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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Sociology

"Safe People and Safe Spaces:"

Filipino American Identity Formation in Response to Local Social Contexts

by
Cilka Mayumi Hijara

A thesis presented to
Washington University in St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

December 2023
St. Louis, Missouri

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Table of Contents

List of Tables iv
Acknowledgments v
Abstract vi
1: Introduction 1
2: Literature Review 5
2.1 Ethnic and Panethnic Identity Formation 5
2.2 Influences on Identity Formation: Racialization, Culture, Local Social Environment 7
3: Data and Methods 14
4: Findings 19
4.1 Safety in Numbers: Belongingness, Understanding, and Connection 20
4.2 Outsider Racial/Ethnic Appraisals 26
4.3 Comparisons to Local Majority Groups 31
4.4 Local Conditions Reinforcing Ethnocentric Consciousness 37
6: Discussion and Conclusion 40
References 44
Appendix 48

List of Tables

Appendix Table 1: Respondent Recruitment Method 48
Appendix Table 2: Respondent Characteristics..49

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Cilka Mayumi Hijara

Washington University in St. Louis

December 2023

ABSTRACT

“Safe People and Safe Spaces:” Filipino American Identity Formation in Response to Local Social Contexts

by

Cilka Mayumi Hijara

Master of Arts in Sociology

Washington University in St. Louis, 2023

Professor Cynthia Feliciano, Chair

The identity formation of Filipino Americans has captured scholarly interest due to their unique characteristics and identity attachments. Studies of children of Filipino immigrants are largely focused on individuals from diverse areas and do not explore whether different social environments influence a diversity of identity perspectives. Using data from interviews with 40 children of Filipino immigrants from across the U.S., I examine whether and how their understandings of their identities are shaped by setting. I find that participants’ local contexts, particularly local racial/ethnic demographics during childhood, shape their perceptions of their identities relative to other groups and prevailing categorization schemes. In environments with limited coethnic/copanethnic representation, participants sought shared or accepted identity through bonds with “similar” groups, internalization of peers’ racial/ethnic appraisals, and comparisons of self to local majority groups. In childhood local contexts that provided coethnic exposure, participants were able to foreground their ethnic identities while maintaining a sense of connectedness and belonging among peers. These findings highlight how those grouped under the same label can hold vastly different perspectives on identity, shaped significantly by local

settings during formative years. They also reflect how views on identity can shift within a single individual as they move between different environments.

1: Introduction

As they settle into life in the United States, the identity formation of immigrant families, and especially their children, has crucial political and demographic implications for future American generations. Popular notions of race and ethnicity suggest that individuals will sort themselves over time into broad but discrete racial or panethnic groups (e.g., Asian, Latino; Okamoto 2014; Ocampo 2016). However, some scholarship indicates that certain groups hold complex relationships to these prescribed identities (Ocampo 2016; Schachter 2014).

Recent studies of the children of Filipino immigrants, an often-overlooked segment of the U.S. population, suggest that they are one such group whose identities often deviate from the Asian American label assigned to them, instead often aligning themselves with groups outside of their panethnic umbrella (Chutuape 2016; Ocampo 2014, 2016) and/or foregrounding their ethnic identities and detaching from panethnic/racial labels altogether (Nadal 2004). However, existing studies have largely focused on groups of participants from one setting at a time – settings which are typically highly diverse and reflect the perspectives of Filipino Americans who live alongside coethnics and other racial/ethnic minorities. Drawing on interviews with 40 children of Filipino immigrants from varied local/regional contexts across the United States, this study examines how and why children of Filipino immigrants from different settings form different views on their identities.

Filipino Americans' departure from expected identity attachments and labels is expressed in multiple ways that extend beyond verbal self-identification, such as intermarriage with non-Asian minorities, in which Filipino Americans engage at higher rates than other Asian Americans (Min and Kim 2009). Filipino Americans exhibit other unique characteristics related to identity formation; in particular, they carry markers of the legacies of colonialism distinctive

among Asians, such as Catholic religious affiliation and Spanish surnames (Ocampo 2016). As descendants from the only Asian country directly colonized by the U.S., Filipino immigrant families often arrive in the U.S. with English language fluency and familiarity with mainstream U.S. culture, further setting them apart from other Asian ethnic groups with different incorporation experiences (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). These distinctions are met with marginalization within the Asian American community (Gavigan 2021; Nadal 2004; Okamura 1998), which may in turn drive unexpected identity formation patterns.

In addition to cultural factors which shape unique possibilities for identity attachments among Filipino Americans (such as attachment to Latino identity), Filipinos have a higher likelihood of residing in diverse settings with low concentrations of coethnics than other Asian groups (Lee 2021). Filipino Americans are also considerably diverse in phenotype, socioeconomic status, and political orientation (Ocampo 2016; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), making the study of this population particularly promising for developing an understanding of differences in identity formation and attachments both between and within groups. Further, Filipinos are among the four largest ethnic groups within the U.S. immigrant population (Budiman 2020). Given that individuals' understandings of their own identities are consequential for patterns of behavior such as political participation (Min 2014) and romantic unions (Feliciano and Kizer 2020), which influence the identity of resulting future generations, understanding the identity patterns of this large group with competing attachments is crucial for forecasting wider social outcomes.

Despite offering a unique opportunity to understand the complexities and contradictions of racial/ethnic identity formation, Filipino Americans remain understudied. When studied, Filipino Americans are often absorbed into larger pictures of Asian American identity which

tend to extrapolate from the experience of East Asian Americans (Kibria 2002; Kim 1981; Tuan 1998). Such broad portrayals of Asian American identity understate heterogeneity within this racial/panethnic group and unique perceptions of identity among groups like Filipino Americans.

Further limiting our understanding of this group, the small number of existing studies on Filipino American identity often rely on data from areas like Southern California, a region with a high concentration of multiracial communities and a popular destination for Asian and Latino immigrants (Bonus 2000; Espiritu 2001; Guevarra, Jr. 2012; Ocampo 2013, 2014, 2016; Rumbaut and Portes 2001). While such areas are well suited to the task of recruiting participants given high concentrations of Filipino Americans (Budiman 2021; Rumbaut and Portes 2001), an exclusive focus on such settings does not reflect the wide variety of local racial/ethnic contexts in which Filipino Americans live across the United States. These studies may not adequately address the possible role of factors like local racial/ethnic composition in identity formation. Consequently, there is little understanding of differences in Filipino Americans' identity formation and attachments across differing local contexts.

Previous scholarship has suggested that the unique racial composition of many Southern California communities incentivizes identification with other racial minorities, particularly with Latinos (Cheng 2013; Ocampo 2016). Further, other scholars of Filipino American identity argue that the racial identity of partners influences Filipino Americans' identity development and perceptions of intergroup boundaries (Gambol 2016). Given that ethnic and racial groups in the U.S. are unevenly spatially distributed, Filipino Americans in different areas will encounter different opportunities to form interracial/ethnic and intraracial/ethnic bonds (Harris and Ono 2005). Thus, there are strong reasons to suspect that children of Filipino immigrants from

different environments will have perspectives on their identities that diverge from those already represented within the literature on Filipino Americans.

The aim of this study is to fill this geographic gap by comparing perspectives of children of Filipino immigrants across different settings, relying on interviews with 40 respondents throughout the U.S. and working from the questions: **1) Do children of Filipino immigrants describe different understandings of their identities and group boundaries according to their regional/local context? 2) If so, how and why do their regional/local environments shape their identities?**

2: Literature Review

2.1 Ethnic and Panethnic Identity Formation

In the United States, immigrants and their children have exhibited attachments to a variety of ethnic self-identities (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). Literature on identity formation often focuses on patterns of clustering into larger panethnic alliances, similar in salience to ethnic identities (Espiritu 1992; Okamoto 2014; Okamoto and Mora 2014) or the retention of stronger attachments to more specific ethnic identities (Ocampo 2016; Schachter 2014). The question of which of these patterns Filipino Americans will exhibit has occupied a central place in the study of their identity, leading to the conclusion that Filipino Americans are relatively disengaged from practicing and identifying with Asian panethnicity (Nadal 2004; Ocampo 2016).

