

# THE PROBLEM WITH KAPWA: CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS OF COMMUNITY, SAMENESS, AND UNITY IN FILIPINA AMERICAN FEMINIST FIELDWORK

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## ABSTRACT

This article brings into question the ethics of conducting feminist research on and with Filipina American women as a Filipina American researcher. Through identifying and challenging the assumptions of *kapwa*—a “pillar” of Filipino cultural values that refers to viewing the “self-in-the-other”<sup>1</sup>—I ask, how does one research communities they have deep and personal stakes in without reproducing the existing “fissures and hierarchies of power” existing in Filipinx American studies?<sup>2</sup> Drawing from personal experiences of navigating research-participant conflict during fieldwork, I center this methodological question to interrogate the affective assumptions of sameness and unity amongst Fil-Ams in diaspora and to address what responsibilities we might have as Fil-Am feminist researchers to challenge such assumptions in our research and writing. In order to center women’s complex lived experiences and disrupt positivist, static representations of Filipinx American diaspora, *kapwa* must be reimagined as a critical standpoint and “sameness” de-centered through the feminist methodological tool of critical self-reflection.

## INTRODUCTION

I first learned to identify sameness through my deep familiarity

<sup>1</sup> Reyes, Jeremiah, “Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics.” *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 149.

<sup>2</sup> Bonus, Rick and Antonio Tiongson (Eds.), *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022)

with difference. I understood my brownness as defined by being neither White or Black, and that “Filipino” was perceived as not Asian “enough” since “Asian” really meant Chinese or Japanese (according to my predominantly White friends and classmates). Difference became the default state of existence as I grew up in the Chicago suburbs, and it seemed to determine the ways in which I was oriented—distanced—from those around me. On the other hand, sameness came in the form of recognition: recognizing another Filipino American family across the restaurant, or hearing a familiar accent that I learned to solely associate with my parents and lola who lived with us. On most occasions, my recognition was met with their own: we saw each other, or perhaps, we felt that we saw ourselves in each other. During my time at graduate school, I would learn that this feeling of recognition amongst other Filipinos was called *kapwa*. While these moments of experiencing sameness felt few and far in between, they held deep emotional components and spoke a great deal about how Filipinx<sup>3</sup> Americans’ search for sameness is rooted in hopes of countering internal struggles of difference and disconnection. I see the same patterns of yearning for recognition across generations, and I begin a discussion on *kapwa* as a Filipina American researcher with my personal memories as a way to reflect on how our everyday emotions and longings shape the fields we step in and out of as researchers.

Although she was still too young to fully grapple with the meanings of ethnic identity and sameness, one of my favorite stories about my niece Ada is when she was two years old and saw a Filipino family on a beach in South Carolina while vacationing with my sister-in-law’s family. Ada’s dad (my second older brother) is a second-generation Filipino American like myself; his wife is a White American who grew up outside of Columbus, Ohio, where they currently live. Despite Ada’s attempts to rebel against any rules put in place by my brother, she shares his dark brown-black hair, round brown eyes, tan complexion, and endless excited energy with a good helping of stubbornness (traits my mom insists come from her Waray ancestry). Their

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<sup>3</sup> I use variations of the term Filipino/Filipino American (i.e. “Filipina” or “Filipinx”). “Filipino” is used when I am talking generally about culture, or when referring to texts that intentionally used “Filipino.” “Filipinx” is always paired with “Americans” as a gender-neutral way of referring to people in the United States diaspora, and “Filipina” (or Pinay) when I’m referring to a self-identifying woman of Filipino descent.

small town of Lancaster is predominantly White, conservative, and working- to middle-class, with their family being the only non-White/interracial family in their neighborhood. This all goes to show that my niece had (and has) very little exposure to other non-White children such as herself, outside of her visits to Illinois where her Filipino American relatives live.

For this reason, my sister-in-law—a very caring woman who always embraced our family’s cultural differences with compassion—was both surprised and humored when Ada ran to a group of brown people on the beach in South Carolina, inserting herself into their afternoon picnic with such ease and comfort. “I was a little mortified,” she said with laughter. “We had no idea who they were, and then some random little girl just runs up to them thinking she knows them, like that’s her family!” It wasn’t until my brother and his wife spoke to the other family that they learned they were also, in fact, Filipino Americans. Ada’s seemingly intuitive comfort around other Filipinos garnered amusement, adoration, and an unanticipated moment of cultural camaraderie on the beach. Upon hearing this story at the kitchen table, my mom and I laughed as she said, “I can’t believe she recognized that they were Filipino! She must have thought that because they looked like us, she knew them.” After the laughter died down my mom continued to say, “I guess that’s a pretty typical Filipino thing though... always saying ‘hi’ even if we don’t know each other. I’m just surprised she recognized that already.”

I was also familiar with the unspoken practice of giving a smile, hello, or “Are you Filipino?” when coming across another Fil-Am in the store, classroom, or non-family social gathering. I came to intellectualize this cultural characteristic after learning about *kapwa*, a concept popularized by psychologist Virgilio Enriquez in the 1970s to explain Filipinos’ interpersonal behaviors as rooted in an internal view of another not as separate from ourselves, but connected through a “shared self.” Similar to my niece, I remember the first time I saw another Fil-Am girl in my predominantly white elementary school in the Chicago suburbs and the excitement I felt when realizing I wasn’t the only Filipino at our school. I immediately approached her during recess and asked if she wanted to be friends. During our first playdate her mom made us *lumpia* and *torta*; for some reason, this is the only part of the hours spent together I can actually

remember. However, after my mom picked me up, met Marie's mom, and drove us back to our house she told me that Marie seemed like a nice girl, but she wasn't sure if we should keep being friends outside of school. Upset and confused, I asked her why: "Her family is different from ours," she explained. Although I still couldn't understand my mom's desire to distance her family from theirs, she remained steadfast in her decision. For reasons of her own, my mother had assumptions about our differences that ended the playdates with Marie.

