

## Colonial Mentality: A Review and Recommendation for Filipino American Psychology

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*Colonial mentality is a term used widely by ethnic studies scholars and by the Filipino American community to refer to a form of internalized oppression among Filipinos and Filipino Americans. The authors propose that colonial mentality is a construct that is central to the understanding of the psychology of contemporary Filipino Americans. Drawing on larger scholarship from postcolonial studies and psychological research on oppression, the authors review the historical and sociological contexts in which to understand the significance of the colonial mentality concept for the Filipino American population. The authors also review the existing literature on colonial mentality and provide specific recommendations for incorporating this construct into research and practice with Filipino Americans. It is argued, through this illustrative example of colonial mentality among Filipino Americans, that examining the psychological impact of colonialism is a way to incorporate larger historical and sociological contextual variables into ethnic minority research and practice.*

*Keywords:* Filipino Americans, colonial mentality, internalized oppression, colonialism, Asian Americans

Paralleling the exponential growth of the Asian American population in the past three decades, the field of Asian American psychology has experienced a tremendous

growth in volume and sophistication in scholarship (Okazaki, 2002). However, several limitations continue to plague Asian American psychology. First, the bulk of our

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current knowledge base still rests on data on Asian Americans of East Asian descent (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans) or on aggregate multiethnic sample of Asian Americans that combines individuals from East, Southeast, and South Asia into one group. Second, the substantive topics within Asian American psychology have mostly focused on Asian cultural variables (e.g., collectivism and interdependence) and cultural adaptation processes (e.g., acculturation), and less so on the experiences of Asian American individuals as racialized subjects who have faced historical and contemporary forms of oppression. Lastly, there has been a call to better understand historical and environmental contexts for Asian Americans' psychological experiences (e.g., Root, 2002).

In this article, we aim to illustrate how increased attention to the racialized aspects of Asian Americans' psychological experiences would move the scholarship forward. More specifically, we argue that history and legacy of colonialism has important psychological implications for contemporary immigrant and American-born Asian American individuals. We focus our review on the psychological legacy of colonialism for Filipino Americans—or *colonial mentality* (CM)—as an illustrative case, with a brief primer of the Philippines' colonial history to set the context. CM<sup>1</sup> is a psychological construct that is thought to play a major role in the psychological experiences of modern day Filipino Americans (Root, 1997). Although scholars in other disciplines have discussed the role of CM in the Filipino American experience extensively, this construct has not been put to effective use in understanding the psychology of Filipino Americans. Therefore, this article may also serve as a reintroduction of CM to the field of ethnic minority psychology, with the hope that it will spark the empirical exploration of this construct in psychological research with Filipino Americans.

It should be noted that this call for a further conceptualization of CM in Filipino Americans are not intended to detract from

the study of colonial legacies in various Asian population groups. We focus our review on Filipino Americans because Filipinos were the only Asian population directly colonized by America and because there already exists an active community discourse surrounding colonialism and CM. We argue that the case of Filipino Americans represents a timely opportunity for scholars in ethnic minority psychology to not only join the scholarly and community discourse already in progress but to also contribute to a better understanding of the psychological impact of American colonization. We situate our analysis of the psychological consequences of colonialism among Filipino Americans within both postcolonial studies and the existing literature on the social psychology of oppression. Our review and recommendations in turn have a potential to not only contribute to Filipino American psychology but also to bridge ethnic minority psychology with scholarship in ethnic studies, Asian American studies, and postcolonial studies.

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## Frameworks

### *Psychological Impact of Oppression*

The psychological impact of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression—both contemporary experiences as well as historical oppression—is a central theme in minority psychology. In these works, internalized oppression, a condition in which the oppressed individuals and groups come to believe that they are inferior

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term *internalized oppression* is used in the literature in minority psychology to refer to the resulting perceptions of ethnic or cultural inferiority of historically oppressed groups, this psychological syndrome will be discussed as the *colonial mentality* with respect to Filipino Americans because this is the term that is already widely used within the Filipino American community movements and in Filipino American scholarship (e.g., Root, 1997). For the same reason we choose not to refer to it as *internalized colonialism*.

to those in power, is described as a salient consequence of systematic and sustained oppression. Different models to describe the processes by which societal oppression affects psychological outcomes for oppressed groups and individuals have been put forth. For example, Thomas (1971) theorized that African Americans' experiences of racism lead to identity confusion and to a White-dependent identity development or self-definition (*negromachy*). He further asserted that the internalization of racial oppression often leads to a devalued self-worth among the oppressed. In their description of the Black Identity Development Model (Nigrescence Models), Cross, Parham, and Helms (1991) also argued that internalized oppression may lead oppressed individuals to highly value the dominant culture and simultaneously devalue their own, perceive their racial identity as a stigma or a curse, and hold anti-Black sentiments or Black self-hatred. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) have also demonstrated empirically that the experience of racial oppression among African Americans is negatively related to their physical and mental health.