However, given insights that identity is subject to individual interpretation and experience (Kibria 2002), we can expect some level of variation in identity perspectives even within ethnic groups. Some scholars find that Filipino Americans react to their unique position by highlighting a sense of shared identity with other racial/panethnic minorities. For example, Anthony Ocampo (2014) suggests that, although Filipino Americans may retain an Asian American label publicly, they feel a stronger affinity with Latinos. Others highlight the development of attachments to other minority groups and/or a sense of shared pan-minority identity (Chutuape 2016; Gambol 2016). Yet another theoretical possibility is the replacement of panethnic identity with an ethnocentric consciousness triggered by the realization of marginalization within Asian American communities (Nadal 2004). As many of these scholars emphasize, these identity possibilities can vary from person to person. When considering the range of possibilities for Filipino Americans' identity formation, Asian panethnicity also cannot be overlooked despite assertions that Filipino Americans are relatively detached from this

identity. Asian panethnicity remains a salient option for Filipino Americans' identity formation and may be more appealing to those in understudied settings that expose individuals to a different set of influences on identity perspectives.

Identity also varies within individuals over the course of their lives. Phinney (1989) suggests that identity formation can be understood as a series of stages delineated by the level of exploration into one's ethnic identity and its meaning. Other studies find that stages of identity formation can be paired with changes not just in how individuals perceive the significance of their identities, but also in how they describe identity in general and whether these descriptions reflect ethnic or larger group affiliations (Feliciano & Rumbaut 2019). Models of change in identity often conclude that these complex processes of exploration flow into a final stage where conflicts about identity are largely resolved and individuals hold a positive view of their own and other groups (Kim 1981; Nadal 2004; Phinney 1989).

Some scholars highlight adolescence/coming-of-age as a particularly crucial time in exploring ethnic self-identity (Phinney 1989). In their study of the children of Mexican immigrants, Tovar and Feliciano (2009) also stress the significance of the transition to college. For their college-educated respondents, ethnic identities became more significant as they gained access to college classes and organizations related to their identities and experienced being in the minority on campus. While shifts toward stronger ethnic identities in college are also common among second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans, such patterns are a result of greater exposure to other Asian Americans (Kibria 2002). While many scholars agree that identity shifts over time and across different contexts, Tovar and Feliciano (2009) also find that the contexts in which individuals grow up and form foundational ideas about identity have a lasting relationship

to self-identities later in life. These studies suggest that changes in identity over time are often intertwined with changes in context.

More specifically for Filipino Americans, Nadal (2004) suggests a series of stages starting in childhood in which Filipino Americans shift between panethnic and ethnocentric consciousness and between pride and shame in ethnic identity at different points, largely as a result of external social influences like discrimination and the availability of education about Filipino American identity. However, studies sensitive to shifts in Filipino Americans' identities over time do not explore how Filipino Americans from different settings experience changes in their identities differently. Insights about change in identity over time stress the importance of exploring and recognizing how identity shifts or remains stable as Filipino American young people from different contexts grow, experience life changes, and respond to their particular social environments.

2.2 Influences on Identity Formation: Racialization, Culture, Local Social Environment

The identification of distinct identity formation patterns has generated interest in uncovering the forces that lead some individuals toward larger group affiliation (Espiritu 1992; Okamoto 2014; Okamoto and Mora 2014) and, to a lesser extent, forces that drive alternative identity development (Ocampo 2016; Schachter 2014). Scholars often point to racialization and discrimination as forces driving panethnic formation. Scholars of both Latino (Flores-Gonzalez 2017; Golash-Boza 2006) and Asian American (Espiritu 1992; Kibria 2002) identity note that individuals from these groups are often appraised as homogeneous and interchangeable, driving panethnic consciousness. Broader studies of children of immigrants suggest that the adoption of panethnic labels generally reflects an effort to articulate differences between one's own experience and that of the white American population (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). Interestingly,

Tovar and Feliciano (2009) find that children of Mexican immigrants who were teased about a perceived lack of ethnic authenticity experience a sense of alienation from ethnic identities, suggesting that being 'othered' within one's own ethnic group can also influence identity development. Scholars also recognize that heterogeneity in physical appearance and discrimination experiences within both ethnic (Golash-Boza 2006; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008) and panethnic (Schachter 2014) groups means that some will be less likely to identify with prescribed panethnic labels and more likely to remain attached to ethnic labels that reflect their particular racialization experiences. In short, while many studies of racialization and panethnicity suggest that those with more experiences of racialization and discrimination are more likely to adopt panethnic labels, racialization can also be significant in the development of other identities.

A similar force theorized to influence identity formation is external judgments about what set of racial/ethnic identity labels is appropriate for an individual to claim, suggesting that the knowledge and biases of peers within a given social environment are a vehicle for the influence of local context. In their study of changes in self-identification among recipients of genetic ancestry testing, Roth and Ivemark (2018) find that racial/ethnic identity labels are shaped in part by whether observers (both members and non-members of racial/ethnic groups in question) accept this label as appropriate for an individual, or an individual's expectations about whether their choice of labels will be accepted. These assessments draw largely on stereotypes about personality, behavior, and physical characteristics associated with specific racial/ethnic groups (Roth and Ivemark 2018) and are therefore grounded in existing knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of the observer. In light of studies finding that notions about race are grounded in place (Cheng 2013) these appraisals may be shaped by what groups and stereotypes are most

conspicuous within a given local context (e.g., an individual in a setting with ample exposure to Chinese Americans may assume individuals with phenotypic, cultural, or other similarities to Chinese Americans to be ethnically Chinese simply because this group is most visible and familiar to them).

While Roth and Ivemark's (2018) study focuses on a different population, their insights may be relevant for understanding Filipino Americans' perceptions of their own identities, as they share an experience of having multiple potential attachments due to high levels of multiraciality (i.e., having one Filipino and one non-Filipino parent; Budiman and Ruiz 2021) and well-documented similarities to a range of different racial/ethnic groups (Chutuape 2016; Ocampo 2014). As a result of a history of trade and colonial intergroup contact, many Filipino Americans have physical characteristics and surnames not commonly associated with popular notions of Asian identity and appearance (Gambol 2016). For these individuals, being appraised as non-Filipino or non-Asian is common (Chutuape 2016; Gambol 2016; Ocampo 2016). If Roth and Ivemark's findings hold for Filipino Americans, participants might discuss adapting their perceptions and expressions of their identities to more closely suit what others around them might see as legitimate. The social appraisals they respond to in their identity development are likely to reflect local demographics, in addition to factors like individual physical appearance.

Scholars have also discussed the possibility that shared cultural identity may motivate broader group attachments, especially among groups like Latinos in which multiple national-origin groups share a common language and religion (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Oboler 1995). For those categorized as Asian American, intragroup cultural diversity can drive attachments inconsistent with Asian panethnicity (Ocampo 2016). However, among Asian Americans, cultural identity can sometimes be interpreted in more flexible terms to support

panethnic affiliation (Espiritu 1992; Gambol 2016; Kibria 2002; Min and Kim 2000). In her study of second-generation Asian Americans, Nazli Kibria (2002) suggests a more complex interplay between culture and structural factors like local ethnic composition, in which some individuals recognize that factors like coethnic population size may limit them from forming intraethnic social ties. In reaction, they engage in panethnicity by broadening their notions of shared culture to include shared values and worldviews. In sum, cultural forces are subject to varying interpretations – interpretations which are sometimes shaped by structural forces like local racial/ethnic composition -- and can therefore influence different identity formation patterns.

Scholars also view the local context as a key influence on identity formation. Panethnicity scholars suggest that residing in an urban setting, shared labor market activities, and shared concentration in neighborhoods among different ethnic groups facilitate panethnic formation through intergroup contact (Okamoto and Mora 2014). Further, local racial/ethnic composition can shape identity formation. A sizable coethnic presence can affirm ethnic identity attachments and diminish the utility of forming alliances that cross ethnic boundaries (Espiritu 1992) while more ethnically diverse settings can encourage panethnic affiliation and organizing (Okamoto 2006). From studying Asian Americans in the Midwest, Trieu (2018) develops a typology of "isolated" (those who do not experience regular exposure to coethnics) versus "everyday ethnics" (those who have contact with coethnics in their everyday lives), finding that isolated coethnics' self-perceptions are shaped by local majority white groups and feelings of loneliness and isolation, while everyday ethnics exhibit ethnic pride and support from their local coethnic community and infrastructure. Trieu (2023) finds that isolated ethnics experience a sense of hypervisibility and vulnerability which they navigate by attempting to conceal markers

of Asianness rather than publicizing Asian panethnic attachments. This sensitivity to relative group size in a given social environment highlights two possibilities. First, members of the same group may have different senses of their identities as a result of different local demographics. Second, as individuals shift between settings with different characteristics over the course of their lives, their perspectives on their identities may also shift to reflect these different circumstances.