The memory of hearing about Ada's adorable mistake and the one of my last playdates with Marie now exist in juxtaposition, illuminating the dark underbelly of 'typical' Filipino behavior and the assumptions of community, sameness, and unity that comes with it. On the one hand, it's 'typical' – and perhaps even expected – for complete strangers to warmly embrace the other as a friend, or to at least acknowledge each other as a fellow member of the Filipino American diaspora. In private, however, unspoken divisions rooted in classism, colorism, homophobia, etc. highlight the ways in which ethnic-sameness is complicated by the internalization of Western colonialism and its practices for enforcing (dis)empowerment. Put simply: Filipino cultural values, such as *kapwa*, are rooted in a strong belief in community, but when left unchallenged, they can also be the source of intra-community conflict. Without a critical interrogation of what *kapwa* actually means or looks like in practice, solutions for healing from histories of colonization, assimilation, and the power-laden hierarchies within the Filipino American diaspora are limited.

In this article I explore and challenge the assumptions of *kapwa* in our daily lives and in the field as Filipinx American researchers. My ultimate goal is to propose a new understanding of *kapwa* outside of the traditional frameworks of Filipino Psychology or Filipino Virtue Ethics, which treat *kapwa* as a defining characteristic of a homogenously defined Filipino identity. Rather, I draw from feminist methodologies to conceptualize *kapwa* as a critical positioning that de-centers sameness when working with other Filipina American women. Such a methodology, I argue, requires deep introspection and an interrogation of what Philippine personhood really entails.

In this discussion I conduct a literature review of *kapwa* and detail their contributions and limitations; I then bring

in scholarship on feminist methodologies that call for critical self-reflection and standpoint epistemologies. As I discuss in the literature review, feminist theory directly challenges the universality of knowledge production (which I argue is present in the literature on *kapwa*), and can disrupt assumptions of sameness in the field. Following this trajectory and the actions of feminist researchers before me, I place myself under a speculative scope as I reflect on a personal experience of conflict with a research participant that was in large part caused by my internalized assumptions of sameness based on an imagined notion of Filipina American womanhood. By discussing my own methodological mistakes, I hope to exemplify how intentional research methods are central to producing innovative scholarship that highlights the complexities of Filipinx American identity and the field.

I began to think more critically about the implications of *kapwa*, community, and diaspora when conducting fieldwork for my dissertation on the Filipina American diaspora in Chicago, a project deeply rooted at the intersection of Asian American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. Overall, I worry about the dangerous implications that 'sameness' has when conducting feminist research in Filipinx American Studies, specifically the danger of replicating an over-romanticized view of a diasporic community that does not always challenge power dynamics in the field, but simply masks it. This would be the complete opposite of what I originally set out to do in my research on Filipina American women in the Chicago metro area — an ethnic, gendered, and geographical community that I identify as belonging to. However, one's belongingness to the communities they research can become an assumption when there is not enough critical interrogation on how community is defined in the first place. These assumptions can lead to the reproduction of systemic violence and further marginalize or exploit the women that I interact with and analyze — women that I may see myself as similar to, but whose own intersectional identities and life experiences make them inherently different than me.

As an "intimate insider,"<sup>4</sup> how do I translate my belongingness to that community as I step into the role as a researcher? Cultural studies scholar Jodie Taylor describes the interrelation dynamics between a researcher and those they research when

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<sup>4</sup>Jodie Taylor, "The Intimate Insider: Negotiating the Ethics of Friendship When Doing Insider Research," *Qualitative Research*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2011): 3-22.

friendship becomes a factor shaping fieldwork, particularly when it comes to “the liberties that friends take with each other; their sometimes insightful gazes; their sometimes myopic familiarity; their choices between honesty and flattery; and their levels of reciprocity among other things.”<sup>5</sup> What boundaries should be made as to not overly blur the lines between myself and my interviewees, subsequently masking the always-existing power dynamics that are at play in the field? How can I apply feminist methodologies in “the field” when that field becomes the Filipina American diaspora—a concept, feeling, and history rather than a physical location?

When conducting interviews with other second-generation Filipina American women in the Chicago metro area, I had to ask myself, “What does an anti-racist, feminist methodology look like when conducting research that I see myself intimately implicated in?” I used to believe that by sharing an identity with those I wrote about, I could more easily conduct feminist research the “right” way. Our shared identity would allow me to speak with them, not for them; I wouldn’t just be representing their stories, but our stories. Perhaps, I thought, sharing an identity with my participants would prevent me from playing the same God Trick produced by Whiteness within the academy—my sameness would protect me from being a voyeuristic outsider peeping into marginalized communities without representing them in nuanced, multidimensional ways.<sup>6</sup>

However, during the first few weeks of conducting interviews I quickly learned that having an (assumed) shared identity presented an even more urgent need to recognize my responsibility as a researcher producing scholarship on an already under-represented community; I needed to pay even closer attention to the ways in which power is always at play when conducting interviews, even when bonding over shared experiences with sexism, racism, and immigrant family life veiled those power dynamics. Furthermore, I learned that an important part of conducting feminist research on one’s own community requires a conscious introspection of any internalized beliefs of a homogenous dias-

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, “The Intimate Insider,” 4.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599; Juanita Sundberg, “Masculinist Epistemologies and the Politics of Fieldwork in Latin Americanist Geography,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2003): 180–190.

poric identity.

