



Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander HERITAGE MONTH

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Team

How do you identify within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?

I identify as a 2nd generation, Filipinx American woman, who grew up in Oakland, CA.

How did you find your way to the Bay Area?

My parents immigrated to California in the 70's and 80's and first came to Oakland. My father was petitioned to come over through my paternal aunts, who were already residing in Oakland. My mother came to California on a work visa as a nurse. After they were married, they bought a house in the East Bay and raised me. My parents were later naturalized and gained US Citizenship when I was about 5 years of age.

How has your heritage shaped the person you are today?

My culture has shaped me in almost every aspect of my life. Tagalog was my first language and even though I primarily use English nowadays, I am still able to converse with not only my family members but with our community mental health clients' families. Growing up, I often felt like an outsider and it was difficult for me to understand and embrace my culture. However, when I became a music therapist and later pursued a graduate degree in counseling psychology, I started to learn more about my culture and I began to understand that I had experienced years of intergenerational trauma as a result of colonization and imperialism. Now, I am part of the Kularts organization, where I play bandurria, an instrument that was brought over to the Philippines by Spanish colonists. We play traditional Filipino music and teach young children traditional Filipino dances so they too can learn more about the culture in the diaspora.

Who are the role models or mentors that have influenced you or helped guide you?

When I graduated from grad school, I really looked to Jose Rizal, a Filipino author and revolutionary, who fought and spoke out against Spanish colonizers in the 1800s. He was known for saying (loosely translated from Tagalog) "Know history, know self. No history, no self". I also look up to Dr. Kevin Nadal, author, activist, and distinguished professor of psychology, as a Filipinx leader in the mental health field. Lastly, I cannot ignore the work of Dr. Dawn Mabalon, an activist, author, and professor of history, who co-founded Little Manila Foundation in Stockton, CA. She also documented the overlooked work of the Filipino Americans during the farm labor movement, often attributed to Cesar Chavez.

What brings you joy about your heritage and culture?

I love that food is central to building community. We have a word in Tagalog "kapwa" that encompasses the need for building a collective community and taking care of each other. I recently had the opportunity of watching the new show "Larry the Musical" a musical based off the work and story of Larry Itliong and Dr. Dawn Mabalon. It brings me so much joy to see a whole show produced and executed by an all-Filipino American cast and team. It is so exciting to showcase the artistic excellence in the Filipino American community. One quote from the musical that also brings me joy is "The heart of the Filipino is revolutionary" since time and time again, Filipinos have always found ways to maintain joy and resiliency through the heartache.



**Behavioral Health
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