Local social environments may also influence identity outcomes by limiting or expanding opportunities for intergroup social ties. Interracial/ethnic unions and friendships may result in "self-expansion," where individuals view the identity of those they are close with as similar to their own (Page-Gould et al. 2010), foreshadowing softened divisions between groups. However, possibilities for the formation of interracial/ethnic relationships and subsequent self-expansion are shaped by constraints such as the uneven spatial distribution of opportunities for interracial/ethnic relationships (Harris and Ono 2005). Across most racial groups, those who live in diverse settings are more likely to participate in interracial relationships than those who do not (Kao et al. 2019). Additionally, growing up in a racially diverse setting and/or attending a diverse school during adolescence increases the likelihood of participation in interracial relationships later in life (Kao et al. 2019). Together, these observations highlight that intergroup relationship formation and self-expansion are more accessible and more common in some places than in others. They also suggest that social environments early in life continue to influence expressions of identity (e.g., choices of social relationships) later in life, and invite inquiry into how and why early social environments retain this influence.

The effects of self-expansion may be especially pronounced among Filipino Americans, who share cultural and phenotypic characteristics and residential spaces with numerous

racial/ethnic groups which may be realized in the context of social ties. These potential ties to other groups are reflected in Filipino Americans' higher likelihood of participation in relationships with non-Asian racial minorities relative to other Asian Americans (Min and Kim 2009), particularly with Latinos (Fu 2007). These unique relationship formation patterns may be both a reflection of and an influence on their identity perspectives (Gambol 2016), suggesting that personal relationships are an important site through which Filipino American identity patterns can be examined.

Given limitations in how (i.e., where) Filipino American identity has been studied, it is unclear how self-expansion may operate for Filipino Americans in different settings. Cheng (2013) notes that different geographic areas vary in their congruence with national racial ideologies, with some settings blurring divisions between minority groups more than others. Anthony Ocampo (2014) similarly acknowledges that multiracial contexts with large Latino populations more common in regions like Southern California may promote bonds between Filipinos and Latinos more than other contexts. The significant history of Filipino-Latino intergroup contact in Southern California communities (Guevarra, Jr. 2012) also cannot be ignored. While Filipino Americans in highly diverse Southern California communities often form bonds with Latinos and believe them to be similar (Ocampo 2016), little is known about whether the same patterns of affiliation are present outside of this and similar settings. Given the willingness of some groups to expand their ideas of intergroup similarity in response to structural limitations like local racial/ethnic composition (Kibria 2002), relationship formation and self-expansion may manifest in different ways for Filipino Americans in different local contexts.

By analyzing the perspectives of Filipino Americans in varying local contexts, this study offers to illuminate how Filipino Americans' social environments shape their understandings of

their identities and senses of similarity to other ethnic, panethnic, and racial groups they encounter. Their reflections will also lend insight into how these environments interact with forces like cultural legacies of colonization and experiences of racialization in shaping Filipino American identity development.

3: Data and Methods

To carry out a comparison of Filipino racial/ethnic self-identification across varying local contexts, I conducted phone and Zoom interviews with 40 participants from across the United States from late 2021 to early 2022. This study investigates a group whose perceptions of their placement in American racial categorization schemes often does not match others' appraisals or the responses they might offer on a fixed-choice survey question about their racial identity. Therefore, a study that investigates Filipino American identity must solicit the perspectives of the members of this group, making an interview methods approach particularly strong for an investigation of this kind. Interviews are well suited to the goal of placing participants' perspectives at the center of research and investigating their perceptions of social boundaries and identity (Gerson and Damaske 2021; Lamont and Swidler 2014). Additionally, the studies on which this research builds have successfully employed interview methods to yield data about participants' processes of identity formation, their perceived proximity to other groups, and the meanings they attach to their identities.

Participants were recruited via flyers, social media, email, and snowball sampling. Flyers and social media materials requested the participation of adults with at least one parent from the Philippines in a one hour Zoom or telephone interview about their views on their racial/ethnic identity. Two participants requested phone interviews, while 38 interviews took place on Zoom calls. Participants were offered a $10 gift card and entry into a raffle for a $100 gift card in exchange for their time. The language in recruitment materials focused on parents' national origin rather than racial/ethnic identity labels in order to capture the experiences of children of Filipino immigrants who do not identify strongly as Filipino/Filipino American in addition to those with stronger attachments to this label. Recruitment materials also referenced my identity

as a Filipino American researcher. Participants' knowledge of our shared ethnic background likely allowed them to be more candid in their interviews.

Because this study is focused on comparing the perspectives of children of Filipino immigrants from different areas, I intentionally recruited participants to achieve geographic variation in the sample as a whole. Initially, I contacted Filipino American community cultural groups and Filipino American clubs on college campuses, taking care to send requests to groups in all U.S. Census regions and in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Simultaneously, I posted flyers on community-use boards in businesses that often serve Filipino Americans. These approaches alone would likely yield a sample with higher levels of education and/or stronger ties to Filipino American cultural identity than the general Filipino American population, so I supplemented this strategy by forwarding digital flyers to those in my social/professional networks and requesting that they share these via email or social media. Following this initial stage of recruitment, I used a snowball sampling technique by asking participants to share my contact information with others who may be interested in participating. This snowball sampling approach contributed to the creation of a more diverse group of participants.

All participants in this study were individuals with Filipino ancestry who have at least one Filipino immigrant parent. The majority of participants (75%) had two Filipino parents. Of the other 25% of respondents who reported multiracial/multiethnic identity, the largest group was respondents who had one Filipino and one white parent (12.5%; see Appendix Table 2 for a detailed breakdown of respondent characteristics). The significant percentage of multiracial Filipino Americans in this study reflects similar levels of multiraciality (19%) in the broader Filipino American population (Budiman and Ruiz 2021). To allow a focus on those who grew up primarily in the U.S. racial landscape, I restricted the sample to those who were either U.S. born

or arrived at a young age (1.5 generation). Most respondents (65%) were members of the second generation, while 22.5% were 2.5 generation (one parent from the U.S. and one parent from the Philippines) and 12.5% were 1.5 generation.

Participants were 18 to 26 years old at the time of their interviews, a period in life shortly before racial and ethnic self- identification diminishes in importance and approaches stabilization (Feliciano & Rumbaut 2019). Individuals in this age range may be more deeply engaged in thought about their identities relative to elders and better able to recall the recent process of their identity development. Women made up 55% of the sample, while men and nonbinary/genderfluid respondents made up 30% and 15%, respectively. Finally, there was a diversity of U.S. regional origins within this sample, allowing an analysis of perspectives across different settings. The sample had the following breakdown of regional origins: 22.5% of respondents were from the Midwest, 20% from the Northeast, 17.5% from the South, 20% from Southern California, 15% from Northern California, and 5% from the Pacific Northwest.

Interviews were structured around various stages of participants' lives to track the evolution of their identities and the conditions surrounding these evolutions. A number of interview questions were modeled from those used in previous research on Asian American and Filipino American identity (Ocampo 2016; Tuan 1998). Questions largely focused on the circumstances in which participants grew up and lived as young adults, including the racial/ethnic composition of their neighborhoods, schools, and friend groups, the families in which they were raised, and broader reflections on Filipino American identity. These questions allowed participants to highlight experiences and relationships that were most salient in the formation of their identities.

In coding and analysis, I examined whether patterns established in existing scholarship, such as disidentification with Asian panethnicity, also apply to those outside of well-studied regions. To discern which factors in participants' social environments influence their identity formation, I used Dedoose QDA software to code for statements where participants drew links between racial/ethnic identity development and elements of their social environments or where their discussions of identity diverged along the lines of what kind of setting they grew up in, whether or not they were explicitly drawing these connections themselves. Following flexible coding procedures, I applied "index codes" to large chunks of text that corresponded with each question listed in my interview schedule (Deterding and Waters 2018). The process of indexing provided an opportunity to attach memos, which served as documentation of preliminary thoughts that guided the analytic stage of coding.

Following the process of linking index codes and memos to the transcripts, I reviewed memos to develop a set of analytic codes that corresponded with themes emerging in the course of interviewing. A key set of codes focused on how participants described their social environments, particularly in terms of racial/ethnic composition (e.g., "predominantly white," "diverse"). This set of codes served as one entry point for pulling forth discussions of the relationship between individuals' surroundings and their identity formation. While I focused largely on references to place, I also maintained codes that highlighted other influences on identity such as family to balance the significance of location relative to other forces.

Another important set of codes focused on different aspects of identity, highlighting discussions of affinities, senses of similarity, claimed identity labels, crucial moments of change in identity, and so on. Along with the family of codes about place, and another set of codes concerning justifications for beliefs about identity (which included sub-codes such as phenotype

and culture), this set of codes allowed me to highlight sets of passages which clarified how specific social surroundings activate certain characteristics to inform ideas about identity. Following Deterding and Waters' (2018) guidance, I disregarded participant attributes as much as possible while reviewing passages to avoid confirmation bias.