### DEMYSTIFYING THE FILIPINO ORIENTATION & SIKOLOHIYANG PILIPINO

In recent years, scholars writing in and on the field of Filipinx American Studies have increasingly challenged homogenous understandings of “Filipino”/x American identity, or what American studies scholar Martin Manalansan refers to as “Philippine peoplehood.”<sup>7</sup> According to Manalansan, this new wave of scholars signals the “Filipino turn” in Asian American studies, as well as a rising critical mass of Filipinx American activist and artists who share a strong commitment to and investment in the project of Filipinx American Studies.<sup>8</sup> However, Manalansan warns against treating this Filipino turn as simply a cause for celebration and instead urges scholars to use this as “an occasion to grapple with existing intellectual fissures and structural hierarchies that have animated and continue to animate the field.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when challenging *hiya*—another cultural value in Filipino Virtue Ethics (FVE) that roughly translates to social shame or guilt—Manalansan argues that any monolithic notion of a national character or identity becomes “a particularly ‘Filipino’ problematic character flaw, an ingredient for a putative national personality trait, and a collective feeling caused by some deficiency or lack.”<sup>10</sup> I understand this “lack” or “deficiency” as related to displacement in a postcolonial landscape, both in the Philippines and in diaspora. However, rather than completely doing away with *hiya*, or any other term that seeks to encapsulate the “meaning” of Philippine peoplehood, Manalansan urges us to think of a more productive use of such terms, one that involves “a sensitivity to agents and contexts.”<sup>11</sup> Following this epistemological approach allows me to reflect on memories of my niece, my childhood classmate, my mom, and my present-day research through a more inquisitive lens that reframes *kapwa* as an emotional positioning, and not a cultural value. *Kapwa* can therefore be more accurately described as a search for oneself in another in response to feelings of isolation, confusion, and disconnection from one’s Filip-

<sup>7</sup> Martin Manalansan, “Unpacking *Hiya*: (Trans)national ‘Traits’ and the (Un)making of Filipinxness” in *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation*, edited by Rick Bonus and Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. (pp. 362-369, New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 362.

<sup>8</sup> Bonus and Tiongson, “Filipinx American Critique: An Introduction” in *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation*, edited by Rick Bonus and Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 11.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>10</sup> Manalansan, “Unpacking *Hiya*,” 364.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 367.

inx/o/a identity.

Following this trajectory, my present analysis of *kapwa* and its limitations is meant to highlight the need for Filipinx American studies to think deeper about our approach to conducting research on and in diaspora, beginning with the work of feminist researchers whose innovative methodologies disrupted masculinist practices across disciplines. While Filipinx American studies is becoming increasingly intersectional and transnational, scholarship concerning the Filipino American diaspora and history often engage with gender in relation to labor (i.e., the feminization and exploitation of overseas Filipino workers) or roles in a heteropatriarchal family (i.e. mothers as guardians of their children), but not always as a methodological and epistemological lens that calls for the critical self-reflection of researchers ourselves.

In contrast to Manalansan's call for an interrogation of Philippine Peoplehood, the dominating literature surrounding *kapwa* has not taken a critical positioning towards the assumption of sameness. I first learned about *loób* and *kapwa* when conducting research on Filipino American Postcolonial Studies, which was also one of my first introductions to work on the Filipinx American diaspora. The oversimplified English translation of *kapwa* ("another person") does not adequately describe the cultural significance of the term. In more non-academic spaces, *kapwa* has increasingly become a popular theme in Filipinx American social media platforms, branding, and marketing. For Filipinx American content creators on platforms such as Instagram, the concept of *kapwa* is represented as a unique feature of Filipino American community practices and diasporic identity that sets us apart from other Asian Americans. *Loób* refers to one's "relational will" towards another, or *kapwa*. When in practice, *kapwa* can be more accurately understood as a feeling of an inseparable, spiritual connection to others in the community. In order to better grasp how Filipinx Americans engage with *kapwa* (as a phrase, conscious practice, or behavior), we must first understand the historical and institutional roots from which the concept emerged.

Although *kapwa* first emerged during pre-Spanish colonization, the most common understandings of *kapwa* are based

on Virgilio Enriquez's construction of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, or Filipino Psychology, which "is anchored on Filipino thought and experience as understood from a Filipino perspective."<sup>12</sup> The core of Sikolohiyang Pilipino is kapwa and it is used to describe "the Filipino personality" as always shaped by interpersonal values and social interactions. Similarly, Filipino Virtue Ethics (developed out of a Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective) interprets kapwa as "together with the person" and is positioned as one of the foundational pillars that aims to support a "special collection of virtues dedicated to the strengthening and preserving human relationships" in Filipino culture.<sup>13</sup>

After receiving his master's and doctoral degrees in Psychology from Northwestern University, Enriquez returned to the Philippines in 1971 with the goal of decolonizing Western psychology that led to "the native Filipino invariably [suffering] from the comparison [to American categories and standards] in not too subtle attempts to put forward Western behavior patterns as models for the Filipino." Alternatively, Sikolohiyang Pilipino focuses on "identity and national consciousness, social awareness and involvement, psychology of language and culture, and applications and bases of Filipino psychology in health practices, agriculture, art, mass media, religion" and more.<sup>14</sup> Enriquez also drew from indigenous techniques of healing, religion, politics, and more to conceptualize the Filipino Orientation of Sikolohiyang Pilipino.<sup>15</sup>

According to Enriquez, while Filipino behavior has been studied and interpreted by Western institutions for centuries, these interpretations are always-already informed by histories of domination and have either reinforced Orientalist notions of Filipino infantilization or ignored the unique cultural factors in the Philippines that creates the Filipino Orientation. Therefore, the Filipino Orientation stresses an "indigenization from within" that is "based on assessing historical and socio-cultural realities, understanding the local language, unraveling Filipino characteristics, and explaining them through the eyes of the native Filipi-

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<sup>12</sup>Rogelia Pe-Pua and Elizabeth Protacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2000): 2.

<sup>13</sup>Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa : An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 149, 151; Virgilio G. Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>14</sup>Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino," 53

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 53.

no.”<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Jeremiah Reyes wrote about Filipino Virtue Ethics (FVE) as a “revised interpretation” of twentieth century American scholarship produced on Filipino values. Such an interpretation was necessary after American social scientists observed Filipino behavior without a deeper cultural and historical understanding of the Philippines. For example, American anthropologist, Frank Lynch, coined the term “smooth interpersonal relationships” when describing “the greatest value of Filipino culture.”<sup>17</sup> However, Lynch’s seemingly positive evaluation of Filipino culture and behavior exemplifies the historically White-centricity of Western social sciences and the reproduction of colonialist perspectives of Filipino people as willing subjects of Western colonization whose presumed submissiveness and docility created harmonious relationships between Filipinos and their colonial aggressors. Reyes instead points to the ways in which Filipino cultural values are a product of Southeast Asian tribal and animist traditions and the traditions of Spanish colonial culture that lasted for over 300 years. In contrast to Enriquez, however, Reyes does not place a critical lens on Western colonialism, which can be noted through his tendency to refer to Spanish colonizers as passing on their “traditions” to the native Filipinos, and not violently erasing the existing cultures of the islands and replacing it with their own religious, educational, and political institutions that disrupted family and community networks.

