

Colonization and Filipino-American Paradox

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Abstract

The Filipino-American experience is inherently different from that of other Asian-American groups. Filipino-Americans feel as if they do not particularly fit into one group or the other, and there is limited research done to assess why that is (Ocampo 2013). Since the Philippines had gone through long periods of Western colonization, the negative impacts from that time period are visible today. This paper aims to explore the effects colonization had on the levels of discrimination Filipino-Americans experience in comparison to other Asian-American groups. We hypothesize that negative impacts derived from colonization causes Filipino-Americans to have higher amounts of discrimination. Our theoretical framework states that internalized feelings of inferiority, the inability to relate to other Asian-Americans, and negative stereotypes are connected to colonization. Using the 2016 National Asian American (NAAS) Post Election Survey, we compared Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Korean-Americans, to Filipino-American respondents. We analyzed the data by creating a sum discrimination scale and a simple linear regression model, in which we expect to see a positive relationship between being Filipino and levels of discrimination.

Introduction:

The “Model Minority ” refers to the idea that Asian-Americans “comprise the racial minority group that has ‘made it’ in America through hard work and education, and therefore serve as a model for other racial minorities to follow” (Wing 2007). But when we think about the groups associated with the model minority, are there certain groups that do not often fit this image of success? To Filipino-Americans, they often feel like their identity does not fall into a positive light like how other Asian-American groups do (Cunanan V.L., Guerrero, A.P. S. Minamoto, L. Y. 2006). Hence, it is important for us to draw upon the distinct history of the Philippines in the study of this phenomenon as the archipelago was colonized by the West for over 400 years before gaining its independence. The lasting impact this had on Filipinos is still felt today as Filipinos often talk about colonization when explaining their cultural identity (Ocampo 2013).

Thus, this paper will explore the impact colonization had on the levels of discrimination that Filipino-Americans experience in comparison to other Asian-American groups. Colonization creates a paradox of assimilation for Filipino-Americans— they are one of the largest immigrant groups in the U.S and have a longstanding history with the U.S in terms of cultural assimilation, however, literature alludes to various discriminatory experiences even if they have “Americanized” themselves to fit into society (Ferrera 2017).

We argue that Filipino-Americans experience higher levels of discrimination in comparison to other Asian-American groups because of negative impacts derived from the Philippine’s history with colonization. In order to investigate this argument, we analyzed data collected from the 2016 National Asian American Survey (NAAS) Post-Election Survey. We selected questions regarding the respondent’s experience with discrimination in the U.S and

compiled answers from Filipino-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Korean-Americans as a way to make comparisons. Other variables such as education, gender, income, and age were controlled because we were interested in seeing whether these factors increased the risk for discrimination as well. After analyzing the data, we found a positive relationship between identifying as Filipino and discrimination. There was also a negative relationship between income along with level of education and discrimination. The significance in the data that was discovered indicated that the negative impact of colonial legacies have influenced the treatment of Filipino-Americans.

Although there has been studies conducted on Filipino-Americans and their experiences in the U.S, there has not been extensive research done on the relationship between colonization and discrimination in the context of this particular group. Many scholars mention colonization as an important variable to consider when navigating Filipino identity, yet the argument that the Philippines' unique colonial experience contributes to unfair treatment is limited. Therefore, this study aims to expand on pre-existing literature that considers colonization as an important factor in the Filipino-American experience and to further define the relationship between being Filipino in the U.S and negative treatment.

Literature Review:

Colonialism and Western Assimilation

Literature highlights the negative impacts colonization has had on the Philippines and its impact on Filipinos today. When the Spanish controlled the archipelago, they incorporated many of their values, institutional structures, and teachings. From this, emerged skin color hierarchies that pit Filipinos at the bottom of the social ladder purely due to the way they looked. Hunter (2012) defines colorism as a social process that grants a higher status to lighter skinned people.