4: Findings

Regardless of the settings in which they grew up and lived as adults, participants highlighted the many similarities Filipino Americans shared with groups within and across racial/panethnic lines, reflecting conclusions from earlier research (Chutuape 2013; Gambol 2016; Ocampo 2014). Often, these observations were described as affinities and/or potential for groupness as opposed to perceived group identities or claimed identity labels. While this study was initially designed to address regional differences, local contexts were ultimately most important in shaping which of these different identity possibilities materialized fully. The conditions of their local contexts – particularly local racial/ethnic demographics within childhood social environments – were a central influence guiding how they understood themselves and their coethnics relative to prevailing categorization schemes and racial/ethnic boundaries. Even as some participants experienced drastic changes in their social environments and gained agency in shaping these environments in adulthood, childhood circumstances and their specific local contexts inevitably framed their decisions, experiences, and perceptions in new ones.

Participants' patterns of identity formation reflected the need for the safety of a shared or accepted identity. Participants adapted their identities to find the most comfortable way to exist within their particular social environments by forming alliances that transcended racial/ethnic divisions, accepting or internalizing others' perceptions into their self-definition, and defining themselves in relation to majority groups. The absence of these strategies was also notable in settings that affirmed participants' identities in their most intact form.

4.1 Safety in Numbers: Belongingness, Understanding, and Connection

Few participants grew up and lived in settings where Filipino Americans were one of the largest groups. Simultaneously, many participants had at least some awareness of racial/ethnic dynamics as they grew up, observing how shared identity could serve to facilitate an instant sense of camaraderie among peers, and how being the only one like them contributed to a sense of being alone, not belonging, or even feeling unsafe. Their awareness of these dynamics often drove a desire to highlight perceived racial/ethnic similarities with peers by strengthening and sometimes publicizing their attachments to certain identities.

For participants who did not live and spend their time among large numbers of coethnics, this desire for connections grounded in racial/ethnic similarity prompted the adoption of broader labels and attachments. Lina, a 25-year-old woman who grew up in a predominantly white midwestern town with few Filipino schoolmates exemplified this pattern:

> "Did you identify as Filipino or Filipino-American while growing up?
>
> Lina: Yes, definitely, I did. I think what was a little different was: I did identify as being Filipino. I also identified as being Asian. Sometimes that was more of a way to connect with other people in my class because they weren't always going to be Filipino, but they were going to be Asian. That's how we would become friends."

As Lina explained quite plainly, she modified her choice of racial/ethnic labels to include an Asian panethnic self-identification. By doing so, she expanded her opportunities for friendship with racially/ethnically similar people in a local context that limited her coethnic friendship possibilities but offered potential Asian panethnic bonds. Like Lina, most participants viewed a sense of connection and belongingness as important, and few were content with the prospect of being the only one like them.

Many respondents who formed Asian panethnic attachments and affinities in pursuit of companionship focused on how similar cultures, family norms, and upbringings created a foundation for connection. This pattern echoed Kibria's (2002) findings about the expansion of notions of cultural similarity to promote copanethnic bonds when coethnic bonds are unavailable. For example, Kim, an 18-year-old student from Texas said, "[Filipinos and other Asians] do feel similar in ways, like we take our shoes off when we go inside. We eat rice. We have similar things where our society prefers lighter skin. We have similar ways of how we're treated by our parents." Others who elaborated on Kim's comments about parenting emphasized how children of Asian parents are subjected to more strictness and pressure to succeed than their peers. Elena, a 20-year-old student from a predominantly white Southern California city and school explained:

> "There were some [students of color], but… it was mostly Asians. To be honest, there weren't many Black students, there weren't many Hispanic students… Really it was mostly white… Looking back and thinking about who my real friends were, they really were just my Asian friends… It was about four White girls and then half of us were four Asian girls… somewhere in my subconscious, we might have been seeking each other out… It's the way you act, it's a vibe, it's the culture, it's what they're receptive to… I know Southeast Asian culture and East Asian culture are not the same, obviously, [but] there are certain things that really do make us more comfortable with each other, especially in an all-White town…I think we just happened to find each other because that's who we were most comfortable with, people in our community, or people that can understand… Like when it came to our relationship with our families, when it came to what we ate, what we thought… There's just so much misunderstanding."

Elena's reflections highlight multiple key themes. First, they describe acknowledging but ultimately looking past within-group Asian diversity in order to access a sense of cultural understanding and groupness ("half of us were… Asian") in a social landscape made up largely of white peers who failed to be "receptive." For Elena, this self-perception as Asian and being like other Asians (alongside ethnic identification) persisted into adulthood even as they shifted into different settings, including those with more Filipino Americans. Second, it is notable that

Elena is a participant from Southern California who described a similar experience to those in predominantly white midwestern cities, like Lina, due to the particular racial/ethnic composition of their immediate surroundings. While Elena might have had some exposure to the more diverse settings within the larger Southern California region represented in earlier research, their predominantly white local environment shaped a lasting sense of comfort with and similarity to Asian peers.

The pattern of stronger panethnic attachments among Filipino Americans from local settings with few coethnics but some exposure to Asian Americans echoes research which suggests that limited coethnic exposure incentivizes panethnic affiliation (Kibria 2002). This finding also complicates existing literature on Filipino American identity which centers the perspectives of Filipino Americans who reject panethnicity, instead highlighting factors like culture (Ocampo 2016) and discrimination (Nadal 2004) that lead to non-panethnic attachments. For this subgroup of respondents, local demographic factors contributed to a stronger panethnic attachment in line with the dominant categorization of Filipino Americans as Asian. However, in contrast with perspectives from Asian panethnicity literature, participants did not always turn to Asian panethnicity when faced with a scarcity of coethnics.

Participants described using different panethnic strategies in settings where even Asian copanethnic friendship opportunities were limited, reflecting earlier scholarship about the ability of Filipino Americans to form bonds with minorities across racial lines with ease (Chutuape 2013; Gambol 2016; Ocampo 2016). Delia, a 24-year-old graduate student described finding a sense of belonging among POC peers when she entered a college environment in which there were few Filipinos and few Asians, limiting her options for both coethnic and copanethnic bond formation:

> "It felt like 90% of the people were white and it felt very isolating… maybe around 2% [were] the Asian population… I would gravitate towards people of color. It didn't matter if they were Asian or not. It was just any person of color that made me feel like I could belong around them. It was a turning point for me… because that's, I realized, a place that I could thrive."

Those who developed a POC consciousness and affinity provided similar explanations of POC commonality that centered on mutual understandings, worldviews, and lived experiences that included an awareness of being different from the white mainstream. Haley, a 23-year-old graduate student described shared POC understanding as, "something comforting about speaking about your own background with someone who gets it… the fight to make your background not disappear is something that probably white people just can't understand." Both Delia and Haley's responses also demonstrate how the development of a POC or other broader group consciousness/attachment extends beyond friendships to include simply speaking to or being around others who share and understand their experience.

A similar type of group attachment that was influenced by the pursuit of connection and safety was a view of oneself and potential companions as having a shared immigrant/child of immigrant identity. This immigrant consciousness was often layered onto a POC consciousness and was especially salient among 1.5 generation participants and those with limited exposure to Filipinos but some exposure to other immigrants/children of immigrants. For example, Bianca, a 1.5 generation, 22-year-old researcher explained,

> "I wouldn't say I ever met Filipinos at school, that's the hard part… When we first got to America, things were kind of hard, and I think that's something that a lot of POCs connect to… that's what I connect to the most— the immigrant identity… that experience of, 'Hey, we're here starting anew…' with white kids, often it boiled down to, 'What do they know about the world?' …a broad understanding of like, 'That homeless person isn't necessarily scary.'"

In her narrative, shared POC/immigrant identities and affinities encompassed common experiences of struggle which were synthesized into a sensitivity to others' circumstances and disadvantaged social positions.

