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The Arts as a Bridge for Connection with Filipino-Americans:

A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

Abstract

This literature review focuses on how the arts in therapeutic practice can be utilized to enhance the well-being and mental health of the identified population of Filipino-Americans. This literature review explores the culture of origin of the Philippines, reviewing the country's history with colonization and contemporary influences, the outlook of mental health, and the quality and access to treatment. Filipino values are also examined in connection to the human condition, in addition to the roles of the arts in culture, as well as how Filipino-Americans navigate mental health challenges. This includes the culture created from the Filipino identity in the United States, as well as the experiences that rise in finding balance between the two cultures in everyday life. Data collection includes both academic and non-academic literature and other media forms to incorporate as much relevant information as possible, with key terms including Philippines, Filipino, Filipino-American, mental health in the Philippines, and art therapy. The findings revealed that the arts integrated in treatment connects to the culture's inherent attunement to nature and addresses holistic needs. The integration of the arts also presents a modality that continues on the culture's resilience through colonialism, in which an approach such as cognitive-behavioral therapy would continue the progression towards decolonization in challenging thought processes stemming from colonial mentality. As Filipinos are also naturally connected to one another in community, findings revealed that humanistic approaches would provide the most compatible care in centering on interrelationships and validating lived experiences through family and narrative therapy.

Keywords: Philippines, Filipino, Filipino-American, mental health in the Philippines, art therapy

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

The Arts as a Bridge for Connection with Filipino-Americans:

A Literature Review

Introduction

Art therapy as a modality of treatment offers a person-centered, holistic, decolonized form of healing, an approach that provides mental health care in a way that attunes to one's individual culture and worldviews. The field of mental health is built upon a foundation with oppressive roots, containing theories and practices that can be harmful to marginalized populations. Filipino-Americans are one of many marginalized groups that have struggled to properly address mental well-being, with the country of origin itself presently lacking the proper resources to address rising mental health needs (Lally et al., 2019). Filipinos are also one of the only Southeast Asian groups to have a history with colonization due to Spain and the United States, thus complicating the search for equitable mental health resources due to origins rooted in systemic oppression. How can Filipinos seek culturally-appropriate care? How can the arts in therapeutic practice be utilized to support the mental health of Filipino-Americans?

Ang sakit sa kalingkingan ay ramdan ng buong katawan, translated as “the pain in the pinky is felt throughout the whole body” is one of the many Filipino proverbs, or *salawikain*, to be passed as words of wisdom from caregiver to child. One of the main attributes of Filipino culture is the emphasis on family and community, with the constant practice of *bayanihan*, or “to unite in cooperation to achieve a common purpose.” The Philippines is one of many cultures to be based in collectivism, where the greater whole is to be placed over an individual in a society. There is comfort in constant connections with others, though there is also the loss of individuality and the pressure to conform to the expectations of the majority. In a society that emphasizes the greater collective over the individual person, people may find themselves

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

struggling to keep up, disregarding their own worth for the sake of remaining strong for the group. With this, facing mental health struggles is often dismissed and ignored as it could potentially bring shame not only on an individual, but to their family and community as well.

The findings of this literature review reveal that the arts integrated into mental health care would best address the holistic needs of Filipinos, a cultural group that has always been naturally drawn to both nature- and spiritual-based healing methods. Arts-based practices provide a form of healing that conforms to practices dating back to pre-colonial times, in which this approach contributes to the continued progression towards decolonization as the Philippines is a nation that has been resilient through periods of colonialism. Treatment methods such as cognitive-behavioral therapy would encourage the progression in challenging behaviors as a result of colonial mentality. Findings also reveal that as Filipinos are inherently connected within one another especially in help-seeking behaviors, humanistic approaches address the need for interconnectedness, where family and narrative therapy provide care in validating lived experiences and engaging with natural supports and resources.

Method

This study draws literature from a variety of sources, including scholarly articles, journals, videos, and other relevant online literature and media. The collection of data followed a process of searching for relevant material with terms and subjects relating to Filipino-Americans, mental health and mental health treatment in the Philippines, art therapy with Filipino-Americans, and Filipino culture. Mental health treatment with the BIPOC community will also be analyzed as there is limited research on art therapy with the Filipino population. The literature reviewed includes both scholarly and non-scholarly material to provide an ample amount of resources as there is a lack of literature available focusing specifically on both mental health

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

treatment and art therapy with the population of Filipino-Americans. Non-scholarly sources were utilized to gain input from voices that may not have had the opportunity to be published, but held strongly supported ideas by the target community. It is also the inclusion of voices to provide more first-hand accounts. Moreover, it was the aim to attain the most updated information on certain subjects and more contemporary concepts, such as working towards decolonization in the work and treatment. The literature was analyzed with a culturally-sensitive and critical lens. Additionally, arts-based reflection was utilized to record initial thoughts, feelings, emotions, and reactions in response to literature.