Thus, these race-based hierarchies tied to skin color became a way of life; it positioned Whites at the top, racially mixed Mestizos in the middle, and dark-skinned indigenous Filipinos at the bottom (Magdaraog 2014). Essentially, fairer people were seen as wealthier and higher in terms of social status, whereas darker skinned people were seen as unattractive and presumed to work in manual labor (Magdaraog 2014). This plays out in modern day society where Filipinos often work in labor and custodial jobs; often society looks down on these jobs in general and when race/ethnicity is put into play, the relationship between Filipino-Americans and poverty remains. It is important to keep in mind that this contributes to negative stereotypes and discrimination against this particular group.

In a similar sense, Ocampo (2013) explained the domino effect colonization had on Filipino migrant workers that came to the U.S for better work and pay. The first part being that Colonial regimes exploit the natural resources and labor of a country, which causes large economic underdevelopment and forces its people to want to migrate to another area. Next, this colonial relationship becomes a driving force behind policies that provide socio-economic “benefits” to individuals who choose to migrate, even in the post-colonial period (Choy 2003). Third, the colonizer uses their strong influence on the local culture and government to their benefit; as they have already implemented their ideals within this colonized society, it makes it much easier to ‘prepare’ them to migrate and become adaptable to their country’s society. Filipinos that dispersed to the U.S for work in the height of the diaspora, were considered as “cheap and subservient labor, easily acquired from an American colony and imagined to be an already rural worker” (De Leon 2019). Already, this sets the tone for how the west viewed Filipinos— cheap and easy laborers. The association between Filipinos, manual labor, and low wages are harmful because it can subject them to economic discrimination. It goes

back to the notion that Filipinos are at the bottom of the social ladder because they were deemed dirty and uneducated (Magdaraog 2014). Not only does the west impose these types of injustices on Filipinos, but Asian hierarchies also negatively impact their quality of life.

Asian Hierarchies

The racial hierarchy and superiority within Asian countries also account for higher discrimination rates among Filipinos. Many Filipinos tend to go for a more “Korean” or “Chinese” look because it helps them escape discrimination from other Asians (Magdaraog 2014). East-Asian countries hold a perceived superiority above Southeast Asian countries due to their skin tone, which often gives them higher social mobility and overall self-image (Magdaraog 2014). Research suggests that darker skinned Southeast Asians experience unequal treatment and discrimination in countries like Japan or Korea due to this perpetuated hierarchy. For example, in South Korea, Silva (2004) explained a tri-racial system where “‘Whites’ are at the top; ‘Honorary Whites’, minorities who ‘approximate or even surpass Whites in terms of many measures’ (e.g., light skinned Latinos and Americans of Asian descent) are in the middle; and the non-White group, the ‘Collective Blacks’ (e.g., Blacks, dark skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, etc.) are at the bottom” (Kim 2020). In South Korea, Migrant workers experience discrimination because they are working class, dark skinned, and non-native Korean speaking “foreigners,” from ‘developing countries’ (Kim 2020). Filipinos, a part of this Southeast Asian migrant group, are often looked down upon and seen as inferior. The issue of Asian ethnic and skin hierarchies affects Filipinos in this way as well, further perpetuating the idea that they are not as skilled or capable as them. It is such a large issue that in a study conducted by Mendoza (2014) in the Philippines, it was discovered that “those of lower socioeconomic status were more likely to use skin whiteners to try to improve their current situation”. This study even found that

the motivation behind skin whitening is the hope to improve their “economic opportunities, class affiliation, and social networking” (Mendoza 2014). In other words, Filipinos have to go through extreme lengths in order to escape discrimination and catch up to their East-Asian counterparts. The idea that Filipinos are not grouped into what the U.S considers as the “model minority” can also be seen in other Southeast-Asian groups who also tend to be excluded from this concept (Ngo and Lee 2006)