Because of the connection between local demographics and identity choices intended to promote bonds, participants' public self-identification sometimes shifted as they moved between different settings. This was particularly salient when tied to life changes like family moves and going away to college, echoing earlier research which highlights the significance of identity shifts as individuals arrive in the college setting (Kibria 2002; Tovar and Feliciano 2009). In all of these scenarios, participants were immersed in environments with different racial/ethnic compositions which they often centered in their accounts of these experiences. However, in contrast to earlier scholarship on the shift to college, participants sometimes adopted new attachments in addition to existing ones, rather than simply strengthening existing identities. In one particularly emblematic example, Ava, a 21-year-old student, grew up among a large coethnic/copanethnic population which led her to gravitate toward Asians and, to an even greater extent, other Filipinos. During this time, she identified exclusively by her Filipino ethnic identity. Ava later attended an exceptionally predominantly white university, where she developed a POC affinity and began to describe herself in these pan-minority terms in addition to her strong ethnic self-identification:

> "I came in 2018 and that's when I realized how different I looked from white people, and how I stood out from the cookie-cutter person that attends my school… because out of a lecture hall of 300 people, I was one of three people of color. I just felt so alone for so long... As I navigated through, I tried to find safe people and safe spaces. In doing that, I found other women of color that I could speak with and that could relate to my experiences in our university."

Ava's story highlights how the desire for connection within the constraints of the racial/ethnic identities represented among one's peers contributes to changes in Filipino Americans' identity

attachments. Additionally, her story illustrates the flexibility of Filipino Americans' identities, and how the local context shapes which potential attachments are activated.

The opportunities for connection created by local racial/ethnic demographics further influenced participants' identities by shaping which groups participants had the most contact with and subsequently came to see as most similar, in line with literature on self-expansion (Page-Gould et al. 2010). Considering their different racial categorizations, this was especially apparent in cases where participants described realizations about Filipino-Latino cultural similarities after spending time among Latino peers, although similar patterns arose with other groups like Southeast Asians. When asked if there were racial/ethnic groups she saw as especially similar to Filipinos, Althea, a 22-year-old researcher said, "Definitely [Hispanic/Latinos]. I had a roommate in college who was Mexican. We were always so surprised at how similar our cultures were; things that we ate, and what we call things… In Bisaya, a lot of the everyday vocabulary is Spanish words." Kim, an 18-year-old student, expressed a similar perspective formed within one of the communities she grew up in:

> "There were more Hispanic and Black kids than I saw in New York for some reason, but that might just be the area I was in… I think that stuck more with me because I think I related to them a lot more …especially with Mexican kids; their food, their language, and the way their families and traditions hold up compared to ours. I really could relate to them."

Notably, participants like Althea and Kim describe notions of similarity with Latinos that formed through experiences of exposure to members of this group, reflecting suggestions that exposure in unique settings can cultivate ideas about racial boundaries that differ from national racial ideologies (Cheng 2013; Ocampo 2016). While those who did not grow up among many Latino peers sometimes held similar views, they often developed these perspectives through studying Filipino identity later in life (e.g., taking a course in college that allowed them to learn about Asian/Latino/Filipino identity). These perspectives had little bearing on how they practiced their

identities in personal choices like friend and partner preferences, and instead served to inform theoretical understandings of who Filipino Americans as a whole were similar to (e.g., statements like, "I have read that Filipinos and Latinos are similar" versus "I feel most similar to my Latino friends"). Patterns of believing Latinos and Filipinos to be similar and acting on these perceptions by forming bonds with Latinos were more common among those who grew up among Latinos and had experienced these friendships early in life.

These remarks make clear how important local exposure is for self-expansion (Page-Gould et al. 2010) or activating an awareness of similarity with groups that may otherwise be treated as distant or dissimilar due to their different official panethnic/racial categorizations. At the same time, as the previous descriptions of POC, immigrant, and Asian identity choices make apparent, participants were not passively shaped by opportunities for connection in their social environments. Instead, respondents in settings that did not allow intra-racial/ethnic connection molded their racial/ethnic identities to create more opportunities for interpersonal connection by foregrounding certain categories and similarities in their public or, less often, private self-identification practices. This strategy allowed them a comfort or safety in numbers that they would not be able to find by focusing only on their ethnic or racial identity and provided refuge within a larger social environment that led them to feel different and alone. Together, these patterns highlight the key role of bond formation and the local context in shaping the identities of children of Filipino immigrants.

4.2 Outsider Racial/Ethnic Appraisals

Another force that shaped how participants understood their own identities was the way that peers within their local context viewed them. For participants to be defined as Filipino by others, their peers must be knowledgeable about this ethnic group, which requires exposure to Filipinos. Thus, participants who lived among few coethnics described being viewed as generally

Asian, non-white, or non-American by others, diminishing emphasis on their ethnic identities. Their awareness of how they were viewed by others subsequently came to shape what they saw as their focal racial/ethnic identity, echoing Roth and Ivemark's (2019) findings about the influence of outside racial/ethnic appraisals on the identity choices of ancestry testing recipients.

Participants in predominantly white settings found the perspectives of the white majority to be particularly potent in determining what labels they chose to identify with, and frequently felt pressure to identify in broader terms than an ethnic label as a result. Denise, a 24-year-old account manager who grew up in a predominantly white northeastern suburb explained that she sometimes referred to herself as Asian as an adult because of the setting in which she grew up: "The fact that I went to such a white school, it really didn't matter if I was Filipino, Korean, Japanese, blah, blah, blah; I was Asian… being surrounded by white people and one Asian comes in, they're just going to label them as Asian and not really care who or what type." Alma, a 23-year-old medical worker from a predominantly white southeastern suburb, echoed her remarks, noting that she thought of her family as Asian because,

> "I didn't have a lot of other Filipinos around me… so I felt that the label that was put on me was just 'Asian… Oh, it's the Asian family…' I just felt like white people labeled me and put me in that category because of the way I looked. I'm very pale too. People thought I was Chinese all the time. I just assumed that identity for myself."

Alma's explanation also makes evident how such racial/ethnic appraisals (and ultimately, their effect on self-identification), were further shaped by phenotype.

Others echoed the significance of phenotype in shaping these encounters, with facial features and skin color emerging as a point of focus. Other participants, such as Caleb, a 23-year-old software engineer, similarly described being appraised as East Asian due to having a lighter skin color. For Caleb, who grew up in a majority white area among few Filipinos, assumptions

that he was East Asian had an even more powerful effect of leading him to identify as Japanese, a specific East Asian ethnic group that was not his own. It was not until a Filipino peer with a strong ethnic identity attachment identified him as Filipino and pursued a friendship with him based on their shared identity that he began to understand himself more clearly as Filipino.

This pattern was notable because of its bearing on self-identification even in cases where participants' ethnic identity was reinforced in arenas such as the home. Because only they – and not their peers – were given lessons about their ethnic identities, they were still exposed to daily messages in settings such as school that they belonged to a broader racial/panethnic category. As a result, these participants assumed broader identities that others in their social environments would be more likely to accept, regardless of whether these labels reflected real feelings or experiences of affiliation with larger groupings like "Asian." As Cecilia, a 19-year-old student, put it, "I think I saw myself as Asian through the eyes of my peers and not really through my own perception."

In contrast to participants who were labeled as Asian/East Asian because of their lighter skin color, having a darker skin color was linked to experiences of being seen as Latino or Hispanic. As noted in previous research (Ocampo 2016), Spanish last names were another characteristic that, if known to people guessing a participant's identity, contributed to assumptions of Latino/Hispanic identity. The same participant, Caleb, who was assumed to be East Asian as a child, noted that as he aged and his skin color deepened, he was instead asked if he was Mexican or Hispanic. However, unlike instances in which participants were seen as Asian/East Asian and adopted labels reflecting these appraisals, participants viewed as Latino/Hispanic did not take on Latino/Hispanic as identity labels. Caleb's response to questions

about his identity in adulthood illustrates this refusal to shift toward a label that reflected these new assumptions about his identity:

> "A lot of times when I'm walking in public, they've asked if I knew Spanish… When that happens, sometimes I would just completely blurt out saying, 'No. I'm Filipino,' even though that wasn't really what they were asking."

This relative reluctance to incorporate assumptions of Latino/Hispanic identity into chosen labels perhaps reflects how the influence of appraisals is limited by rigid "rules of race" that define Latino and Asian as separate and incompatible identities, and place Filipinos under the Asian umbrella despite histories and characteristics that complicate this categorization (Ocampo 2016).

Unlike participants who were not viewed by their ethnicity because of their non-Filipino peers' lack of exposure to Filipinos, participants from areas with a coethnic presence were more often understood by others as Filipino. The experience of being appraised as Filipino contributed to stronger attachments to ethnic identities for participants like Jade, a 25-year-old data analyst who grew up in a Northern California city with a large Filipino population. When asked what group others would assume she was a part of, she described encounters where non-Filipinos had correctly identified her as Filipino because of her facial features. Jade shared, "If they know what Filipino is, I would say that they would think [I'm] Filipino," emphasizing the significance of phenotype and others' exposure to Filipino identity in external affirmations of ethnic identity.