Literature Review

The Origins of the Filipino-Americans

Waves of Filipino Migration

The term “Filipino-American” refers to individuals of Filipino descent who were either born in the United States to Filipino families or have immigrated to the US and later obtained citizenship. In looking into the history of Filipinos coming into the United States, four distinct waves can be identified as time periods where groups of individuals found their way to the US for various reasons, such as for education opportunities and employment. Other reasons include the need to fulfill workforce purposes, as such that the first recorded ‘wave’ of Filipinos entering the US was when Filipino seafarers, or “Manilamen”, jumped Spanish galleon ships and landed in modern-day Morro Bay, California in 1587 (Aguilar, 2012). The second wave of Filipino immigrants consisted of *pensionados*, or sponsored students. These students were particularly provided the opportunity to study in the US by the US government following the Philippine-American War in 1899, in which the goal was to provide a more ‘civilized’ way of life through American education as the US saw the Philippines as its “little brown brother” (Rodriguez,

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

2016). The Philippine-American War ensued as the US believed that the Philippines was unable to self-rule following a long period of being under Spanish rule, assuming that another country will just take over if the US does not involve itself (US Department of State, nd). The third wave of migration occurred between the 1910s-1940s, mainly consisting of laborers and non-sponsored students, where many individuals made their way into the US for the purpose of seeking better opportunities for work, education, and the overall quality of life. (Rodriguez, 2016). The fourth official wave, starting after 1965, is identified by the increased number of professionals recruited for work, more commonly doctors, nurses, and engineers (Nadal, 2020). Nursing is one of the more notable careers that allowed a path for many to make their way into the US, in which training systems were created in the Philippines for the purpose of recruiting professionals who would end up working for less pay in the US (Choy, 2009). Other Filipinos were also able to immigrate despite not following under the ‘desired’ professions. Like many countries, a number of Filipinos continue to enter the country without proper documentation, often due to present immigration policies. Filipino communities refer to these individuals as “TNT” or *tago ng tago*, translated as “to keep on hiding” (Chan, 2010). There are many different reasons for facing challenges regarding citizenship, such as expired work visas, in which the reason to remain in the US can also vary, such as the higher quality and accessibility of health care (Chan, 2010).

The History of Colonization in the Philippines and Contemporary Influences

The Philippines is one of many nations that suffered under colonial rule for hundreds of years, though it is the only Southeast Asian country that was colonized before being given the opportunity to establish its own centralized government (Knowledgia, 2021). A majority of colonial rule was made by Spain that spanned from 1565 to 1898, where many Filipino values,

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

practices, traditions, and language remains to have traces of Spanish influence. The end of Spanish rule was followed by US colonization in 1898, determined by the conclusion of the Spanish-American War where the US obtained the Philippines as a colony through the Treaty of Paris, followed up by the Philippine-American War in 1899 (Jose, 2021). The Philippines did not gain complete independence as a nation until July 4, 1946, following the aftermath of WWII.

As Spain held the longest period of colonial rule, there are many aspects of culture that have been established in values, traditions, practices, language, and more. The three major areas of influence as a result of Spanish rule are religion, gender roles, and colonial mentality (Nadal, 2020). Language is another area, as many words derive from Spanish roots. Starting with religion, Spain introduced Christianity, in which about 80% of Filipinos identify as Roman Catholic, and about 65% of Filipinos in the US identify as Catholic (Lagman et al., 2014). Catholicism contains a set of values and practices, including but not limited to prayer, religious practices and sacraments, and going to mass (Alviar & del Prado, 2022). These traditions ultimately provide a sense of structure and support, especially when it comes to supporting more complex, external issues, such as mental health, illness, and other events that cannot be simply explained otherwise with a lack of physical evidence. Intertwining Filipino culture with Catholic faith means to have a belief system that essentially depends on God for the answers to life and support to achieve one's goal and purpose (Alviar & del Prado, 2022).