Internalized oppression has also been discussed with respect to sexual minority populations. Meyer (2003) reviewed the mental health status of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population and proposed the minority stress model for LGB individuals. This model distinguishes between distal stress processes (e.g., discrimination and violence) and proximal stress processes (e.g., expectations of rejection and concealment of one's sexual orientation), both of which affect LGB individuals' mental health outcomes. Meyer asserted that the most proximal of the stressors (on the continuum from the environment to the self) is internalized homophobia, in which a LGB individual directs negative societal attitudes toward himself or herself. Even in the absence of overt negative discrimination, this insidious form of stressor can harm a LGB individual's self-regard. In his review of literature on internalized homophobia, Williamson (2000) showed that internalized homophobia ap-

pears to be related to various negative health and psychological outcomes.

### *Colonialism*

In the larger scholarly literature surrounding the effects of racial oppression on minority groups around the world, the colonial model is invoked as a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of oppressive social contexts. The classical colonial model includes four phases of colonization (Fanon, 1965), with the first phase involving the forced entry of a foreign group into a geographic territory with the intention of exploiting the native people's natural resources. The second phase involves the establishment of a colonial society that is characterized by cultural imposition, cultural disintegration, and cultural recreation of the native's indigenous culture, all of which are intended to further create a contrast between the superior colonizer and the inferior colonized. In the third phase, once the colonial society has established a clear distinction between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonized are portrayed as wild, savage peoples that the colonizer has to police and tame, in essence putting oppression and domination into practice. All of these colonial phases eventually lead to the final phase that involves the establishment of a race-based societal system in which the political, social, and economic institutions in the colony are designed to benefit the colonizer and continually subjugate the colonized.

In postcolonial studies, which Sagar (1996; quoted in Bhatia & Ram, 2001) described as the study of "all the effects of European colonization in the majority of the cultures in the world" (p. 423), have examined the legacy of colonialism largely from humanistic disciplinary traditions. In considering the psychological consequences of colonialism, scholars have recognized that a condition of internalized oppression that is common to many colonized or formerly colonized individuals. Based on his

work with colonized people in Algeria, psychiatrist Fanon (1965) argued that colonialism's systematic denigration of the colonized person and the continuous denial of the colonized person's humanity often leads to self-doubt, identity confusion, or feelings of inferiority among the colonized. Memmi (1965), based on his observations of French colonized Tunisia and Algeria, echoed Fanon's arguments but also added that the colonized individual may eventually come to believe an identity that is consistent with the colonizers' stereotyped perceptions of the colonized. Freire (1970) further contended that because of the inferior connotations attached to their cultural and ethnic characteristics, the colonized individual might develop an intense desire to distance himself or herself from such mythical, stereotypical, and inferior identities and try to become as much like the colonizer as possible.

Within the field of ethnic minority psychology in the United States, the impact of slavery and other racial oppression for African Americans and of historical trauma such as displacement and genocide for American Indians is analogous to the effects of colonialism. Although there is no forceful entry or an overt control by a foreign group, *internal colonialism* mirrors classical colonialism with respect to social inequities based on racism, cultural imposition of the dominant group on the minority groups, and cultural disintegration and recreation of the oppressed groups. In his analysis of the psychological impact of racism on American Blacks, Harrell (1999) invokes the term *Manichean*, which the French psychiatrist and activist Fanon used to describe the world of the colonized. This term originates from the philosopher Manicheus in the 3rd century A.D. Philosophically, the Manichean world order consisted of irreconcilable opposites such as good versus evil, light versus darkness, and white versus black. Harrell argued that the Manichean analogy is suited to describing the psychological experiences that racial oppression generates, as the Manichean order permeates semantics (in which words connoting blackness and dark-

ness are ascribed negative characteristics), esthetics (especially with reference to African physical characteristics deemed undesirable), and history and culture (in which historical and cultural memory of the oppressed are reinterpreted, diminished, or destroyed). In turn, Harell argued that the Manichean social order creates conditions that encourage African people to behave in a self-destructive manner. Similarly, the colonial theory was proposed as a viable explanatory model for the high rates of crime and delinquency among African Americans (Tatum, 1994), in which one can view crime and delinquency as the behavioral responses to a society that perpetuates and maintains an environment in which there are limited opportunities for social mobility because of one's race.

In American Indian psychology, McBride (2002) argued that the legacy of historical oppression, such as the boarding school era and geographic displacement, leads to loss of identity, spirituality, and culture. She further asserted that the oppression of American Indians, both historically and contemporarily, contributes to cultural isolation, vocational stresses, and stress-related dysfunctional behaviors such as substance abuse and domestic violence. Duran and Duran (1995) and Brave Heart (1998) have also reported that perceptions of cultural or ethnic inferiority may be further promoted by continued oppression, lack of opportunities to critically understand such histories, forced assimilation, and familial socialization. These authors also suggest that such a history of oppression and its internalization may contribute to the high rates of suicide, alcoholism, and domestic violence among Native Americans.