As described in earlier scholarship (e.g., Golash-Boza 2006), experiences of discrimination, "othering," and microaggressions also functioned as external appraisals that influenced identity, although participants rarely made explicit connections between such experiences and changes in publicized identity. Ava, the student who developed a POC affinity in her predominantly white college setting, explained the role that microaggressions played in shaping this emerging sense of POC identity and connection:

> "I was able to bond with other women of color over the dumb things people would say to us and the dumb dating stories… just the silly questions we'd get regarding our race and how we look and maybe how we speak… I would be a stand-in for all people of color. 'Oh, I have this brown friend that this is happening to. Well, what can I do about that?' …Once on a dating app I didn't even get a hello. They're like, 'Are you a citizen?' …I've gotten the question a lot of, 'Oh, where are you from?' 'California.' 'No, where are you from?'"

The specific prejudice she encountered functioned similarly to straightforward guesses about racial/ethnic identity in that they were rooted in the perceptions of her peers more than any internal idea Ava held about her identity. In her case, her peers' perceptions seemed to focus on broader groups (e.g., minorities and immigrants) rather than specific ethnic or panethnic identities. For Ava, mutual experiences of being "othered" as non-American and monolithically non-white in a predominantly white setting contributed to the sense of being like other WOC/POC so much so that she began to gravitate toward POC for friendships and romantic relationships. This finding echoes earlier scholarship about the influence of racialization and discrimination in identity formation (Golash-Boza 2006; Nadal 2004; Schachter 2014) and suggests that consideration of the local context is important for understanding the relationship between racialization and identity.

In addition, participants' beliefs that they might be spared from becoming targets of certain stereotypes could shape their views of what groups they were similar to or different from. When asked what racial/ethnic groups (Asian or non-Asian) they saw as similar, Dana, a 23-year-old from the PNW said:

> "I have heard us called, 'the Mexicans of Asia,' so I think it is easy for us to forge bonds with people from Latin America just because of how we're perceived. I think that is something that we share, I think that that is not the case for us and other Asians, however, which is interesting. When I think of the model minority myth I don't think of Filipinos as sharing that."

Dana's sense that, as a Filipino, they would not experience model minority stereotyping contributed to a sense of distance from other Asians, while cultural narratives about similarity to Mexican/Latin American people contributed to a sense of closeness, or a "bond," between Filipinos and Latin Americans. As in other discussions of expected or actual external judgments about identity, Dana's experience reflected the importance of peers' perceptions of their identities and how existing exposure and knowledge informed these perceptions. Dana's words also serve as a reminder for how such experiences shape ideas about identity, and sometimes even how identity is practiced (e.g., through relationship formation).

4.3 Comparisons to Local Majority Groups

For most participants, local racial/ethnic majority groups occupied an important place in conceptualizing and speaking about their identities. While this aligns with earlier research outlining how Asian Americans use ideas about the local majority to form notions about their own identities (Trieu 2018), participants in this study often framed their identity in contrast to local majority groups when asked to describe their identities in broad terms instead of highlighting similarities. For example, Abigail, a 22-year-old teacher from a predominantly white northeastern city, described how she refined her sense of her identity through conversations with family about how they differed from the white Americans who made up the local majority:

> "We've talked about it as a family like, 'What does it mean to be Asian?' That's mostly in comparison to the people around us like, 'They do this, but we do this… [It's] such an American thing to want to move out super quickly…' A lot of the conversations were mainly just like, 'What is something we do that they don't do?' '…they' being the white populous that we live around."

As in Abigail's reflections, majority groups most often functioned as foils that helped participants to form ideas of what they were *not* in racial and ethnic terms, rather than serving as a group to identify similarities with.

For many who grew up in settings in which they were not a member of the majority, especially those from predominantly white environments, their first thoughts about their identities emerged from spontaneous and often painful moments of realization that they differed from the norm. Sean, a 21-year-old student from a predominantly white area in the Midwest, described the moment when his identity came into view:

> "When I'd be playing sports, and then we'd be in the locker room and the team would be getting ready, we'd all look at each other in the mirror. I would visually see, like a side-by-side comparison, how different I looked than them. It was kind of like a wake-up call like, 'I'm not actually white. I'm not actually like them.'"

Such awakenings were often catalysts for long journeys of understanding and negotiating identities that differed from a perceived white American norm.

While some participants responded to realizations about differences from the majority with more neutral attitudes, others experienced a sense of shame at being different and engaged in attempts to "fit in" among the white majority, like respondents in Trieu's (2023) study of Asian Americans in the Midwest. Ana, a 20-year-old student from a predominantly white midwestern city, described her retreat from expressions of her Filipino identity when such expressions left her vulnerable to being perceived as "weird":

> "I feel I was very heavily culturally raised…. because of that, I've always been aware [of my identity]. I feel like no one really acknowledged my identity much in high school… Sometimes I would have interest in Filipino singers in elementary school or I would try to do research on my culture, and people would think that was weird. …I think that was when my pride in my heritage diminished a little …I didn't really have any personal hatred towards my own culture. It was more of just [a hatred of] an expression of it …I almost feel in a sense, I tried to make myself culturally white as if you could make yourself culturally white, but in a sense where my Filipino culture was non-existent because I didn't express it."

While Ana's family offered knowledge and opportunities for practicing her culture and foregrounding her ethnic identity, her experiences being different from the white majority led to efforts to draw attention away from her Filipino identity. Her words speak to the conflict

participants often encountered between messages about identity at home and messages about identity when surrounded by non-Filipino peers.

Participants like Ana who tried to quiet their identities to suit largely white communities often experienced shifts toward reconnecting with and expressing their racial/ethnic identities as they entered settings that prompted engagement with the meanings of their identities (e.g. college classes and campuses with different racial/ethnic compositions) and gained greater internal capacity to ponder their identities; echoing previous scholarship about increasing exploration into identity over time (Phinney 1989) and critical moments of context change in identity development (Kibria 2002; Tovar and Feliciano 2009). For example, Althea, the 22-year-old researcher from a predominantly white southern U.S. city, described a growing comfort with and interest in her ethnic identity as she entered adulthood,

> "For a lot of my growing up years, I think I was embarrassed or ashamed… I sought out friends that were not Filipino because I wanted to be more American… having two worlds, that's definitely how I felt growing up. I was always afraid and made active choices to not combine those two worlds… When I turned 15, I had a birthday party at home. I made my parents leave two hours before everybody was going to get there… As an adult, I'm embarrassed that I was embarrassed by my parents. I have friends in college… who understand my experience as an immigrant and as a Filipino-American. Even in that context, I struggle with introducing them to my parents… I think it's just something that I hold onto from when I was younger…
> When I got to college, I tried to seek out more spaces that were Asian, Filipino. I found a lot of that in college… I think I just grew up and realized that it was silly to be embarrassed by my parents. I think that's also around the time when I started to learn more about the world, and how complicated immigration is… in an academic context."

Such shifts happened for a variety of reasons, but as in Althea's narrative, seemed to most often be linked to the emergence of a more mature, grounded relationship to family and personal identity that was less fragile to the judgment of peers, exposure to new surroundings (often through active choices about what groups to be a part of, where to live, work, or go to college), and greater knowledge about their backgrounds gained from learning opportunities like college

courses. However, as Althea highlights, attempts to fit in among white peers during childhood sometimes had a lasting effect on how easy it was for them to transition into foregrounding their racial/ethnic identity if they chose to do so later in life.

Gina, a 25-year-old auditor from the northeastern U.S., shared a particularly illustrative story which reflected the significance of the local white majority group in shaping her identity while growing up and how this affected attempts to connect with her ethnic identity later in life. Gina grew up in an area that was nearly 100% white American with little to no coethnic presence. Like other participants raised in predominantly white settings, she juxtaposed her identity against that of the white peers who made up most of her friend group, describing the contrasting family customs and other cultural practices that bolstered a special sense of shared "immigrant" identity with Black and Latino friends. Although her family made efforts to pass on Filipino culture, which granted her a sense of connection to her ethnic identity, this cultural transmission was not a central influence on her identity during her upbringing – Gina was "aware" she was Filipino, but this identity did not overtake others.