Gender roles was another aspect that had been largely impacted (Nadal, 2020). Prior to Spanish colonization, the culture of the Filipino indigenous people was largely gender-neutral, in which specified gender roles were not strict, nor was sexual orientation or language (Smith, 2022). For religion, many communities were animists, with beliefs, practices, and traditions originating in spiritual powers that come from natural elements (Villarta, 2020). Animists

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

believed that all living things in the natural world shared a soul, connection, and importance (Villarta, 2020). Pre-colonial Philippines also had a strongly matriarchal society that greatly respected women as they had the power to procreate, with power extending to the ability to heal (Alegre, 2022). Many problems were solved with the help of the *babaylan*, or a Filipino shaman that acted as a bridge between the natural world and spiritual world (Pagulayan, 2022).

Babaylans were typically women, though men could serve the role through ‘crossing’ genders, a concept that continues to support modern-day decolonization in advocating for the Filipino LGBTQ+ community (Pagulayan, 2022).

A third influence that was carried over from centuries of colonization is colonial mentality. Colonial mentality is defined as an internalized attitude of feeling culturally inferior as a result of colonization (David & Okazaki, 2006). For Filipino-Americans, colonial mentality affects a lot of internal and external beliefs. Colonial mentality continues to remain in contemporary influences in society, pertaining to many societal standards and expectations. This appears more in how one perceives themselves to others. Colorism, or the preference of lighter skin over darker, is an ideology that stems from the Spanish colonial period, where white Spaniards placed themselves above Indigenous Filipinos with darker complexions, defining societal hierarchy (Laforteza, 2022). The favor of those with fair skin remains to be a practice in modern day as evidenced by the constant advertisement of skin whitening products in the Philippines. It is also the constant presence of individuals with lighter complexions or mixed identities with European descent on mainstream media (Laforteza, 2022). Physical appearance is one of the many aspects that remain to be a negative impression in the culture. The use of the English language and viewing one's ability to speak English clearly with no presence of an accent as high intelligence was another indicator of social hierarchy (Constante, 2021). How one

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

looks and speaks would essentially act as determinants for how one is treated in Filipino society. These factors often lead to low self-esteem, which in turn, can lead to high-risk behaviors and a lower quality of mental health (Constante, 2021). From this, many issues faced by Filipinos can ultimately be traced back to a form of colonial mentality (Constante, 2021).

Acculturation and Enculturation

So et al. (2023) completed a study focusing on how Filipinos have adapted in the US across generations as a result of immigration, going in depth on how cultures shift in family dynamics according to the change in a home environment. In comparison to other Asian communities, Filipino-Americans have a rather complicated background on top of the history of colonization from the country of origin. Filipino-Americans are the only Asian-American group to experience direct influences as a result of colonization from the US and Spain, leading to a larger impact with American superiority in association with the identified population (So et al., 2023). The blend of cultures brings complex issues when it comes to the biculturalism, or the coexistence of two cultures, that Filipino-Americans may face (Montes-Alcala, 2023). The duality of cultures can also bring the struggle to find balance, especially when figuring out how one fits identity-wise. Concepts such as acculturation and enculturation are introduced to provide understanding in identity formation. Acculturation refers to the orientation to the dominant culture, in which one may adhere to their ‘American’ side to better fit within the majority (So et al., 2023). This includes adapting to American norms, where assimilation and marginalization may occur, causing one to stray away from Filipino roots to conform to the dominant culture (So et al., 2023). Those who remain close to the culture of origin may refer to individuals who assimilate as “westernized” or “Americanized”, which may cause some negative connotation in exploring identity (So et al., 2023). On the other hand, enculturation may occur, referring to the

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

process of maintaining norms of the culture of origin, such as the continued practice of Filipino traditions while residing in the US (So et al., 2023).

In a Filipino-American family, both concepts may co-exist between the generations, as such that caregivers who were immigrants may want to stay close to their roots to maintain connections to the homeland, whereas their US-born children may assimilate with peers to have a better chance in succeeding in American society (So et al., 2023). This particular example is common for many in the Filipino-American community (Nadal, 2020). Aspects may differ depending on the length of stay in the US, if there is a large Filipino presence within a community, or if a family unit is multicultural (Nadal, 2020). Contradictions within the family dynamic may also differ depending on the generations of individuals. Those who are first or second generation, or those who have more direct connections with the Philippines, may wish to retain Filipino traditions and have a desire to continue the practice of Filipino values and beliefs (So et al., 2023). In a brief comparison to American beliefs and values, Filipinos tend to be more conservative in religion, morality, and education, along with higher degrees of respect toward authority figures and the older generations (So et al., 2023). There is also a larger presence of community in the practice of collectivism, as the Philippines is a collectivist society. On the other hand, some American values include individualism, equality, progress, and assertiveness, all qualities that oppose Filipino ones (University of Portland, 2023). Here, it can be viewed how discordance may occur between members of different generations or how one chooses how they adapt to the dominant culture.