The persistence of kapwa in and outside of scholarly spaces illustrates the impact of Enriquez’s work nearly fifty years after Sikolohiyang Pilipino was established, and I want to acknowledge the importance and power of studying the emotive processes that organize our interpersonal connection and identity-formation, something that I think both Enriquez and Reyes aim to do in at least some ways.<sup>18</sup> However, my feminist critiques of Sikolohiyang Pilipino and FVE’s conceptualization of kapwa targets their homogenization of Filipino culture, identity, and behavior through the concept of the Filipino Orientation and a

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<sup>16</sup> Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Lynch, “Philippine values II: Social acceptance,” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1962): 89.

<sup>18</sup> In more recent years, kapwa has transcended academic borders and become increasingly popularized in Filipinx American popular culture. Filipinx American social media influencers, tattoo studios, yoga collectives, and more have used kapwa to promote themselves and their brand as dedicated to Filipino culture, traditions, and history.

reliance on “the native Filipino.” While I believe that decolonizing the social sciences and humanities to revise Orientalist constructions of Filipino culture is a necessary task, I take issue with the over-romanticizing of a “native” perspective that constructs indigeneity in universalist terms and the tendency to portray Filipinos born and/or still living in the Philippines as the only “authentic” producers of cultural knowledge.

For example, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* stresses that part of our socialization is “being sensitive to non-verbal cues, having concern for the feelings of others, being truthful but not at the expense of hurting others’ feelings” that result in an “indirect pattern of communication of Filipinos.”<sup>19</sup> However, Enriquez suggests that the Westernized Filipino is “impatient” with this mode of communication (due to their cultural detachment from the native Filipino perspective) and is therefore insensitive to such non-verbal cues. Enriquez also uses this to describe “the great cultural divide” caused by Westernized Filipinos’ elitism and apparent rejection of all things Filipino.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Westernized Filipino (such as the Filipino American) is unable to truly understand or feel *kapwa*. However, conflating Filipinx Americans’ Westernization with elitism or cultural ignorance ignores the ways that Filipinx experience identity, self, and community differently based on one’s geographic location. Using his theory of “positions in process,” ethnic studies scholar Rick Bonus argues that Filipinx identity is never singular, and that Filipinx American identity must be understood as a spatial and temporal negotiation.<sup>21</sup> The “cultural ignorance” and disconnection Enriquez critiques are not voluntary; rather, they are the direct products of socio-emotional pressures of assimilating to the dominant culture, intergenerational trauma, and internalized perceptions of Filipino inferiority/Western superiority.

Additionally, Filipino Psychology and FVE are predominantly male-dominated and adopt a gender-neutral approach when defining *kapwa* as a racial or ethnic construct. In reality, identity is an intersectional experience shaped by one’s gender, socio-economic class, geographical positioning and more. While colonization negatively impacted all Filipinos, the introduction of

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<sup>19</sup> Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, “*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*,” 56.

<sup>20</sup> Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 7.

Western heteropatriarchy was particularly damaging for women and girls who occupied a “displaced position” as second-class citizens in the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, I argue that the scholarship dominating conversations about kapwa are illustrative of how ethnic-sameness is treated as the organizing category for understanding Filipino interpersonal behaviors and cultural norms, while ignoring the ways in which women and girls experience Filipino culture as subjects of heteropatriarchy.

In the Filipino American diaspora, Filipina immigrant women and their contributions to uplifting Filipino culture in the United States have been recorded as directly tied to their roles as dutiful wives and attentive mothers who raise children in accordance to “respectable” Filipino behavior.<sup>23</sup> As feminist scholars have showcased, however, Filipina American girls continue to experience higher pressures to behave in respectable manners through hyper-surveillance of their sexuality and expectations to silently obey their parents’ orders. Such gendered disparities in parenting is one of the most persistent ways that Filipino immigrants have countered Orientalist notions of Filipina women’s alleged hypersexuality and immorality.<sup>24</sup> In turn, women and girls are expected to carry quite a heavy load when it comes to not only cultural preservation, but ethnic representation when faced with the threats of Western colonialism and White supremacy. Therefore, without a critical understanding of how masculinist standpoints dominate narratives of the Filipino orientation and experience, methodological approaches to conducting research and understandings of kapwa fail to adequately and accurately represent women’s experiences in diaspora.

### **POSITIONALITY AND THE GOD TRICK: FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS INTO POSITIVIST METHODOLOGIES**

Feminist scholars have developed their own set of methodologies to challenge the heteropatriarchal gaze and positivism that dominated research in the humanities and social sciences; while traditional schools of thinking in psychology favor measur-

<sup>22</sup> Lou Collette S. Felipe, “The Relationship of Colonial Mentality with Filipina American Experiences with Racism and Sexism,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2016): 25.

<sup>23</sup> Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans. A Pictorial Essay / 1763-Circa-1963* (Seattle: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983), 147.

<sup>24</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 157.

able, quantitative data to understand behavior, feminists have promoted qualitative methods. Since the 1980s, feminists collaborated, debated, and disagreed as they attempted to create a new set of ethical research practices that could produce “authentic” feminist scholarship, or scholarship that was produced by women and for women with the intention of challenging the masculinist and positivist representations of The Human Experience, a universalist construction of human relations and society through the perspective of a select few.<sup>25</sup> I argue that drawing from these interventions can disrupt the male-dominated narratives and methodologies surrounding Filipino culture and kapwa.