For college, Gina went to the Pacific Northwest and was labeled as "whitewashed" among a group of Filipino American peers from Hawaii/West Coast communities with more Filipino representation:

> "I tried joining a Filipino group at my college and wasn't very accepted over there because I was too 'whitewashed.' …in my mind, I was like, 'I'm the only Filipino in my area. How am I not considered Filipino over here?' …It was the first time that I've ever been surrounded by so many different types of Asians, specifically Filipinos… I don't really know certain things that they knew about our culture… I always got the comment from other people, 'How do you have so many white friends? You're very whitewashed.' …I didn't have anyone to relate to because most of the people were from the West Coast or from Hawaii. There weren't a lot of people from New England or even the East Coast in general… Then I didn't really hang out with a lot of Filipinos after that… Most of my friends were Asian, but they're more like Asian Americans or Japanese or Chinese or Korean."

Later, Gina reverted to broader identities and affinities, grouping herself throughout her interview with Asians, POC, and immigrants/children of immigrants who she saw as also having a different experience from the white majority. She exhibited considerable flexibility in how she thought about her own identity and that of Filipino Americans in general, viewing Filipinos as forming intergroup bonds with exceptional ease, and had a diverse group of friends and partners.

Gina's story illustrates several interesting themes described in existing research including the array of identity attachments available to Filipino Americans (Chutuape 2016; Gambol 2016; Ocampo 2014) and how different settings with different racial/ethnic compositions compel individuals to toggle between different identities/affinities (Kibria 2002; Tovar and Feliciano 2009). For example, in college and among more coethnics, she attempted to foreground her Filipino identity by seeking out Filipino peers and cultural groups, while at home she gravitated more toward POC group identity and friendships that reflected a different lived experience from the local white American majority.

Gina's story also echoes earlier claims about the significance of local environments during formative years even when circumstances shift in adulthood (Tovar and Feliciano 2009) and lends insight into how childhood context and identity shape identity in adulthood. Her upbringing in a predominantly white setting cast more focus on her broader identity as a minority and child of immigrants when juxtaposed against whites, did not necessitate certain types of cultural knowledge, and ultimately distinguished her from Filipino American peers who labeled her as lacking ethnic authenticity, putting feelings of belongingness among coethnics out of reach in adulthood. Previous findings that being teased about a lack of ethnic authenticity contributes to a sense of distance from ethnic identity (Tovar and Feliciano 2009) are supported by Gina's narrative of surrounding herself with non-Filipinos after being rejected by coethnics.

Her experience of being singled out among coethnics was shared to various degrees by other participants who grew up with the influence of a local white majority and sought membership in Filipino communities during early adulthood.

Participants who grew up alongside a non-white majority group also focused on these groups in framing their identities, although their narratives focused less on experiences of exclusion and more on organic feelings of similarity. Cameron, a 21-year-old student who grew up in Southern California in majority Latino schools and neighborhoods explained:

> "…a lot of people assumed that I was Latinx, just because I have a light tan and the majority of the neighborhood was Mexican or Central American …I was primarily perceived as part of that majority, almost… [Now] I most often just get white because white is the majority here. I feel like a lot of people just see if my appearance fits in with the majority. If it does, then that's the assumption that's put upon me."

Later, when asked what groups they thought of as similar, Cameron shared:

> "I have heard the comparison a lot of how similar, oftentimes, Filipinos and Mexicans are… I definitely agree with a lot of that sentiment. Maybe it was also because when I grew up in Latinx communities, I was oftentimes lumped into that category; it was easy for me to make friends and connections with a lot of Latinx people."

Cameron's response illustrates how fitting in with the local majority group as a child allowed them to form bonds with members of this group, in turn shaping their views in adulthood about which groups are most similar to Filipinos. It is also notable that, although they again felt they were able to "pass" as a member of a different majority group in adulthood, they still emphasized who they grew up alongside during formative childhood years. While narratives of majority-group comparisons most often focused on differences from white Americans, participants like Cameron illustrate how even the presence of non-white majority groups can be central to understanding their own identities.

4.4 Local Conditions Reinforcing Ethnocentric Consciousness

While many participants practiced panethnicity or other broader group identification as a way of navigating the constraints of their social environments, some participants described very stable, salient ethnocentric consciousness throughout their lives. Similar to Trieu's (2018) "everyday ethnics," these were participants who grew up in areas where the local ethnic composition was such that nonfamilial coethnic exposure was built into their everyday lives. In these settings, participants faced few pressures to adopt broader panethnic identities to find companionship among peers, were relatively unconcerned with comparisons to other racial/ethnic groups and were more often recognized as Filipino by others. These factors allowed them to form strong attachments to their ethnic identities early in life that lasted into adulthood and were relatively durable to changes in local context.

In large part, this identity pattern was supported simply by the presence of other Filipinos. Lane, a 21-year-old student from California who experienced little pressure to identify outside of their ethnic identity, recounted how the presence of other Filipinos shaped their identity:

> "When I was five, we moved to [city with large Filipino population]. I never had problems with identifying as Filipino. I was pretty loud about being Filipino… I never had the stinky lunch discourse. That was never a problem for me because it was so diverse… I don't think [my family] felt the need to assimilate or position themselves next to whiteness because we were surrounded by Filipinos… A lot of people I know who grew up in predominantly white communities or didn't have a big Filipino community, they would be like, 'I wanted to look white so bad…' That wasn't something I experienced."

Lane notes how outsiders' judgment of ethnic/cultural symbols like food can discourage ethnic attachments, characterizing ethnic identity attachment as an instinctive state which is threatened without the support derived from a local coethnic presence.

While many responses from participants with solidly foregrounded ethnic identities focused on social contact with coethnics, other geographic factors sometimes placed further emphasis on their ethnic identities. For example, many respondents from California communities with large Filipino populations understood "Filipino/Filipino American" to be both their ethnic and racial identity. As some of them explained, typical survey questions in their areas included "Filipino" as an option in questions about race, affirming their view of themselves as exclusively Filipino and separate from any Asian or other racial/panethnic group. In her observations about another local influence, Giselle, a 21-year-old student with roots in Southern California, noted how the infrastructure of the setting she grew up in influenced her sense of connection to Filipino identity more memorably than people: "They had a Jollibee. I was very fond of that. Food-wise, culture-wise, I felt like I had more connection to Filipino stuff there, but people-wise, I don't remember that much..." Giselle's recollection of her childhood setting and sense of attachment to Filipino culture echo arguments about relationships between ethnic consciousness and access to coethnic-serving community spaces (Bonus 2000; Trieu 2018).

In contrast to those who experienced a growing "ethnocentric consciousness" (Nadal 2004) later in life after experiencing environments that animated other identities, those who grew up in settings that bolstered an ethnocentric consciousness and did not necessitate affiliation with broader groups more commonly viewed themselves only as Filipino and refused to attach themselves to broader group identities into adulthood. These participants' experiences notably departed from identity development models that describe pronounced shifts in relationships to one's own identity across life and intermediate stages marked by insecurity in ethnic identities (Kim 1981; Nadal 2004; Phinney 1989), emphasizing how an "everyday ethnic" (Trieu 2018)

childhood context that recognizes and offers exposure to coethnics can promote a strong ethnic identity across life.

6: Discussion and Conclusion

While this study focuses on just one ethnic group, its findings contribute to our understanding of identity more broadly in multiple ways. First, the diverse narratives among these participants clearly reflect richly varied identity even within groups that are treated as monolithic in scholarship, government classification, and public perception. Some scholars focus on the allure of large panethnic groupings for members of individual ethnic groups (Espiritu 1992; Okamoto 2014), while other studies suggest that, for some unique groups, ethnic identity and/or other intergroup affiliations will hold more importance (Ocampo 2014; Schachter 2014). Such studies often focus on the identification of larger patterns of identity common within ethnic/panethnic groups, rather than attempting to capture within-group diversity. In contrast, this study shows that individuals from the same group will exhibit varying patterns of identity formation that reflect the local social surroundings they each come from, complicating the idea that we can draw broad conclusions about identity for members of the same ethnic group. To be clear, participants did discuss influences on their identities unrelated to local context, such as the extent to which parents transmitted cultural knowledge and practices during childhood. Nevertheless, woven throughout their discussions of how their identities took shape were constant reflections on how the particular communities surrounding them complicated or affirmed how they understood their place within the U.S. racial/ethnic landscape.