Weaving in the topic of mental health in both cultures results in varying reactions. The Philippines is a country that continues to increase access to mental health resources, in which seeking support is still a concept that is slowly becoming more accepted (Lally et al., 2019).

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

However, many continue to turn to their families, communities, and religion before seeking professional mental health care, as therapeutic services are still viewed as something that can lead to guilt or shame due to the idea of ‘getting help’ signifying weakness in oneself. In the US, although there is a stigma surrounding mental health, more resources are readily available as the practice of psychotherapy and other counseling professions have been around since the 1800s.

The Outlook of Mental Health and Mental Health Treatment in Filipino Culture

Access to Mental Health Resources in the Philippines

In connecting mental health treatment to the identified group of Filipino-Americans, it is important to acknowledge the outlook of mental health in the country of origin. It was not until 2017 when the Philippines designated a legal framework to provide access to mental health care. The Mental Health Act (Republic Act no. 11036) was recently established to increase access to comprehensive mental health services, allowing people with mental health needs and their families to have protected rights. It was found that only a small percentage of the country’s total health budget was set aside for mental health, as such that only 3-5% would be used compared to the 70% set for hospital care (Lally et al., 2019). Currently, general mental health services in the Philippines are severely underdeveloped and under-resourced, including community resources and training institutions. In a general hospital, only 1.08 beds are set for mental health needs, whereas in psychiatric hospitals, there are about 4.95 beds (Lally et al., 2019). These numbers are going by a population of 100,000 people, in which the Philippines has a population of over 100 million. Based on the latest available data, there are about 84 general hospitals with psychiatric units, 46 outpatient facilities, 4 community residential facilities, and 2 tertiary care psychiatric hospitals (World Health Organization, 2020). Many of these services are located in urban areas, mainly in the Metro Manila area. In terms of professionals, many of whom work in

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

for-profit or in private practice, there are about 1.68 mental health workers per population of 100,000, with 0.22 as psychiatrists, 0.08 as psychologists, 0.48 as social workers, 0.78 as mental health nurses, and 0.13 as other specialized mental health workers (World Health Organization, 2020). Many facilities dedicated to mental health care are often overcrowded, underfunded, and constantly face staff shortages. In terms of mental health diagnoses, reported data shows that depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia are some of the more common cases that receive treatment, though data may be inaccurate given that many cases do not end up being reported due to cultural mentality. In the latest available data, only 88 cases were reported for a population of every 100,000 people (Lally et al., 2019). In the Philippines, individuals may refrain from initially seeking help to ‘save face’, often feeling that mental health issues and seeking support may result in the loss of one’s position in society (Lally et al., 2019).

Connecting Filipino Morals and Values to the Human Condition

Nadal (2020) identifies the four core values of Filipino culture as *kapwa*, *hiya*, *utang na loob*, and *pakikisama*. *Kapwa*, or “fellow being”, refers to the idea that all individuals are intrinsically connected within one another. *Hiya*, or “shame”, refers to the idea that a person’s life goal is to represent oneself or the family in the most honorable way, ultimately avoiding shame that would embarrass the family through being successful. *Utang na loob*, or “debt of reciprocity”, refers to the assumed generosity in returning favors, often going undiscussed and expected in putting others before oneself. *Pakikisama*, or “social acceptance”, refers to the ability to get along with others in conformity, living in a way that is harmonious with the collective and avoids disagreements and conflicts (Nadal, 2020). There is also the value of *bahala na*, or “fatalistic passiveness”, more commonly known as “leaving it in God’s hands”, referring to the attitude of accepting things as they are (Nadal, 2020). These values ultimately connect back to

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

the greater community, that a person must always be mindful of the collective as opposed to just themselves.