Urban planning and policy scholar Shirley Hune explains, “In Asian American Studies, race is the organizing category and the master narrative remains male-centered. Hence, the historical significance of women is rendered invisible when their lives, interests, and activities are subsumed within or considered to be the same as those of men.”<sup>26</sup> In the same trajectory, other anti-racist feminists developed their own methods for conducting ethical research by engaging with an intersectional lens that not only addressed the gendering, racialization, and sexualization that informed the positions of their research subjects, but also encouraged researchers themselves to reflect on how their intersectional identities rearranged the centers and margins of the communities they were working with and within.<sup>27</sup> Feminist geographers in particular challenged the very notion of “the field” in fieldwork as they drew from feminist methodologies as a tool for dismantling the assumptions that the researcher and researched are inherently separate (opposite), and that the field is somewhere “over there” or “back then,” rather than being in the here and now.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, feminist interventions in conducting fieldwork have gone great lengths to reinvent the ways in which traditionally White, masculinist disciplines produce scholarship on marginalized communities, disavowing the God Trick that

<sup>25</sup> Melissa R. Gilbert, “The Politics of Location: Doing Feminist Research at ‘Home,’” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 90–96.

<sup>26</sup> Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura (Eds.), *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, “Coloring the Field: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Fieldwork,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 73–80.

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Hyndman, “The Field as Here and Now, Not There and Then,” *Geographical Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (2001): 262–272; Cindi Katz, “Playing the Field: Question of Fieldwork in Geography,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 67–72; Mimi E. Kim, “Anti-Carceral Feminism: The Contradictions of Progress and the Possibilities of Counter-Hegemonic Struggle,” *Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2020): 309–326.

attempted to produce “authentic” knowledge about already real people, systems, and socio-political networks.<sup>29</sup> According to Haraway, the God Trick signified the ways in which the social sciences, dominated by masculinist perspectives, attempted to create universal truths regarding the human experience without any consideration of how their power and privilege through gender, race, and class skewed their world view. The theory of situated knowledges, however, helped open up epistemological spaces for the voices and perspectives of women of color researchers who invested in feminist scholarship as a way to represent the marginalized communities they came from. Such a return, however, requires “the emotionally laborious weighing of accountability for kin and other relations”<sup>30</sup> when the researcher’s presence transforms “home” into the field. Anthropology scholar Dada Docot’s examination of the conflicts and crises of returning to her hometown of Nabua in the Philippines as an expat and researcher calls into question the meanings of home, belongingness, and ultimately, power. Such questions are at the root of feminist methodologies, and can offer a new and critical perspective to approaching ethnographic research in Filipinx American studies not only by disrupting masculinist approaches to conceptualizing ethnic identity, but by focusing on the responsibility of researchers to reflect on the complex, power-laden relationships between researchers and research subjects.

My feminist critiques of Sikolohiyang Pilipino’s or Filipino Virtue Ethics’ theorization of kapwa are not meant to act as a distraction from my own assumptions of sameness based on a shared ethnic identity. In fact, it was feminist scholar Donna Haraway herself who cautioned feminists from assuming that they were safe from playing the God Trick simply because they were women conducting research on other women.<sup>31</sup> Rather, my personal reflections of conducting fieldwork aim to show that any person is capable of falling into the comforting assumptions of sameness (be it race, ethnicity, gender, or age), and that such slippages are symptoms of larger problems or realities: the minoritized presence of Filipinx American Studies in Asian American

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<sup>29</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

<sup>30</sup> Dada Docot, “Negative Productions during Fieldwork in the Hometown,” *GeoHumanities*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 308.

<sup>31</sup> Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 580.

Studies; the newness of Filipinx American Studies as separate from Philippines Studies; and the struggles that Filipinx American women and nonheteronormative folks face when attempting to find accessible representations of their unique experiences in diaspora. Therefore, without a critical feminist understanding of the intersectionality of Filipino culture and diaspora, such shortcomings are reincarnated through everyday practices of kapwa and can create damaging interpersonal environments when reimagining psychological models of behavior, conducting Filipinx American fieldwork, and building community.

In essence, I hope to convey the notion that kapwa is less of a reality for Filipinx Americans, and more symbolic of how minoritized groups in the United States engage in practices of (be)longing, or the acts of longing to belong to a larger group and place.<sup>32</sup> My experiences when conducting fieldwork articulate those same longings, and call attention to the dire need of feminist interventions into how we understand and practice kapwa. As I shared in my opening vignette, as a Pinay<sup>33</sup> I often-times view myself and other Pinays as having a shared identity, which fed into my belief that I am naturally more fit than someone outside of our ethnic and gender communities to conduct feminist research on our experiences. However, as educator and scholar Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales suggests, we must work towards community-building through a critical Pinayist standpoint that pushes us to “check [ourselves] and how [we] wish to seek out and keep allegiances with allies, including each other.”<sup>34</sup> Following Tintiangco-Cubales’s call for a critical Pinayist standpoint, I’ve learned that assumptions about a community without an internal interrogation of what community actually means and looks like when conducting field work may cause us, as Peminist scholars, to run the risk of reinforcing the fissures and hierarchies in Filipinx American studies rather than challenging them.

In this article, I place my own assumptions of community and diasporic connectivity under an analytical microscope as (1) an example of the dangers of treating kapwa as an inherent Filipinx trait or virtue, and (2) a launching point from which

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<sup>32</sup> Amy Carillo Rowe, “Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation,” *Journal of the National Women’s Studies Association*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2005), 15-46.

<sup>33</sup> Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and other Peminist scholars have used the term “Pinay” to refer to the gendered positioning of Filipina women in the United States. Peminism/Pinayism refers to Filipina American feminism. See Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and Jocyl Sacramento, “Practicing Pinayist Pedagogy,” *Amerasia*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2009): 179-187.

<sup>34</sup> Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, “Pinayism” in *Pinay Power: Theorizing the Filipina/American Experience*, edited by Melinda L. De Jesús (New York: Routledge, 2005), 124.

new conversations surrounding feminist methodologies in Filipinx American fieldwork can ensue. As powerful of a sensation kapwa can be, particularly for those who very rarely had conversations with others who had similar gendered experiences as an ethnic minority, this was also where I found the limitations and dangers of kapwa when specific boundaries weren't kept in place. Although we emotionally resonated with similar experiences, cultural norms, and colloquialisms, my subconscious temptation to find sameness in these conversations also led to the assumption of sameness. While I believed my intentions to be altruistic and for the sake of creating a community with those involved in the project, such assumptions also highlight the limitations of imagining a diasporic community based on sameness and camaraderie. Rather than regarding such limitations—and my own experience of navigating through conflict in the field—as an obstacle in the search for writing about diasporic community, I hope to shed light on the importance of embracing moments of difference, contention, and confusion when exploring new terrains of Filipinx American identity and diaspora.