Navigating Identity

Model minorities are seen as having superior academic ability, hardworking and a success story (Ngo and Lee 2006). But Filipinos do not seem to fit in this mold as they are perceived differently in comparison to other Asians. In Hawai’i, they are stereotyped as “undisciplined”, “prone to get pregnant”, “use drugs”, “stay out later”, and “have less parental influence” (Cunanan V.L., Guerrero, A.P. S. Minamoto, L. Y. 2006). It is interesting how this is a perspective from a place where there is a high Asian population, and that Filipino discrimination and stereotyping runs deep. This can be alluded to the plantation days where Filipinos were racially discriminated against and were treated unfairly (De Leon 2019). They were seen as peasants who should not see what the “city” was like and that they should be kept within the confines of the plantation (DeLeon 2019). The complex socio economic hierarchies within the plantations contribute to the wealth and treatment disparities of Filipinos in comparison to other Asians.

Theory and Hypothesis:

We theorize that internalized inferiority, difficulties relating to other Asian-Americans, and negative stereotypes are legacies of colonization that impact the Filipino-American experience. This theory, however, does not account for the other Asian groups that were

colonized by the West in the past. If we are hypothesizing that Filipinos are more at risk for instances of discrimination, it does not consider other colonized Asian groups who may report high levels of discrimination as well. Their history of colonization may not be as long at the Philippines, but there is a possibility that their discrimination score could be high too.

Nevertheless, since the Philippines has had experiences both with the U.S and Spain for hundreds of years and had been intentionally prepared for life in the states, it is important that we emphasize the importance of their history in relation to modern day discrimination. Through this theory of colonial legacies, we hypothesize that Filipino-Americans experience the highest level of discrimination amongst other Asian-American groups because of their unique experience with colonization.

Research Design:

The 2016 National Asian American Survey (NAAS) Post Election Survey has nationally representative data from telephone interviews of U.S. residents over the age of 18 who identified themselves as Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Multiracial. The survey included a considerable sample size from Asian Americans in 9 Asian groups (Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Hmong, and Cambodian), as well as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. It was supported by a major grant from the National Science Foundation, with support for supplemental data collections from the Ford Foundation, the California Immigration Research Initiative, and the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation. The survey was conducted from November 17, 2016 to March 2, 2017 and the respondents were drawn from a random selection of respondents from a national listed sample stratified by race and national origin. As these interviews were conducted over the phone, survey respondents were not compensated. In this survey, participants were

asked about voting and election related contact, presidential vote and party identification, problems facing the community, experiences with discrimination, opinions on policy issues, racial identification, and race relations. We selected the questions Q5.1B - Q5.1E and Q5.1G - Q5.1H, which asked the survey participants, on a monthly average, what their experience of discrimination was like. The survey questions are as follows:

Q5_1_B: You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores

Q5_1_C: People act as if you don't speak English

Q5_1_D: People act as if they are afraid of you

Q5_1_E: People act as if they think you are dishonest

Q5_1_G: You are called names or insulted

Q5_1_H: You are threatened or harassed

Respondents were able to answer “yes”, “no”, “I don’t know”, and “refuse to answer”. From there, we compared answers from Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans, and Chinese-Americans to that of Filipino-Americans because those 3 groups are strongly associated with the “model minority”. In total, the survey collected responses from 2,029 participants, although not all of them responded to the question. Breaking down the total responses, there was data from 524 Japanese-Americans, 500 Korean-Americans, 492 Chinese-Americans, and 512 Filipino-Americans.

The independent variable of this study is Filipino-Americans versus Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans, and Chinese-Americans while the dependent variable is discrimination. Control variables are age, gender, income, and education level. Using a sum discrimination scale, the survey results were analyzed as a whole with all 4 groups and then individually in order to

show gaps in the data. A simple linear regression model was used to find correlation between the variables and to provide support for my hypothesis.