In addition to cultural values, religion is another key factor to consider in the mental health of Filipinos. Alviar and del Prado (2022) completed a research study with Filipino-Americans to analyze the association of religion in mental health, where many participants shared turning to Catholic faith and the community in times of stress and challenges before even considering mental health care professionals. Prayer and support from those who also shared the same religious faith were pointed as initial resources in response to seeking help beyond close family and friends. As previously stated, the value of *bahala na* or “leaving it in God’s hands” mentions God in the context of Christianity. For many, the value of *bahala na* provides direction in putting trust that everything happens for a reason and that it is in God’s plan for whatever happens in an individual’s life (Alviar & del Prado, 2022).

In the context of mental health treatment, Filipino core values center around communal connections, in which placing priority on oneself in receiving mental health care can bring a sense of guilt and burden in reflecting how treatment can affect the ‘image’ of one’s family (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011).

The Filipino-American Experience in Mental Health

When it comes to the access of mental health treatment and its overarching stigma, the United States has a more positive outlook and sense of support in comparison to the Philippines. With this, those of Filipino descent are more likely to receive higher quality of mental health care if residing in the US as the Philippines currently lacks the resources to meet the growing need (Lally et al., 2019).

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

With the target population of Filipino-Americans, there appears to be a further misunderstanding within the Asian communities. Many studies will have a focus on the East Asian population, including those who are of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent (Nadal, 2020). Both South and Southeast Asian populations often see an oversight in constantly being ‘lumped’ in with those who are East Asian despite there being many differences across the Asian communities and cultures (Nadal, 2020). This outlook essentially makes these identified populations ‘invisible’ and misrepresented compared to other Asian groups, further lessening the need to provide culturally appropriate treatment (Nadal, 2020). Filipino-Americans specifically will have a more unique experience as there are more aspects to consider, such as the history of colonization and its impact in what is defined as ‘Filipino culture’. In what already appears to be a lack in academic research and published literature, the outlook of Filipino-Americans in the field of mental health is severely limited.

In the context of the United States, individuals who identify as BIPOC are less likely to receive access to high quality care despite being more likely to suffer from poor mental health compared to their white peers (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). This is due to multiple factors, such as the disproportionate treatment of being negatively associated with the presentation of behavioral issues (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). There is also the lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding in working with clinicians of different backgrounds, as such that the language used or behaviors presented may be interpreted differently between clinician and client (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). With this, there may be challenges to receiving high quality and equitable care for those from marginalized communities.

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

In Filipino culture, many of its values are already embedded in community and family, in which individuals often seek initial support from loved ones before even thinking about seeking professional help (Lally et al., 2019). There is also the existing shame in thinking about one's mental health as it is essentially seen as placing oneself over others, going against the expectations of collectivism (Lally et al., 2019). For Filipino-Americans, there may be a bit more of an open-mind in considering treatment for mental health, as not only is the US better with more accessible care, there is also the change in cultural identity growing up in one culture while raised with beliefs and values from another (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). The fusion in cultures encourages openness, as such the professionals in the US are more likely to refer to treatment in cases where it is needed to address mental health needs and concerns (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). For many, treatment may be the most beneficial if seeing a clinician from a similar background, as the understanding of beliefs and values from the same culture can ultimately enhance the therapeutic experience. An example of this is having an understanding that values of a Filipino-American are embedded in family and cultural identity, in which there are many layers that can come with connecting a presenting problem to one's position in a family dynamic and community (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011).

The Application of the Arts in Treatment

The Importance of the Arts in Filipino Culture

Philippines culture contains a variety of art forms of many mediums, ranging from visual art to music, dance, and performance.

Moya (2021) identifies weaving as an indigenous practice, requiring the use of raw materials, such as cotton, abaca, fibers, and pineapples. The tradition of weaving originated in the belief that the tactile process created a bridge to the spirits in hopes to attain good health and

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

protection in the natural world (Moya, 2021). This was also considered a recreational activity to do with others, engaging in conversation while completing such tedious tasks. The patterns and colors created from weaving often had different meanings. Certain patterns were used in dance for specific milestones and events, such as courtship, healing, war, harvest, and protection (Moya, 2021). On the other hand, certain colors represented more specific matters, such as earthier tones, like brown, represented death and mourning, whereas red represented power. The patterns created often represented natural elements, such as plants, animals, stars, sun and the moon, elements that were often connected to what the people wished for, such as good health, protection, harvest, guidance, and more (Moya, 2021).