#### **RETHINKING “THE FIELD” & METHODOLOGY**

Recruiting research participants in the middle of a pandemic inevitably changed the geographical and conceptual terrains of what is considered “the field,” and therefore directly altered the ways I maneuvered through the formative stages of fieldwork. Rather than physically traveling to Chicago to meet with participants in person, sit in on meetings organized by Filipina American clubs, or attend social events with the participants and their organizations, I arranged Zoom meetings or socially-distanced interviews in outdoor coffee shops in neighborhoods such as Hyde Park, Bridgeport, and Lakeview. However, in my research, I position these virtual spaces and short windows of moments as “the field” by use of theories written on emotional geographies, ethnic belonging, and imagined communities.

Scholars in the field of Emotional Geographies contend that our emotions directly shape how we experience spaces, and that “We live in worlds of pain or of pleasure; emotional environs that we sense can expand or contract in response to our experience of events—though there is rarely a clear or consistent sense of simple “cause” and “affect,” further reiterating the ways

in which emotion creates immaterial spaces that “can clearly alter the way the world is for us, affecting our sense of time as well as space. Our sense of who and what we are is continually (re)shaped by how we feel.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, theories on Asian American ethnic enclaves draw from anthropological concepts of primordialism and instrumentalism in immigrant communities, the former explaining immigrant-ethnic cohesion in a host country as rooted in biological and ancestral sameness because of their origins, whereas instrumentalism typically explains ethnic cohesion as more of a choice dictated by shared goals and interests.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, Benedict Anderson’s oft-cited theory of “imagined communities” continues to inform the ways in which scholars conceptualize national belonging as more of an intellectual, imaginative, and emotional process than a geographically determined one. For Anderson, “[The community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” further explaining the characteristics of being imaginative because the “finite, if elastic, boundaries” of a community are shaped by the personalized image constructed by different members, therefore creating multiple definitions and boundaries of that community occurring all at once yet in the same “space.”

<sup>37</sup> The emotional and reflective conversations held with my Filipina American interviewees, paired with my own positioning as a Filipina American who grew up in similar circumstances, created an immaterial diasporic space in which a type of imagined community was fostered. Discussing similar memories and shared feelings created a space that challenged the notion of fieldwork as geographically rooted, and instead introduced an emotional terrain in which we all could step into and explore.

The women in my study were all second-generation Filipina Americans born and/or raised in the Chicago metro area. I met several of them through Filipino/a/x American organizations and clubs based in Chicago, while others I met through word of mouth—posting electronic flyers on my social media

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<sup>35</sup> Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, “Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies,” *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2004): 524.

<sup>36</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 4-5.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 6-7.

pages, asking friends to pass on my information to anyone who would fit recruitment criteria for my research. Within two weeks, I quickly accumulated almost fifteen volunteers who all expressed interest in talking about their experiences as Filipina American women and daughters of immigrants. The virtual and distanced interviews I conducted and the virtual events I attended were all tied together through their feelings of belonging to a gendered and ethnic community that they felt was separate from the Filipino American community at large because they were women. Comments were often made that signaled participants' identification with me as a part of their imagined Filipina American community as they would say things like, "Oh, you know how Filipino moms are..." or "You know Filipina titas (aunties), they all like tsismis (gossip)." One of my favorite interactions with a participant was when she talked about her past relationships with men, referring to them as "basura (trash) boys." This colloquial use of "trash" in the contemporary English language to describe her past partners—one she assumed I'd be familiar with because of my age—was translated to Tagalog when used in conversation with me. Even though neither one of us spoke Tagalog fluently, we both knew exactly what she was talking about and were able to share a moment of laughter.

Our interactions created a space shaped by emotions, memories, and imaginations of gendered diasporic belonging, a space in which we each stepped into as we logged onto Zoom or sat six feet apart with masks on at a coffee shop. The more I listened to them talk about their experiences—and we found that we shared many of them—the more our imagined diasporic community grew and the more the field developed around us and from us, momentarily creating what felt like kapwa. However, as my experience with one participant in particular revealed, the feelings of kapwa are temporal and subjectively experienced: what may have been a positive experience for me ended up as an emotionally triggering one for her. It is through my first experience with confrontation in the field that I learned more about the meaning of conducting feminist fieldwork, building community, and seeking connection in the Filipinx American diaspora.

### **THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF KAPWA THROUGH CONFLICT IN THE FIELD**

In August 2020, I sat at the dining table in my apartment with my open laptop and notepad, ready to jot down any memora-

ble quotes and observations to be used in the dissertation. As I launched the Zoom meeting room designated for interviews, I reviewed my short list of opening questions to get our conversation going: did you grow up around other Filipinx Americans? How was culture talked about in your household? When and why did your parents immigrate to the United States? Sam\* was one of the first women who responded to my call for participants after receiving a flyer through the Filipino American Historical Society's (FANHS) listserv. It should be noted that I do not use her real name, provide any personal information, nor do I discuss any specific interview materials gathered during our conversations. I draw from my experiences with Sam to further examine the politics of *kapwa* in the field, but not to reveal any sensitive information regarding her personal experiences that were shared with me during the conversations.