However, little attention has been paid to the colonial and postcolonial psychological experiences of various Asian groups despite the fact that many Asian American immigrants come from Asian nations with a recent history of colonization. India was colonized by Great Britain, as was Southeast Asia (Indochina) by France and the Netherlands in the 20th century. Japan was a colo-

nizing presence in Korea, Taiwan, and other parts of Asia. The legacies of Japan's colonization have received media and scholarly attention, with the most dramatic example being the plight of former Korean "comfort women" who were conscripted as sexual slaves to the members of the Japanese military in the 1930s and 1940s (Min, 2003). Within the field of Asian American psychology, Nagata's (1990) work on the intergenerational consequences of systematic governmental oppression in the form of World War II internment of Japanese Americans is a rare exception to the dearth of literature on internalized oppression among the Asian American population.

An understanding of the psychological legacy of colonial oppression among Asian populations necessarily involves a brief discussion of postcolonial theories surrounding the complex interaction between the West and the East. The most influential of these analyses is the literary critic Edward Said's (1979) book *Orientalism*, in which he analyzed the ways that European colonialism created and maintained the image of the Orient (or non-Western "Others") as inferior, primitive, exotic, and uncivilized. Within the field of psychology, there has been a limited discussion of the ways in which psychology and related disciplines have continued to maintain Orientalist images of Asia and Asians (Bhatia, 2002). Indigenous psychology movements in China, the Philippines, and India arose in response to the perceived connections between colonialism and Western psychology (e.g., Enriquez, 1993; Sinha, 1997; Yang, 2000).

### *Summary of Frameworks*

There is a wealth of scholarship regarding the legacy of oppression of minority groups in various historical and contemporary societies around the world, although the discussion of colonial legacy has not been as extensive within ethnic minority psychology. Importantly, various forms of internalized oppression—colonial or otherwise—are de-

scribed as having a long time course in their potential to harm. For example, in their description of internalized oppression among Native Americans, Duran and Duran (1995) argued that these debasing attitudes toward one's own group may be passed on intergenerationally through familial socialization and continued oppression by the dominant group (e.g., lack of opportunities to discover accurate history, forced assimilation, lack of acknowledgment by the dominant group, and unresolved confusions or struggles). A similar intergenerational legacy of historical oppression and cultural genocide has also been observed among Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children (e.g., Krell, 1990; Moskowitz & Krell, 1990; Solomon, Kotter, & Mikulincer, 1988), and among Japanese American World War II interns and their children (e.g., Nagata, 1990).

Given the potential of historical oppressions to harm the psychological well-being of minority individuals across multiple generations, psychological researchers and practitioners working with a minority group must increase their knowledge surrounding the group's colonial past and the particular form in which colonization continues to affect its members today. We now turn to a discussion of Filipino Americans as a particular example of the psychological legacy of colonialism.

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## **Filipino Americans and CM**

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### *Filipino American Population*

Although other Asian ethnic groups have experienced colonization in the 20th century, the Filipino American colonial experience is unique because Filipino Americans are the only Asian American ethnic group to have experienced direct U.S. colonization. The Philippines was a U.S. commonwealth until 1946 and Filipinos held status as U.S. nationals until 1938. Furthermore, American military bases were maintained in the



Philippines until 1992. Although Filipinos were one of the earliest Asian immigrants to the United States, with documentation of Spanish-speaking Filipinos settling in the bayous of the Louisiana Territory as early as the mid-1700s (Takaki, 1989), the majority of Filipino Americans are post-1965 immigrants. The Filipino immigration rate into the United States (40,000 per year) is second only to that of Mexicans, attesting to this group's rapid population growth (Agbayani-Siewart, 1994). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Filipinos today are the second largest Asian group in the United States (2.4 million total; Barnes & Bennett, 2002) and the largest Asian subgroup in the largest state of California (2.9% of the state's total population; Lott, 1997).

Although most Asian American ethnic groups in the United States today are largely immigrants (with the exception of Japanese Americans), most Asians probably had extensive exposure to Western influences before immigration. However, for many immigrants from Asia, their acculturating experiences in the United States may have been their first encounter with racism and discrimination based on race. In contrast, we contend that because of the legacy of Spanish and American colonization for four centuries, Filipino Americans as individuals and as communities have been exposed to more pervasive and sustained denigration of Filipino culture in postcolonial Philippines in what Said (1983) described as "cultural imperialism." In his Filipino American identity development model, Nadal (2004) cited two salient cultural characteristics that distinguish Filipino Americans from other Asian American groups: (a) Catholicism is the predominant religion practiced by Filipino Americans, and (b) Filipino Americans have high English proficiency and familiarity with the American culture. These characteristics that mark Filipino Americans as somewhat distinct from other Asian American groups are directly related to the history of Spanish and American colonization of the Philippines, as Catholicism and the English language are not indigenous to the Philippines.