Insider Business (2023) identifies tattooing as another indigenous practice that nearly disappeared in the 19th century due to US colonization. In 2023, Insider Business created a video segment covering Apo Whang-od, a 107-year-old woman who has continued the practice of batok, a tattoo technique that dates back to pre-colonial times. Tattoos were believed to represent strength, beauty, and wealth, as well as were also symbols on one's body that will help ancestors recognize their loved ones once in the afterlife, differing from the association that tattoos are taboo according to Christian belief (Insider Business, 2023).

Other art forms central to Filipino culture include more performative art, such as music, dance, theater, parades, and festivals. In pre-colonial times, chants and songs were used in healing practices (Greymouse Marketing, 2023). Pascasio (2021) introduces karaoke as a practice that can be observed all throughout the nation, as well as for Filipinos abroad - an art form that can be distinguished as a tradition to connect others through musical engagement. The art of karaoke brings communities together for their love for singing, in which singing not only helps de-stress, but is also a way to express in celebration, mourning, and love, an outlet of

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

expression that connects to human nature (Greymouse Marketing, 2023). Singing for others and with others brings connection, joy, and community, enhancing emotional expression.

As food can be considered another form of art, Bender and De Leon (2018) discuss ‘boodle fights’, or the pre-colonial tradition of communal eating. The feast entails a group to eat together as a whole with their hands, or *kamayán*, with various foods spread across the table on top of banana leaves (Bender & De Leon, 2018).

The arts play an essential role in Filipino culture, where the tradition of attuning to the natural world and within members of the community promotes and enhances well-being, concepts that had almost been wiped out as a result of colonialism. In pre-colonial times, evidence shows that there were many arts-based practices intertwined with healing methods. In other Asian cultures, the arts were considered to be part of human nature, a way to create a bridge for connections between the body, mind, and spirit (Kalmanowitz, 2012). The integration of art in a sense revitalizes the mind and spirit, equalizing the inner self with the outer (Kalmanowitz, 2012). To implement the arts into treatment humanizes healing. With this, to integrate the arts into clinical practice with the identified population would allow for a more holistic and comprehensive form of treatment, just as how the culture originally viewed the concepts of healing.

Potential Theories and Practices

In working with the identified population of a collectivist culture that translates heavily into its morals and values, family- and community-based theories and practices seem to be the most beneficial to consider in mental health work.

Family systems theory addresses the central value of family and community in Filipino culture. Bergman and White (2010) discuss how this theory focuses on how an individual is best

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

understood based on the relationship to their family, an emotional unit to be looked at as a whole as opposed to isolated from one another. The basics that make up a person's emotional functioning is determined by the 'family of origin', in which 'family' is referred to as a "natural system of emotionally interdependent people functioning reciprocally in relationship to one another" (Bregman & White, 2010). This particular origin of emotional functioning goes back generations from which the family was formed, and will have an impact on the behavior and functioning for future generations (Bregman & White, 2010). It is the complex system of interactions between members of a family unit that will not only affect each person, but are interconnected within one another as well. Tu (1976) shares from Chinese culture that the self is almost always linked to the collective, that "self-realization is innately connected to harmonizing human relations." Here, it is presented that the connection between the self and others is ingrained in collectivist cultures, in which a group-oriented approach attunes to a natural instinct. Cheung and Jahn (2017) bring up a case study focusing on a Chinese family that had immigrated to the US and has been facing conflict and tension between the family, thus resulting in seeking family therapy. Cheung and Jahn (2017) summarize a session where each member was asked what appears to be the presenting problem, following the 'miracle question' of what the family may look like if counseling solved all their problems utilizing a solution-focused approach. Members were able to see each other's perspectives, as well as voice their own concern and how one may reach a 'solution.' In this case study, it is presented that family therapy provides a safe space where all members are equal to one another, where each voice is equally heard, with a clinician present to facilitate dialogue and provide additional support and validation if needed or faced with power struggles (Cheung & Jahn, 2017).

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is an approach that focuses on one's cognition, such as how one thinks and their behavior. Steele (2020) identifies a case study using CBT with African-Americans, another largely marginalized group in the mental health field. A similarity between the populations is the shared struggle of internalized racism that can be connected to the effects of colonial mentality, as well as shared cultural strengths of community support, spirituality, and resilience. Steele shares a case study of a client, Star, who struggles with negative thought processes, many of which surround low self-esteem, self-image, and confidence as she feels "incompetent" as a Black woman in a White-male-dominated work environment. Reframing negative self-talk was identified as a treatment goal, encouraging Star to think of alternative ways to change her thought processes surrounding her identities, as it was something that set her apart from the majority in this specific context. This theory challenges unhelpful negative thought processes in reflecting on cognitive distortions, emphasizing that how one perceives things is not always inherently true and is often a form of dysfunctional thinking that strays away from the actual events that are occurring (Steele, 2020). This is a more structured form of counseling that weaves in psychoeducation on the cognitive mode.