Much like the other participants, Sam sent me an email briefly explaining her participation in FANHS and expressed her interest in getting involved in the project. She briefly described her upbringing as a second-generation Filipina American in a Chicago suburb about an hour from where I grew up, although for several years now she had been living out of state for school and work. In her message, Sam wrote about her excitement to talk about her experiences because she felt that that “more representation of Filipina Americans’ experiences need to be shared.” After scheduling a time to meet, I sent Sam a more detailed description of the project—its goals, focuses, and methodological scope. I included a list of the general, open-ended questions I’d ask in the interviews, but clarified that it would be mostly a conversation that could go in any direction that she as the participant would like it to go. Because I was exempt from IRB approval, I was not required to obtain written consent, although I received recorded, verbal consent indicating that they understood that if the topics became too sensitive or emotionally difficult for them, they had the right to refuse to answer a question, end the interview at any point, and say things off record that would be left out of the dissertation. Once she acknowledged and accepted these terms, I began the interview: “tell me about yourself.”

I could immediately tell that Sam was highly intelligent and not afraid of voicing her opinions or expressing her emotions. There were very rarely (if any) lulls in our conversations as we seemed to swiftly move from one topic to another as she let her

stories of high school and college friends, her immigrant parents, and relationship with her brother flow so freely. Other than a few words of acknowledgment, I was almost completely silent for the first twenty or so minutes, giving her the space to take things in the direction she wanted and allowing myself to gauge her energy and adjust to her pace. As her nerves seemed to calm down and she began asking questions about myself and my own up-bringing, I noticed a shift in our dynamic. We became much more conversational, transitioning into more of a back and forth dialogue as we compared and contrasted the neighborhoods and schools we grew up in. I then asked Sam the same question I ask all participants: how did you come to learn about your identity as a Filipina? In the interviews before and after this one, participants had a tendency to refer to their relationships with their immigrant parents (usually their moms who they were closest to) who passed down cultural values and shared family histories. Similarly, Sam talked about the close relationship that she and her younger brother had with their mom who was a Filipina immigrant. Soon after, however, she began talking about the contentious relationship she had with her dad while growing up. As she seemed to get deeper into the memories of her childhood, Sam's pace began to speed up again as she shared memories of an immigrant household affected by alcoholism, domestic disputes, violence, the trauma of being sexually abused by a family friend, and the deep-seated pain of feeling abandoned by her mother, who she felt didn't protect her and brother enough.

As I tried to process Sam's pain and remember all the training I received in my graduate methodologies courses, I felt my own emotions and memories of a similar past come flooding in. I told her that I understood the confusion she must have felt from having a "close knit" family that was also the source of a lot her pain and trauma. I also mentioned to her that, unfortunately, these were common occurrences in Filipino American families. Some theorists explain the common occurrence of domestic violence as a result of Western colonialism and the forced implementation of Eurocentric gender roles organized by heteropatriarchal domination (Espiritu, 1997, p. 13), while others explain issues with mental health and substance abuse amongst Filipino Americans as symptoms of colonial mentality.<sup>38</sup> I wanted

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<sup>38</sup> E.J.R. David and Sumie Okazaki, "Activation and Automaticity of Colonial Mentality," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2010): 850-887.

her to know that she wasn't alone in this trauma, that I also grew up in a household where yelling, physical fights, and substance abuse deeply shaped my experiences as a child and adolescent. However, my responses remained vague and non-specific as I found myself tiptoeing around the unspoken expectation to share my own stories with the same detail that Sam gave me. I wasn't ready to confront my own traumas and accept that my pain and that of my families' were always-already implicated in the project. Perhaps out of panic and stress, I chose to intellectualize our feelings, treating them representative of a shared cultural issue explained by postcolonial theory and psychology. By doing so, I was able to extract myself from the surprising and uncomfortable emotive space we now found ourselves in and fall back into the role of The Researcher. However, I didn't realize that while I had the ability to "pull out," Sam was stuck, and unready to make an intellectual pivot when remembering her traumas. As I made the split-second call to take this turn away from my own discomfort and anxiety, I unknowingly exercised my power as a researcher in a way that prioritized my emotions above hers.

Although the rapid pace of our conversations made it difficult, I did my best to check in on how she was feeling, asking her if she would like to stop to take a breather before continuing on. At the end of our hour and a half long conversation, we were both physically and emotionally spent. I thanked her again for her time, and she expressed her desire to have a follow-up discussion during my second round of interviews—she even texted me the names of a few different Filipino American podcasts that she felt I would be interested in. I felt relieved that things had gone smoothly—that I had handled such difficult moments correctly—and that she wanted to keep participating in the project. However, less than a week later, I received an email from Sam that was starkly different than our last interactions. This email was filled with panic, worry, anger, and accusations. She asked what my methodology was; what feminist scholarship I was using to support my analyses (and included a list of sources that I "should follow next time [you] interview someone"); how I was storing all of the interview materials; and asked for proof that my project was exempt from IRB approval. She asked how I would protect her identity in my research, and then made a comment that as a researcher herself, she felt that I didn't know what I was

doing. Shocked and embarrassed, I typed out my answers to her questions and apologized for any discomfort she felt during or after the interview process. I told her that it was okay if there were parts of the interview she wanted to be left out, and that there would be no animosity if she wanted to withdraw from the project all together. I never heard from her again, but ultimately decided to leave her out in an attempt to respect her feelings of discomfort and regret.

After reviewing all the steps, I took the issue to my advisor and an IRB officer at the University of Texas at Austin. Ultimately, they came to the conclusion that I did everything I was supposed to do, and that I handled the situation with as much care and caution as I could have. My advisor told me that things like this happen in the research process, and to treat it as an experience to learn from rather than fearing that it would be detrimental to my entire project. In retrospect, my fear of being seen as a faulty researcher by my advisor and the university took precedent as I relied on them to affirm my credibility. Reexamining my reaction to Sam's emails reveals how I unconsciously reassumed the position of a researcher (not just a fellow Filipina American to Sam) because I knew that I could receive some degree of institutional protection, when really what I was feeling was extreme emotional vulnerability. Not only was I worried about my dissertation, but I was also plagued with very real, raw emotions. I was shocked—even angry—by what felt like an abrupt change in her view of me. I felt the discomforts of rejection as I realized that I misinterpreted or overestimated a connection with Sam, when she did not feel the same as me. I originally left the interview feeling like we talked about such important and revelatory topics and shared such vulnerable parts of ourselves to each other. Once leaving that space, however, Sam re-oriented herself in opposition to me. To her, we were no longer two Filipina American women from Illinois who were trying to figure out our own identities through family memories, but I was the researcher and she was the researched; she was the vulnerable one while I was a threat to her safety. As the reality of our complicated relationship dawned on me, I felt my cheeks burn as I thought about the shame and embarrassment I would feel if word got back to my advisor that I wasn't good at my job—that I wasn't a trustworthy researcher and community member. The *kapwa* I thought existed through our similarities was demystified, and out of our attempts

for self-preservation, we turned on each other and retreated into our own anxieties, fears, and pain.