We argue that Filipino Americans' status as recently colonized subjects of the United States is a critical factor to consider in advancing our understanding of Filipino American mental health.

However, despite their large representation and their unique history in relation to the United States, Filipino Americans continue to be regarded as the "forgotten Asian Americans" (Cordova, 1983) or the "invisible minorities" (Cimmarusti, 1996). The invisibility of Filipino Americans is mirrored within psychology, as research focused on the Filipino American population is sparse relative to available research on other Asian American populations. For example, a search in the PsycINFO database using the four largest Asian American ethnic groups as keywords revealed 675 published works for Chinese Americans, 366 for Japanese Americans, 282 for Korean Americans, and only 90 for Filipino Americans (retrieved on June 5, 2004).

Recent health statistics show that Filipino American adolescents have one of the highest rates of suicide ideations and attempts in the country (President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, 2001) and Filipino Americans have depression rates that are significantly higher than the rates of the U.S. general population (Tompar-Tiu & Sustento-Seneriches, 1995). Furthermore, alarming statistics on other health issues such as rates of HIV/AIDS, unintended pregnancy, eating disorders, sexually transmitted diseases, and drug use are also reported for Filipino American communities across the United States (as cited in Nadal, 2000). Indeed, increased research and clinical attention on the Filipino American population are seriously needed.

#### *Primer on the Philippines' Colonial History*

COLONIALISM UNDER SPAIN. The Spanish involvement in the Philippines began in 1521 when the explorer Magellan claimed the islands for Spain, although it was not

until 1571 when Spanish King Phillip II's army finally subdued the Philippine natives' resistance (Agoncillo, 1974). Colonized Filipinos are believed to have experienced exploitation, brutality, cheating, cruelty, injustice, and tyranny. As part of the "civilization" process, the native Filipinos' indigenous culture and beliefs were replaced by Spanish culture and the Catholic religion.

Rimonte (1997) argued that Filipinos under Spanish rule developed a sense of "colonial debt," characterized by a deferential attitude toward Western culture and Westerners and the tendency to accept maltreatments by the Spanish rulers as the natural cost for civilization. According to Rimonte, such a perception of indebtedness to the colonizers may still be widely held among modern-day Filipinos and Filipino Americans as endorsed by the "Golden Legend." The Golden Legend is a popular historical belief that pre-Hispanic Filipinos were uncivilized savages who were nobly civilized by the Spanish through the gifts of Spanish culture and Catholicism. Rimonte further asserted that the Catholic Church was instrumental in endorsing such a Golden Legend during the colonial rule by promoting the idea that a person who does not change, "civilize," or "Hispanicize" himself or herself has "strayed from the prescribed Catholic path of righteousness" (p. 59).

**COLONIALISM UNDER THE UNITED STATES.** After more than 300 years of subjugation, a series of major Filipino uprisings seriously disrupted Spain's control over the Philippines toward the end of the 19th century (Agoncillo, 1974; Espiritu, 2003; Pido, 1997). As a result, Spain sold the Philippines to the United States for \$20 million during the Treaty of Paris in 1898, and this began yet another long period of colonization for the Filipinos. However, despite unimproved agricultural reformations that continued to suppress the socioeconomic status of most Filipinos, one positive change that U.S. colonization brought was free education. The

Americans established a nationwide public school system in which most of the educators were "Thomasites"—American teachers who came in the country through the St. Thomas transport (Espiritu, 2003). The St. Thomas transport was a U.S. Army vessel that sailed from California to the Philippines in 1901 carrying more than 500 American volunteer teachers and officials. A year later, the Thomasites' numbers grew to more than 1,000 as the United States became more convinced that "education, instead of outright military suppression, was the more effective means to pacify the Filipinos" (Espiritu, 2003, p. 26).

One major drawback of the establishment of the Americanized public school system was that, in addition to teaching the Filipino students the English language and fundamental academics, the Thomasites were said to have been "inculcating Filipinos with American values" (Pido, 1997, p. 24) as well as shaping Filipino worldview with American political ideas in the establishment of the U.S. tutelary regime (Go, 2003). Pido argued that the Thomasites informed Filipinos that America is the land of endless opportunities and wealth—"the land of milk and honey" (p. 24). Because many Filipinos were poor and because socioeconomic mobility in the Philippines was extremely limited at the time, the American educators' information about the United States may have distorted the Filipinos' view of life in America (Pido, 1997). As a probable result, Filipinos may have developed a grandiose picture of anything American and mediocre attributions toward anything Filipino (e.g., Karnow, 1989; Tompar-Tiu & Sustento-Seneriches, 1995), similar to how Filipinos were thought to have developed the belief that the Spanish and their ways of life were naturally superior. A number of scholars of postcolonial Philippines (e.g., Espiritu, 2003; Go, 2003; Karnow, 1989; Root, 1997) have asserted that this perception of American superiority may be passed on from one generation to the next through socialization, continuous endorsement of the American version of the Golden Legend (i.e.,

perceiving Americans as freedom fighters, the masters of democracy, and enlightening heroes), and the persistent Americanization of the Philippines.

