressions that Filipino Americans experience as graduate students. Although the participants rarely labeled them as such, it is clear that their experiences encompassed the three forms of racism discussed by Jones (1972): individual (i.e., combating personal stereotypes about Filipinos), institutional (i.e., a lack of structures and personnel in place to foster academic success); and cultural racism, with culture being graduate education (i.e., devaluing the study of Filipino American studies). Their reports of feeling invalidated speaks to the experiences of racial microaggressions, in which a person of color receives subtle, denigrating messages because of her/his race (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). These Filipino-specific experiences with racism and racial microaggressions support previous notions that marginalized Asian Americans (e.g., Southeast Asians and Filipinos) are more than likely to be perceived and treated differently by Whites and other people of color (Nadal, 2004) than are other East Asian Americans and often may experience racism and racial microaggressions similar to Black/African Americans or Latinos (Nadal, 2008). Future research should examine these ethnic-specific experiences with racism and explore their potentially egregious effects on both psychological as well as academic outcomes.

There are many implications that this study has for student affairs professionals.

One of the striking insights gained from these participants' responses is that many of these Filipino Americans felt underprepared (or unprepared) for the transition to graduate school. Accordingly, it would have been important for these students to have received assistance and/or preparation prior to entering graduate school. Filipino American graduate students may benefit from mentorship and outreach programs specifically targeting their needs as a unique and marginalized ethnic group within a model minority paradigm. Counselors and academic advisors should also be aware of issues unique to Filipino Americans and encourage dialogue with students regarding the possible obstacles they may face in their career development. Student affairs professionals can optimize these outreach efforts through collaboration with Filipino American student and community organizations. Multicultural affairs coordinators can provide support programs for graduate students of color, allowing a safe space for individuals to voice their concerns, find some universality of experience, and receive encouragement. However, student development offices should also recognize that pan-Asian American organizations and services may be insufficient and assess the possible need for more ethnic-specific programming. Finally, university and college administrators must create and advertise financial aid and scholarship opportunities for this population, recognizing Filipino Americans as an underrepresented group and offering greater opportunities for entrance into the graduate education pipeline.

## LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to the study. First, inherent in an open-ended, online survey method is a limitation in probing for greater depth of response. Due to confidentiality, we were not able to follow up with participants

to clarify or expand upon their responses. Second, the nature of the survey precluded the participation of Filipino Americans without computer or Internet access, which may also be a function of social class. However, because the survey was publicized to Filipino American and Asian American listserves, the participants were more likely to possess greater self-awareness regarding their race and ethnicity and these variables' impact on their graduate experience.

## CONCLUSION

This exploratory study highlights the urgency for culturally competent research, service, and institutional policy for Filipino Americans. Researchers must recognize the barriers and psychological consequences unique to Filipino American graduate students. The dearth of literature regarding this population leaves many areas open to investigation: the consequences of alienation, risk, and protective factors to psychological outcomes (e.g., social support, self-reliance, etc) and racial and ethnic identity development. Although the U.S. system of higher education purports to move toward greater representation from various racial and ethnic groups, researchers and professionals must keep abreast to meet the ever-increasing needs of such marginalized populations.

This study is a call to the profession to take care to not overshadow the experiences of Filipino Americans within the broad category of Asian Americans. Academic institutions must recognize that Filipino Americans and other Asian American subgroups (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong Americans) may have lower admissions and retention rates, and that more scholarship, mentorship, and outreach opportunities must be created and provided for them (see Chhuon & Hudley, 2008). Student affairs administrators must recognize the unique experiences that may

affect a Filipino American graduate student's identity development and growth while tailoring services and support programs to be inclusive of these experiences. Professors and educators must recognize the fallacies of the model minority myth, particularly with Filipino Americans, while understanding the detriments of stereotyping groups in this manner. By recognizing the unique experiences of Filipino American graduate and

undergraduate students, it is hoped that this group's rates of retention and graduation will increase and the quality of their experiences will be improved.

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*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kevin L. Nadal, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 445 W. 59th Street, New York, NY 10019; knadal@jjay.cuny.edu*

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