Now, I can reflect on our interactions and my internal reactions to her emails following the interview out of the terrains of “good” or “bad.” Rather, I see it as an outcome of a complicated web of different feelings, people, and positionalities. Even though I never intended to express the sentiments of *kapwa* in my interviews by treating the interviewees and myself as one in the same person, connected by our shared identities as Filipina Americans, the underlying assumptions of *kapwa* and Filipino American diasporic community still informed our interactions. At first, these assumptions provided a space in which we were able to share the burden of familial trauma. Once leaving, however, those assumptions made Sam feel unsafe and too vulnerable—feelings not acknowledged when *kapwa* and community are imagined. Yet, these difficult emotions and the interpersonal conflicts became equally important when exploring new definitions of the Filipinx American diaspora in my research. Although my project ended up going in a different direction that no longer included multiple narratives of Filipina Americans (including Sam’s), my experience with Sam challenged my assumptions of conducting feminist research with(in) a community I identified with, while also initiating the implementation of boundaries in the field—for my protection and the participants’.

Surface-level understandings of *kapwa* can over-emphasize unity and connection at the expense of one’s boundaries as well as mental and emotional safety. Creating boundaries—or establishing a clear sense of self as distinct from another—helps ensure the safety and care without sacrificing interpersonal connections that humanize our research. Feminist geographers Dana Cuomo and Vanessa Massaro similarly found that reconstituting and reconstructing the physical and emotional boundaries of field space was essential when researching their resident community in Philadelphia. Their reflections on conducting fieldwork in their own community, and with people they had friendly ties to as neighbors and not researchers, illustrated the much-needed yet under-discussed topic of boundary-making as a methodological practice in feminist research. In Cuomo and Massaro’s joint introduction they wrote, “While such blurred lines may be desirable for geographers looking to get ‘inside’ their research site, we found that we needed to create physical and

emotional boundaries to construct us explicitly as researchers in the eyes of our participants.”<sup>39</sup> The “blurred lines” that the geographers mention refer to the ways in which “the field” that was subject to their analytical eyes was not physically distinguishable from “home,” thus blurring the lines between insider or outsider, friend or neutral third party. Similar to Cuomo and Massaro, my emotional and physical closeness to my participants constructed “the field” as both “spatially and temporally messy and difficult to discern,” and therefore resulted in the unintentional collapsing between myself as the researcher and those that I was still researching.<sup>40</sup>

While un-blurring the lines between the researcher and participant—and exposing the assumptions of *kapwa*—may spark anxieties about producing work that leans too far into the formality of oppositional positionalities, the work of feminist geographers sets an example of how boundary-making can be one solution to nuancing Filipinx American methodological entanglements with *kapwa*. Implementing boundaries to create some degree of distance could have helped keep Sam emotionally and physically safe; boundaries would have also helped me better navigate these feelings of confusion, loss, and hurt. Furthermore, having clear set boundaries can benefit participants by allowing them to “imagine how the outside world would receive their stories,” rather than forgetting that our conversations would not necessarily remain within the immaterial walls of our temporal diasporic community.

### **KAPWA: A CRITICAL STANDPOINT & METHODOLOGY**

I do not suggest that boundary-making and *kapwa* are mutually exclusive—that researchers must choose between a consciousness of (dis)empowerment in the field or seeking a deeper connection with those we research on and for. Rather, I propose a reframing of *kapwa* as a critical standpoint that actively interrogates the meanings of community and sameness: what if *kapwa* did not begin and end with the assumption of sameness, but with a commitment to representing the diversity of diasporic identities and intra-community healing? *Kapwa* as a critical

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<sup>39</sup> Dana Cuomo and Vanessa A. Massaro, “Boundary-making in Feminist Research: New Methodologies for ‘Intimate Insiders,’” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2014): 95.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

standpoint challenges the notion that interpersonal and internal conflict are antithetical to community, and resembles Manalansan's call to embrace the "wildness" and "mess" of qualitative research in order to better obtain a "sensitive, visceral, affective, and emotional literacy about the struggles of queer subjects such as immigrants, people of color, and single mother on welfare."<sup>41</sup> Similar to Manalansan, I argue that embracing the ambiguity of identity and discomforts of conflict are crucial methods toward healing the pains of disconnection and producing work that truly represents the multifaceted and complex positionalities of the Filipinx American diaspora.

After deeply reflecting on my experience with Sam, I now believe that there is a way to un-romanticize kapwa when conducting research with—and on—other Filipina American women, while simultaneously remaining true to the feminist ideologies of practicing empathy and creating emotional connections in the field. Over the years and dozens of interviews conducted since Sam, I have learned how to take a critical positioning towards kapwa while still paying close attention to the ways in which emotions are ever-present in the field. I am careful about the pace at which our conversations move to ensure that they are in charge of what is shared and when they choose to share it; I check myself whenever I have the urge to finish their sentences, or reframe what they are saying in a way that mirrors my own internal dialogue. I also try to take better care of myself through the interview processes by listening to my body when it tells me that we are emotionally charged, exhausted, content, or confused. Like all other qualitative researchers, I will continue to face challenges in the field that make me question myself—I like this. As feminist researchers teaching and contributing to the growing field of Filipinx American Studies, we must continue to produce and practice ethical methodologies that keep our participants and ourselves safe. We must continue to challenge the assumptions of community, grieve the pains of disunity, and search for new modes and methods of finding connection and fostering kapwa.

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Manalansan, "Messy Mismeasures," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3 (2018): 492.