It has been argued that the prolonged and significant U.S. political and military involvement in the Philippines may have continued to reinforce such a belief of American superiority as well (Espiritu, 2003; Karnow, 1989). Current events in the Philippines also reflect America's continued influence on the country. For example, the Philippine president ordered the use of English as the primary language for instruction (Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas, 2003), and U.S. soldiers continue to be active in the Philippines to "train" Philippine troops in suppressing terrorism. Indeed, as Karnow (1989) suggests, "...in no place is the imperial legacy more alive than in Manila, where America's presence is almost as dynamic now as it was during the days of U.S. rule" (p.16). For many contemporary Filipino American immigrants and children of immigrants, it is likely that the psychological legacy of colonialism, or CM, continues to exist through intergenerational socialization and through continued Americanization of the Philippines that further cement the notion of American superiority over the Philippine nation and culture (Espiritu, 2003). In summary, Filipinos and Filipino Americans have experienced both classical colonialism and internal colonialism here in the United States as well as in the Philippines (Lott, 1976).

#### *CM Discourse in the Filipino American Community*

Cordova (1973), a Filipino American historian, was one of the earliest, if not the first, to discuss the presence of CM among Filipino Americans. Cordova asserted that the history of colonization and its accompanying cultural replacements have contributed to the ever-present Filipino ethnic and cultural identity crisis—confusion as to what constitutes an authentic Filipino culture and

identity. Such an identity crisis is believed to lead toward the conclusion that there is no authentic Filipino culture and identity that one can be proud of, and thus, may lead to the perception of inferiority toward anything Filipino. Lott (1976) also discussed the existence of such a condition among contemporary Filipino Americans, which she attributed to the continued subjugation or oppression of this group within the United States (internal colonialism). Furthermore, Lott also argued that immigrant Filipinos may have brought with them such a mentality from the Philippines. Revilla (1997) analyzed Filipino American student essays and Filipino American community newsletters and concluded that CM is a prevalent phenomenon within this ethnic group. Editorials in Filipino American community publications cite CM as contributing to the lack of societal presence and social unity of many Filipino American communities and lack of ethnic pride, historical knowledge, and cultural appreciation of many Filipino American individuals (e.g., Gaston, 2003).

#### *Dimensions of CM*

Although the above discussion suggests that CM is a community-supported narrative that is widely discussed by scholars, ethnic media, and community organizers, it can also be conceptualized as an individual differences variable on which Filipino Americans probably vary in the levels of their endorsement. CM is also conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that may be manifested in a variety of ways by Filipino Americans. Based on existing accounts, there appear to be at least four different ways in which CM is thought to be manifested in Filipino American individuals: (a) denigration of the Filipino self, (b) denigration of Filipino culture and body, (c) discrimination against less Americanized Filipino Americans, and (d) tolerance and acceptance of historical and contemporary oppression of Filipinos and Filipino Americans. We illustrate each type of manifestation with narrative excerpts from previously published works.



**DENIGRATION OF THE FILIPINO SELF.** According to the theories of Memmi (1965), Fanon (1965), and Freire (1970), a salient effect of colonization is the internalization of the inferior perception that is imposed on an individual by the colonizer. Such internalization may lead to feelings of inferiority about oneself and one's ethnic or cultural group and feelings of shame, embarrassment, or resentment about being a person of one's ethnicity or culture. The following narrative provides an example of how a Filipina American describes her negative self-concept (as quoted by Revilla, 1997):

Throughout my days at elementary school I had an acute fear that someone would discover that I was Filipino. It was open season on Filipinos. There were the "buk-buk" [sic] jokes, other derisive nicknames created by students, and a large number of stereotypes expounded and attributed to Filipinos. They were labeled as being stupid, backward, and capable of only the most menial jobs available . . . . In my own experiences, I knew that these generalizations were false, but still I feared association with them. These images and stereotypes persisted in the consciousness of the student body for so long that I began to look at being Filipino as a curse. It embarrassed me that I should be a part of a race so disregarded and dehumanized by society. (p. 101)

**DENIGRATION OF THE FILIPINO CULTURE AND BODY.** This dimension involves the perception that anything Filipino is inferior to anything White, European, or American. These judgments apply to, but are not limited to, culture or lifestyles, physical characteristics, socioeconomic opportunities, language, material products, and leadership or government. Such a global negative regard of Filipino culture is thought to extend from preferences for American-made products to judgment of White physical features as being more attractive and desirable (expressed by a young Filipina American, as quoted by Bergano & Bergano-Kinney, 1997):

[Among Filipinos,] . . . white skin is considered better. I cannot tell you how many prod-

ucts are advertised and sold (in the Philippines) to "whiten" our skin. Marrying a white man . . . is a step up . . . socially and economically. Mixed children by white men . . . are thought of as more valuable, precious, and better prepared for . . . society. This mentality is not new. Many of the elders . . . believe "White is right." All white boyfriends, husbands, and mixed children are shown off . . . as trophies. (p. 202).