This study also highlights the significance of the childhood context for the development of identity throughout life. Models of identity development often do not provide insight into how earlier stages of development inform later stages. Instead, they portray identity development as the shedding of characteristics associated with earlier stages and, often, arrival at a final, secure stage free of earlier identity conflicts (Kim 1981; Nadal 2004; Phinney 1989). Participants in this

study instead described developing perspectives on their identities and strategies for navigating them in childhood that persisted and informed their identities in different times and contexts. These findings align with Tovar and Feliciano's (2009) study of children of Mexican immigrants, which identifies a connection between identity in childhood and adulthood and lends insight into the significance of context during formative years. These similar findings across two ethnic groups suggest that identity and context in childhood are likely to be important for understanding identity development more broadly. The qualitative findings from this study also illustrate some of the reasons for the ongoing significance of childhood identity and context. Participants described how the beliefs and tools (e.g., concealing identity in inhospitable environments) that they developed for understanding and navigating their identities in childhood were difficult to shed and framed their perceptions of new environments. Overall, this study shows that circumstances during formative years are essential to understanding identity throughout life.

This study also contributes to research on identity and context by identifying the pursuit of safety and comfort as a key logic that shaped strategies for navigating identity in different environments. Often, participants who did not already have a significant number of coethnic peers turned to other groupings for a sense of connection, understanding, and safety from being the only one like them. This pattern showed similarities to suggestions from other literature about identity and isolation, especially on Asian Americans, except that participants did not only turn to Asian American panethnic affiliation (Kibria 2002) or attempt to conceal their identities (Trieu 2023). Instead, they made decisions based on the particular demographics of their local environments (i.e., what "similar" group had a critical mass to provide safety, or if there was none, using other strategies like concealing markers of identity to avoid negative attention),

leading to a diversity of identity patterns. The wide range of strategies and perspectives these participants adopted to navigate their particular environments echoes earlier assertions about the complex relationships of children of Filipino immigrants to dominant racial schemas (Ocampo 2016; Nadal 2004) as well as the sense of interconnectedness that Filipino Americans experience with a number of other racial/ethnic minorities (Chutuape 2013; Gambol 2016; Ocampo 2016). This unique station necessitated strategies to find safety because it was common to feel poorly understood, and simultaneously granted a variety of connections with other groups to strengthen and publicize. The logic of safety may also be essential to understanding the identities of other groups whose characteristics and experiences are not represented neatly within popular understandings of racial/ethnic identity.

Finally, this research contributes to the development of a detailed portrait of Filipino American identity and illustrates how the study of this and other unique, understudied groups aids efforts to understand racial/ethnic identity more broadly. While previous research has identified and detailed the complexity of Filipino American identity, especially relative to more visible Asian American ethnic groups, this body of research is overwhelmingly focused on areas in which Filipino American participants are surrounded by coethnics and other minority groups with shared characteristics, specifically Latinos. Thus, existing research leaves the significance of the social environment and resulting within-group diversity out of view. This research clearly illustrates that Filipino American identity is not monolithic and offers the local context as one channel for highlighting and understanding internal diversity.

Future research should explore how the local context influences perceptions of identity for other groups, especially those who, like Filipino Americans, hold complex connections to a variety of identity groups or differ from broader racial/panethnic groups to which they are

frequently assigned. Another promising avenue would be investigation into what identity 'outcomes' we might expect for members of this group in different environments. The findings of this research assert the significance of local context and outline some ways in which it functions to influence Filipino Americans' perceptions of their identities but are not focused on developing a predictive model for outcomes like chosen identity labels. A larger study focused on developing a typology of U.S. local settings and associated identity patterns would offer a deeper understanding not just of *how* local contexts act on Filipino American individuals, but *what* identities they might claim as a result of these influences. Further research along these lines will continue to highlight the diverse experiences of children of immigrants and reveal what is lost when we rely on a small number of immigrant destinations to build our understanding of this complex group of Americans.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1. Respondent Recruitment Method

	N	%
Social media	22	55.0%
Referral by family/friend	11	27.5%
Member of Filipino community org.	7	17.5%
Total	40	100.0%

Appendix Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

	freq./mean	*std. dev.*	*range*
Gender			
men	12		
women	22		
nonbinary/genderfluid	6		
*Racial/Ethnic Background**			
Filipino only	30		
Filipino-White	5		
Filipino-Korean	1		
Filipino-Japanese	1		
Filipino-Black	1		
Filipino-Japanese-White	1		
Filipino-Colombian	1		
Age	22.27	(1.88)	18 to 26
Immigrant Generation			
2.5 generation	9		
2nd generation	26		
1.5 generation	5		
Highest Educational Degree			
Some college	1		
Enrolled in college	12		
Associate's	1		
Bachelor's	24		
Master's	2		
Family of Origin Household Income			
Less than $24,999	1		
$25k to $34,999	0		
$35k to $49,999	0		
$50k to $74,999	7		
$75k to $99,999	6		
$100k to $149,999	11		
$150k+	9		
Don't know	6		
U.S. Regional Origin			
Midwest	9		
Northeast	8		
Northern California	6		
Southern California	8		
South	7		
Pacific Northwest	2		
N	40		

*This race/ethnicity variable reflects parents' racial/ethnic background rather than self-identification. Some respondents with one Filipino and one non-Filipino parent identify as Filipino only, with a total of 87.5% of respondents exclusively identifying as Filipino.

Interview Protocol

Childhood & Adolescence

1. Can you tell me a bit about the place/places where you grew up? Where are you from?
2. I would like you to picture the home and neighborhood in which you spent the most time as a child. Can you tell me a bit about your neighborhood? Who were the neighbors that lived closest to you? What were they like? Did you have any playmates who lived close by? Tell me about them.
3. What were their racial/ethnic identities?
4. Growing up, how much contact did you have with Filipino/Filipino Americans?
5. How aware were you of being Filipino American/your Filipino ancestry as a child?
6. Can you describe your elementary school in terms of the racial/ethnic identities of students and teachers?
7. If there were Filipino students, did you seek them out? Why or why not? Do you remember having a preference when it came to your friends' racial/ethnic identities?
8. How about in high school and/or college? What were the ethnicities of your closest friends? What about your partners' identities?

Family

1. Can you recall having any conversations with Filipino/Filipino American family members while growing up about your cultural, ethnic, or racial identity? If so, what were they like? Any memorable conversations in particular?
2. Did you think of your family as being particularly Filipino/Filipino American, particularly American, a combination of the two, or something else?
3. Did you speak [Tagalog, Ilocano, Bisaya, other Filipino language] at home?
4. How important do you think it was to your family that you were familiar with Filipino/Filipino American culture? (If important) How did they achieve this? (If not important) Were there other cultures they tried to share with you?
5. Do you think your family had any opinion on what kind of friends/partners they wanted you to have? If so, how did they express this to you?

Emerging Adulthood

1. Can you tell me about the city and neighborhood/campus you live in now? Who are your neighbors/the people you encounter most often? What are their racial/ethnic identities?
2. Are you currently working/in school? If yes, what are the racial/ethnic identities of your coworkers/supervisors or classmates/instructors? Do you have any coworkers/classmates that you are closer with than others?
3. Do you feel that your view of your racial/ethnic identity has changed since you became an adult? If so, how? If not, what do you think has contributed to the stability in your identity?
4. Do you have any friends with Filipino ancestry? What are the racial/ethnic identities of your closest friends?

5. Have you ever dated? Do you have any current or recent partners that you feel comfortable talking about? (If yes), what is the racial/ethnic identity of your partner?
    a. For those who haven't dated: If you were to look for a relationship, are there certain characteristics you would look for in a partner? Certain racial/ethnic groups you would want to date? Why or why not?
6. Have you ever dated/married a Filipino/Filipino American?
7. Have you ever dated/married someone of a different racial or ethnic background?
8. If yes, do you think Filipinos/Filipino Americans and X group are similar/different? How so?
9. Does your race/ethnicity (or, if different, your partner's race/ethnicity) ever come up in conversation between you and your partner? Can you recall the last time you talked about it? How did it go?

Racial/Panethnic/Ethnic Identity

1. In general, how conscious are you of your Filipino ancestry? What kind of role does it play in your life?
2. When you are asked about your race (ex. Asian, White, etc.…) by a friend, how do you generally answer? A new acquaintance? A government form? Is it ever challenging to answer questions like this? (If yes) How so?
3. When you meet someone new, what racial/ethnic group do you think they would place you in? Why? Do you think other people's perception of your identity is consistent, or does it vary in different contexts?
4. Filipinos are often put in an "Asian/Asian American" category on government forms, for example. How well do you think "Asian/Asian American" describes you and/or your family? How well do you think it describes Filipinos/Filipino Americans in general?
5. How similar do you feel to other Asian American groups, like (provide examples)? Culturally, politically...?
6. How easy/hard is it to relate to members of other ethnic groups? Do you think there are some groups that are easier for Filipinos/Filipino Americans to form bonds with? Why or why not?
    a. (If participant names groups) Can you describe your impressions of X culture? Do you see any similarities with Filipinos/Filipino Americans?