Findings and Implications:

Fig.1: Ethnic breakdown of sample groups

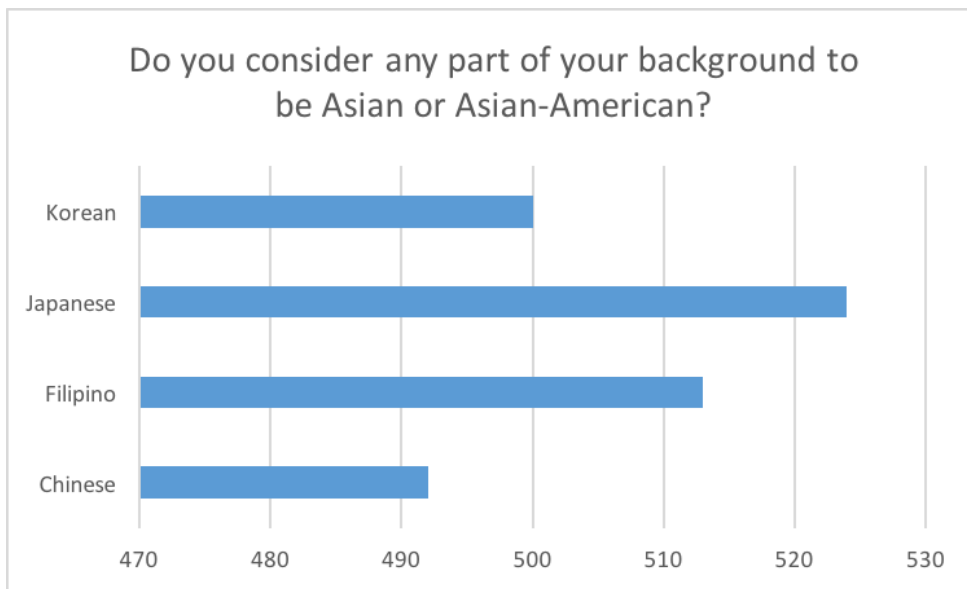


Fig. 2: Gender identification of survey respondents

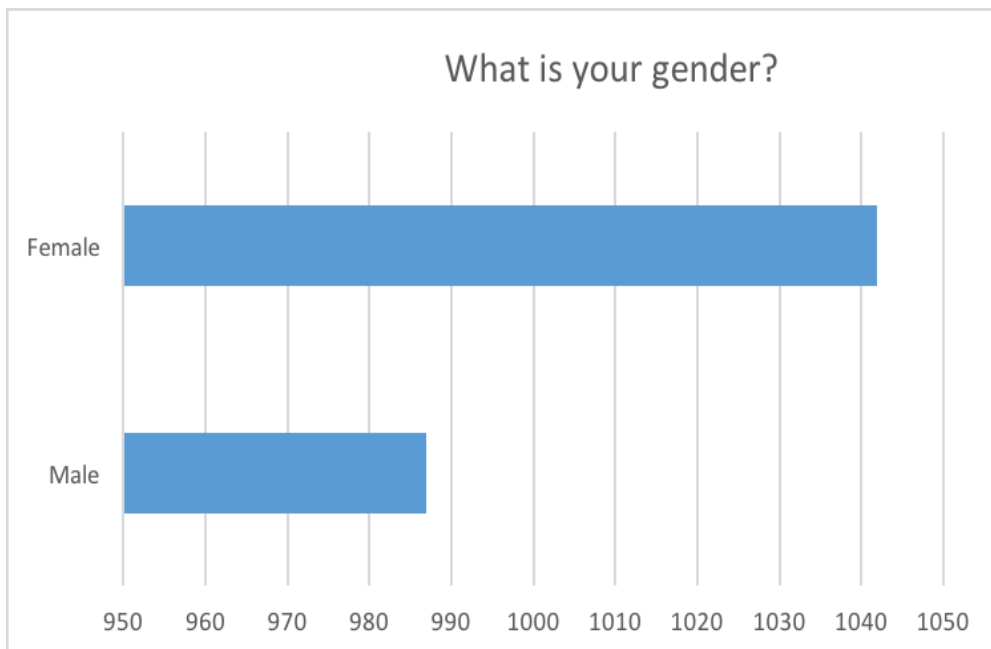


Fig. 3: Highest level of education completed by survey respondents

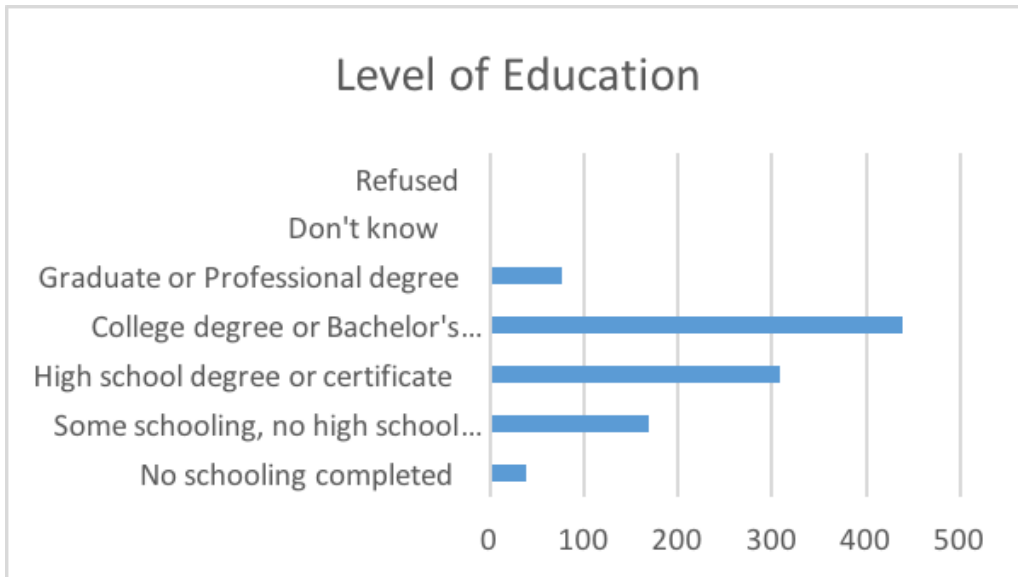


Fig. 4: average income of survey respondents

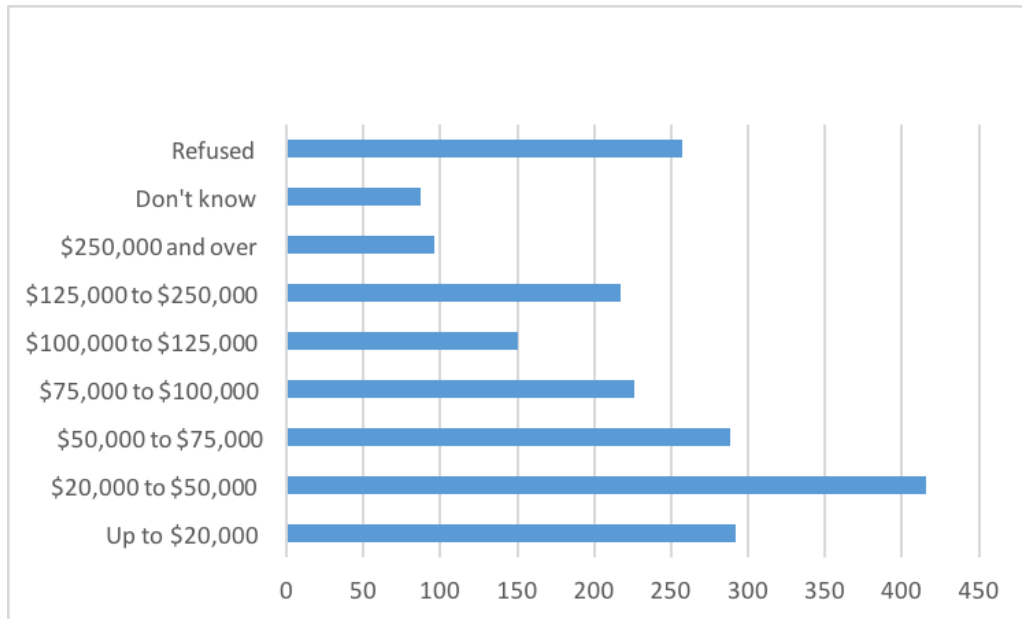


Fig. 5: average year of birth of survey respondents

Observations	Year Born Mean Estimation
1,784	1959.015

Fig. 6 Responses to discrimination questions

Questions	Yes	No	Total
You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores	410	1,597	2007
People act as if you don't speak English	558	1,442	2000
People act as if they are afraid of you	133	1,875	2008
People act as if they think you are dishonest	137	1,861	1998
You are called names or insulted	293	1,726	2019
You are threatened or harassed	199	1,821	2020

According to the descriptive statistics table (fig. 6) that displayed the answers to the six questions regarding discrimination, a majority of the respondents did not report any experiences of such nature, giving the impression that there are low levels of discrimination within the Asian-American community. The significance of the smaller number of respondents who had reported otherwise is that this made the reports of discrimination much more prominent due of the smaller number pool of respondents. Furthermore, the most common forms of discrimination are others acting as if they do not speak English (n=558), unfair treatment at restaurants or stores (n=410), and name calling and insults (n=293). Relating back to our theory, we can see that negative stereotypes that are perpetuated in the U.S is one of the factors that cause mistreatment. Interestingly enough, though there were many reports of English bias as a form of