Another narrative by a young Filipino illustrates the psychological effects of the pervasive American influence in the Philippines (as quoted by Karnow, 1989):

My ambition as a kid was to be like an American. We'd been taught in school that the Americans were our saviors, that they brought us democracy. When I saw cowboy-and-Indian movies, I always rooted for the cowboys. I preferred American-style clothes. Americans were rich, handsome and superior. Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary looked like Americans, with their white skins and long noses. (p. 17)

**DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LESS-AMERICANIZED FILIPINOS.**<sup>2</sup> Another manifestation of CM is the discriminating attitudes some Filipino Americans hold against members of Filipino American communities they perceive to display negative Filipino (and non-American) characteristics (Root, 1997). Allport (1979) asserted that discriminatory attitudes toward one's own coethnic group

<sup>2</sup> Although highly Americanized Filipinos may also be discriminated against or ridiculed by other Filipino Americans by labeling of the highly Americanized ones as "White-washed," "coconuts" (brown on the outside, but White on the inside), or "sell-outs," it is unlikely that such attitudes and behaviors are due to CM. It is more likely that Filipinos who hold such attitudes are reacting differently to colonization or oppression. That is, instead of internalizing and accepting their alleged inferiority as individuals with CM are argued to have reacted, individuals who ridicule the sell-outs are believed to be doing so because of their extreme pride for being Filipino. Thus, this type of within-group discrimination is not considered as a manifestation of CM, which generally means the perception of inferiority toward one's ethnicity or culture.

may in large part be due to the minority individuals' strong desire to conform to the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the dominant group, which may include the dominant group's discriminatory attitudes and practices. Freire (1970) also theorized that owing to the feelings of inferiority about themselves or their heritage, oppressed persons may feel uncomfortable with, and thus choose not to associate with, others who remind them of such a perceived inferiority. Filipino American community newsletters, student essays, and a few interviews indicate that some Filipino Americans prefer not to associate with Filipinos whom they perceive as less Americanized or with those who are perceived to be too much of a Filipino (e.g., Revilla, 1997; Strobel, 1997). Some Filipino Americans may ridicule less-Americanized Filipino Americans by tagging them with labels such as "FOB" (fresh-off-the-boat), "stupid," and "backward" (Revilla, 1997). Such a discriminatory attitude may reflect the belief that the only ways for Filipino Americans improve themselves is to Americanize (Rodriguez, 1997) and to associate only with American or Americanized people. A 26-year old Filipina American stated (as quoted by Strobel, 1997):

My idea. . . of Filipino culture and identity is split into two forms: the FOB. . . and the Filipino American. I did not associate with "FOBs." They were backward, had accents, and just acted weird. . . . Then there was me, the non-"FOB," who spoke perfect English, born and raised here, had only white friends. . . . I was "white" in every way except for the color of my skin, my nose, and eyes. . . . I hate to admit but I have been an accomplice to the cruel acts that have been perpetrated against Filipinos. (p.67)

Another example of discrimination against less Americanized Filipino Americans is the perception that English proficiency reflects higher status and intelligence. Those who speak English with a Filipino accent are reported to be given the subjugating labels mentioned above and be discriminated against by highly Americanized Filipinos "because the former's lan-

guage is often associated with inferiority, lack of intelligence, and 'otherness.' This arrogant perception is based on the assumption that 'standard' English is a universal norm and . . . marker of intelligence" (Strobel, 1997, p.74).

**TOLERANCE OF OPPRESSION.** When an individual has adopted the belief that the colonizer is superior to his or her own heritage, and when an individual has already begun emulating the colonizers because of their alleged superiority, the colonized individuals might begin to view the colonizers in a positive light. More specifically, the colonized individuals may begin to view the colonizers as well-intentioned, civilizing, freedom-giving, unselfish, liberating, noble, or sanctified "heroes." Such a belief might then lead to the normalization of the maltreatments such as discrimination from the dominant group, because such maltreatments might be perceived as the natural cost for progress or civilization, the price the colonized individuals have to pay to become as much like the dominant group as possible (Memmi, 1965). Rimonte (1997) referred to this aspect of CM as the "colonial debt." For example, when writing about his experiences and observations of other Filipino Americans, Dario Villa (1995) illustrates how colonial debt (as insisted by the Golden Legend) may be displayed by Filipino Americans:

I know many Filipinos (in America who) would deny that they have been discriminated against. Too many are so thankful to be (in America) that they shut their eyes to avoid seeing the injustices, political and economic injustices. Then there are those who simply do not care. This type of attitude stifles our community. (p. 179)

Connie Tirona (1995), narrating one of her experiences with discrimination at a hospital in San Diego, CA, in which she stood up for herself, provides more support for the existence of colonial debt:

So after that incident, they started sensitivity courses there at the hospital. So you have to

complain. If you sit back and do not say anything, they tend to walk all over you. And I think for the most part, Filipinos have a colonial mentality. They tend to not do anything. (p. 79)

### *Quantifying CM*

The only quantitative study of CM to date (Bergano & Bergano-Kinney, 1997) involved 150 Filipino American high school and college students (100 from the East coast and 50 from the West coast). Filipino American students were asked to rate their level of agreement with three statements: (a) "I am expected to marry a Filipino/a"; (b) "I am expected to experience racism and discrimination"; and (c) "I am expected to become a community leader." Bergano and Bergano-Kinney found that although the majority of surveyed students reported that they were expected to marry a Filipino or a Filipina, only 20% of Filipina students from the East coast reported that they were expected to marry a Filipino. The researchers also found that 70% of West coast and 57% of East coast Filipino/a students agreed with the item on experiences with racism. Finally, only 32% of East coast and 35% of West coast Filipinas but 50% and 52% of East and West coast Filipinos reported that they were expected to become community leaders. Next, the researchers randomly selected 20 individuals from their sample to explore possible reasons for such results. Notably, the participants invoked CM as an explanation for these findings, suggesting that CM was a widely shared discourse among Filipino American students. For example, when asked to explain why such a low percentage of Filipinas in the East Coast are expected to marry Filipinos, a young Filipina American stated (as quoted by Bergano & Bergano-Kinney, 1997):

Because of the American colonization process, Filipinas are being taught that "marrying up" means "marrying white." The Filipina's standard for beauty has changed so that they see white men as desirable and "bearers

of the ideal beauty". . .not the Filipino man. The "white-oriented" mass media has blinded and brainwashed today's Filipina at the expense of the Filipino male. (p. 202)

When asked to explain why very few Filipinos or Filipinas are expected to become community leaders, a Filipino American student from the West Coast stated (as quoted by Bergano & Bergano-Kinney, 1997):

Because of colonial mentality, a Filipino (American) community leader lacks credibility unless he is a rich, white, mestizo male and has no accent. The more he is perceived to be assimilated into white America, the more powerful he would be as a leader. (p. 206)

Although Bergano and Bergano-Kinney's (1997) study provides some insight about the attitudes and expectations held by Filipino American students, their research is not without serious limitations. In their study, CM was assessed with only three items with questionable face validity. For example, others' expectations of who a Filipino/a should marry may reflect CM of the "others" but not necessarily CM held by the respondents. Similarly, others might expect a person to experience discrimination or to not become a community leader, but the respondent may not necessarily feel this way. Thus, the manner in which the questions were asked does not necessarily reflect CM by the survey responders themselves, but the responders' perceptions of CM by the "others," whoever "others" may be. In addition, career choice had not been discussed previously as a central aspect of CM by scholars or by ethnic media, and the relationship between expectations to become a community leader and CM is unclear. Given that Bergano and Bergano-Kinney did not perform a validation procedure for their three-item assessment of CM in the manner widely practiced in psychological assessment research, their findings regarding the prevalence of CM is inconclusive.

### **Recommendations for the Psychological Study of CM**

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Scholars and community members alike have long speculated about the potential psychological implications of CM among Filipino Americans. For the most part, the presumed effects of CM are negative. For example, Rimonte (1997) stated that the “persistent self-hate of which many acts of anti-Filipinism are the chiefest [sic] manifestations. . . produces an acute, destabilizing, (and) discomfiting self-awareness. . . .” (pp. 41–42). Strobel (1997) identified “feelings of anger, betrayal, confusion, doubt, and anxiety” as psychological effects of CM that her Filipino American “decolonization” efforts target (p. 66). Additionally, Tompar-Tiu and Sustento-Seneriches (1995) cited CM as a possible contributing factor in the alarming depression rates they documented for this community.

However, there has been no research to date demonstrating that the CM held by Filipino Americans is related to any mental health outcomes. It is possible that CM and CM-related features may in fact be associated with positive outcomes. For example, Filipino Americans’ high levels of English proficiency and familiarity with the American culture could serve as factors that facilitate acculturation and adaptation processes for immigrants. The notion of colonial debt may even work as an adaptive strategy that protects Filipino Americans from the potentially adverse effects of oppression on psychological well-being. Because the stress appraisals of such experiences of oppression (e.g., racism) are found to mediate the relationship between oppressive experiences and psychological well-being (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1996), it is possible that Filipino Americans who tend to minimize or normalize such experiences of oppression (colonial debt) experience less stress. Indeed, due to the lack of empirical studies and the consequent lack of empirical evidence, it is unclear how CM might be debilitating or enhancing the lives of Filipino Americans. Be-

low, we offer some recommendations to extend our knowledge of CM and its implications.