discrimination, Filipinos have been well assimilated into American society that their culture includes the English language. In fact, the national language of the Philippines is English, in addition to Tagalog. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Hawaii by Vanessa L. Cunanan, Anthony P. S. Guerrero, Linda Y. Minamoto BA (2006) to understand why Filipinos do not resonate with the concept of “model minority” Asians, their interviewees had claimed to have been negatively stereotyped growing up as well as endured insults because of their identification with the Filipino culture. Moreover, this study also found that many Filipinos were seen as delinquents and were not trustworthy to be around. This can explain why there were also NAAS survey respondents reported above who had claimed that others were afraid of them just because of their background. In terms of Filipinos and their relationship to other Asian-Americans, this connects to how their experience with discrimination creates disconnect in the community. As Ocampo (2013) stated in his study, Filipinos tend to use historical legacies to blur the lines with other Asian-Americans. In other words, colonialism had set the tone for how Filipinos are treated in the U.S and decreased their relativity with other Asian groups.

Fig.7.1: sum discrimination scale

Observed - Chinese-Americans	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Max
465	0.7612903	1.283603	0	6

Fig.7.2

Observed - Japanese-Americans	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Max
510	0.6647059	1.147017	0	6

Fig.7.3

Observed - Korean-Americans	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Max
491	0.7841141	1.204681	0	6

Fig.7.4

Observed - Filipino-Americans	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Max
489	1.200409	1.621045	0	6

The sum discrimination scale showed the mean and standard deviation of the four ethnic groups analyzed in this study (Fig.7.1 - Fig. 7.4). In order, the ethnic groups that experienced the highest amounts of discrimination were Filipino-Americans, Korean-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Japanese-Americans, respectively. Filipino-Americans, who were the most discriminated against, had a mean of 1.200409 and a standard deviation of 1.621045. As the max sum score of discrimination is 6, they score relatively high on this scale. When comparing this to Japanese-Americans, who had a mean of .6647059 and standard deviation of 1.147017, a large gap between the two groups was apparent. This can be connected back to previous literature as Japanese-Americans were positively highlighted in American public media as a “success story” (Peterson 1996). It is important to note that other model minority groups like Chinese-Americans and Korean-Americans, though at much lower rates than Filipinos, had reported discrimination as well. This shows how the model minority does not protect Asian groups in the U.S completely and often erases reports of mistreatment. Another crucial note is that Korean-Americans were the second highest reporters of discrimination. Historically, they were also colonized and had experiences with U.S occupation as well.

Fig. 8: Regression Analysis and Significance test

Source	SS	df	MS
Model	61.9192951	5	12.383859
Residual	1194.25819	749	1.59447021
Total	1256.17748	754	1.66601788

Variable	Coefficient	Std	Error	T	P> t	[95% conf. interval]
*Filipino	0.5636029	0.1081378	5.21	0	0.3513137	0.7758921
Gender	0.1830623	0.932177	-1.96	0.05	-0.3660615	-0.0000632
Year Born	0.004586	0.0033759	1.36	0.175	-0.0020414	0.0112135
*Income	-0.0614086	0.0290005	-2.12	0.035	-0.1183405	-0.0044768
*Education	-0.0811115	0.0350606	-2.31	0	0.021	-0.1499403
Constant	-7.467743	6.580209	-1.13	0.257	-20.38559	5.450103

The regression analysis was statistically significant according to the p value test. There was a positive relationship between being Filipino and experiences with discrimination (coefficient= .5636029, p=.3513137). In other words, there was support for the hypothesis that identifying as Filipino can lead to higher amounts of discriminatory experiences in comparison to other Asian-American groups. This aligns with the theoretical model that Western

colonization created these feelings of internalized inferiority and negative stereotypes. Though other Asian-American groups such as Japanese-Americans and Korean-Americans also had a history of occupation from the U.S, it was not to the extent that of the Philippines who had over 400 years of colonization from both Spain and the U.S. Furthermore, even within the Asian region, there are racial hierarchies that were put in place. Filipinos, who had developed a sense of internalized oppression, perpetuated colonist ideals by erasing their identity in order to relate and be accepted by their East-Asian neighbors (Magdaraog 2014). This can be seen in the large differences in mean and standard deviation between Filipinos and other East-Asian groups as stated prior.

Also, there was a significant negative relationship with the control variables income (coefficient: $-.0614086$, $p=-.1183405$) and education level (coefficient: $-.0811115$, $p=-.1499403$). In other words, the lower one's household income and education level is, the higher chances there are for discrimination. This was in alignment with the literature— the U.S exploited low income Filipinos with little to no education from the provinces for work (De Leon 2019). Though the U.S had promised benefits for them, the treatment they received while in the states was unfair. Moreover, the U.S had viewed Filipinos as subservient, cheap labor (Magdaraog 2014). Today, many Filipinos work in manual labor, which further perpetuates this idea of Filipinos. With this, they are put more at risk for unfair treatment. In addition, during the colonial period, it was ensured to not educate Filipinos “too” much in order to prevent resistance (De Leon 2019). Without the protection of high income and education, they are susceptible to mistreatment. Lastly, gender could also possibly play a role in discrimination as it had a p value of 0.05, which is approaching the threshold of what is considered statistically significant. There were more female identifying respondents of this survey ($n=1,042$) and it can be alluded that

being a female Filipino could potentially put one at risk for discrimination as well. But since this variable was not considered significant, further research should be done in order to understand this relationship.

Conclusion:

Filipino-Americans have a very unique experience in the U.S due to the Philippines' history of Western colonization. Though Asian-Americans tend to be grouped together under one umbrella, it erases the intricacies of each individual group. In the case of Filipino-Americans, they are a group that has been highly assimilated into the U.S because of colonization and laws that encouraged the assimilation of this group into American society. However, this is a paradoxical relationship because although they are one of the most assimilated groups, they face the highest amounts of discrimination. As the data had been proved to be significant, being Filipino as well as being low income and having lower education, can lead to a higher chance of discrimination in the U.S. Though as not to overlook the experience of other Asian-Americans as they too can attest to discriminatory experiences, Filipino-Americans have a sense of distinction from other groups. Further research would include studying other historically colonized Asian-American groups such as Vietnamese-Americans and understanding how colonization affects attitudes towards these groups in the U.S in the post-colonial period.

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