#### *Recommendation 1*

To proceed with psychological research on CM, we need a tool to assess it. A self-report measure of CM would allow an examination of the extent to which CM is held by Filipino Americans today. Pido (1997) has asserted that “. . . this syndrome of denying one’s racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage can be found across the U.S.” (p. 35). Consistent with Pido’s position, Bergano and Bergano-Kinney’s (1997) empirical study suggested that, at the least, approximately 50% of Filipino American students sampled reported experiences that may be consistent with CM. However, the three-item measure of CM in Bergano and Bergano-Kinney’s study was not evaluated for its reliability and validity. A good measure of CM would enable tests of various hypotheses concerning the nature of CM, such as its intergenerational transmission, its maintenance through continued societal oppression, and its negative impact on mental health of Filipino Americans. Such empirical efforts may also lead to the identification of factors that may either increase or decrease the likelihood of development of CM, as well as factors that might decrease levels of CM among Filipino Americans.

#### *Recommendation 2*

Psychologists and other mental health service providers working with Filipino Americans should become familiar with this population group’s colonial past and the notion of CM. Furthermore, it is important to note that CM should be viewed as an individual differences variable, so as to avoid assuming that every Filipino American individual holds CM and experiences poor self-regard. For example, in Espiritu’s (1995) collection of first-person narratives from 13 Filipino Americans differing in backgrounds, view-

points, and experiences, it is suggested that CM may be felt and manifested by some but not by others. Bergano and Bergano-Kinney's (1997) study also indicated that preference for marrying a White person may be more common among East coast Filipino Americans than those on the West coast, whereas expecting discrimination may be more common among those on the West coast than those on the East coast, all suggesting possible regional variations in CM manifestations. Such possible regional variations in CM manifestations may be due to times of immigration and socioeconomic status, as Filipinos in the West Coast are mostly descendants of pre-civil rights immigrant farmers, whereas East Coast Filipinos are mostly post-civil rights highly educated professionals. Also, the finding that becoming a community leader is less expected for Filipinas than Filipinos on both coasts suggest possible gender differences in CM manifestations. Finally, Espiritu posits that generational levels and age at immigration may also be influential in terms of CM. She argued that U.S.-born Filipinos may experience more CM manifestations (e.g., cultural shame and embarrassment and within-group discrimination) because, unlike immigrant Filipinos who hold knowledge about an alternative life in the Philippines and are likely to have more positive experiences about the Filipino culture, U.S.-born Filipinos may lack the cultural ties, knowledge, and positive cultural experiences that may serve as protective factors from their experiences of discrimination from the dominant group.

### *Recommendation 3*

Researchers and practitioners should collaborate in the development of, and subsequent evaluations of, intervention programs (e.g., Filipino American classes, workshops, and dialogues) that presumably foster decolonization (Strobel, 1997, 2001) among this group. For example, Strobel has proposed and implemented a three-step pro-

cess of decolonization among West coast Filipino Americans, and the results of such an in-depth dialogue suggest that CM decreases as one is exposed to different aspects of the Filipino culture and as one is given the opportunity to develop a deeper and more critical understanding of Filipino culture and history of colonization. The implementation of effective decolonization interventions may lead to increased societal presence, social organization, social unity, and group vitality of the Filipino American community and alleviate the lack of ethnic pride, historical knowledge, and cultural appreciation of many Filipino American individuals.

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### *Conclusion*

We have suggested that increasing efforts in the field of psychology to consider cultural factors in understanding the psychological experiences of individuals and groups should be extended to Filipino Americans. Furthermore, it is argued that to accurately understand the role of cultural factors on the psychological experiences of Filipino Americans, psychologists need to view Filipino American culture through the context of Spanish and American colonization. The influence of the colonial past is thought to continue on modern-day Filipinos and Filipino American culture. In particular, scholars from various disciplines have asserted that CM continues to exist among modern-day Filipino Americans and that it continues to influence the psychological experiences of these individuals (e.g., Root, 1997; Tompar-Tiu & Sustento-Seneriches, 1995). There are a host of potential psychological implications of CM among Filipino Americans that deserve research and clinical attention. Unfortunately, the Filipino American population has received relatively little scholarly attention within psychology. Systematic research and application of the CM construct may infuse vitality and direction to the psychological study of Filipino Americans. To our knowledge, the only attempt



thus far to assess CM among Filipino Americans is the study by Bergano and Bergano-Kinney (1997), yet their study was not intended as a development of a CM measurement. To legitimize CM as a viable and vital psychological construct in Filipino American psychology, a measure to assess CM should be developed in a rigorous and scientific manner.

As a population-based scholarship, ethnic minority psychology must take into account multiple levels of contextual variables that impact the psychological experiences of minority individuals. To date, researchers in the field have yet to actively engage in the discussion of how to incorporate historical context into their research programs. We argue that the consideration of and empirical efforts to develop tools to assess a construct such as CM for Filipino Americans represents a promising direction for ethnic minority psychology.

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