Humanistic and person-centered therapy is the third approach that addresses the need for connection with others. Cepeda and Davenport (2006) discuss how a humanistic approach establishes a safe and warm interpersonal relationship between client and clinician. The goal of treatment is to have the client reach self-actualization, or the realization of fulfilling one's full potential. The key conditions necessary for change according to this approach include genuineness or congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. The clinician must establish a therapeutic space following these conditions in order for the client to have a full understanding of self in the here-and-now (Cepeda & Davenport, 2006). Narrative therapy is a

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

humanistic approach that focuses more on providing space to allow clients to tell their own stories and explore their own meanings. Cervantes (2022) shares the work of the SALUD model of family therapy with undocumented Latinx youth, in which both narrative therapy and structural family therapy work in-hand to provide mental health care to both youth and their families in a way that adheres to cultural beliefs and values. Cervantes discusses narrative therapy as a way to help clients separate themselves from their behaviors and challenges, encouraging that the ‘answer’ is within themselves as they are the ones to have access to their own strengths and the ability to change their own perceptions.

Applying Art Therapy with the Filipino-American Population

Art therapy is one of many well-established forms of treatment and approaches in mental health that have originated in European roots, where many of these practices lack studies and perspectives of working with clients of various backgrounds, as well as dismisses the diversity and differences of clinicians themselves (Menjivar, 2023). The concepts of ‘healing’ and ‘mental health’ itself can vary depending on the culture, where clinicians must maintain cultural competency and cultural humility when working with clients, especially when applying treatment, approaches, and practices that may not line up with the ideologies of their clients (Menjivar, 2023). Utilizing the arts of different forms engages a more holistic approach to treatment, in which many indigenous practices of healing often involve the use of visual arts, music, and dance.

Going by the values of Filipino culture, many center around the theme of community and connection (Nadal, 2020). The arts in culture also stem from community and connection, where many traditions and practices involve a group of people. Filipinos often rely on their connections with others in daily life, where the integration of togetherness in mental health treatment may

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

provide more effective results in healing. In referencing the limited experiences of mental health treatment, many Filipino-American clients often discuss how their problems tend to trace back to how their community is affected, how their family is affected by their own personal issues and dilemmas (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). It is the desire to accomplish goals that will bring pride to the family and community, pushing aside what brings guilt and shame, such as the stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health symptoms that come with constantly pushing oneself to be a 'productive' citizen in society (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). The mindset that constantly involves the community suppresses the importance of being able to put oneself before others.

The tools that are used in art therapy essentially acts as a 'jumping off' point for discussion and reflection, and can be helpful for those who are hesitant to treatment, as traditional talk therapy can be viewed as intimidating and too direct. Maria Alinea-Bravo, a Filipino art therapist, introduced an intervention named "The Bean Project," where a variety of beans were used to create a collaborative art piece within a group in a hospital setting (Kitazawa, 2020). The clients of this specific intervention came from different cultural backgrounds, in which Alinea-Bravo was able to identify beans as a 'common ground' according to many of the clients' current diets. Clients engaged in discussion of their experiences with beans, such as how they were cooked in their respective cultures. The final products of this intervention were beans glued on cardboard pieces, where each client created their own pattern as a result of the conversations surrounding cultural upbringing. This case highlights conversation surrounding culture, where the arts foster engagement and discussion centering around cultural identity and lived experiences in connection to presenting problems.

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

In 2006, Gina A. Alfonso and Julia Gentleman Byers led an art therapy crisis intervention initiative following Typhoon Reming in Bicol, PH (Kalmanowitz, 2012). Alfonso and Byers, with the help of volunteer relief workers, provided art therapy to identified survivors who were at risk of severe psychological trauma as a result of the natural disaster that killed over 1000 people. The work included workshops to provide space to honor the narratives of the survivors, using whatever art materials were available to create stories, or “fairy tales”, to represent present experiences. Themes of hope, growth, and resilience came up, alongside pain, shame, and guilt, feelings that were addressed, honored, and shared between members. Although the facilitators did not have much time, materials, or even art therapy-related experience to prepare for the relief work, it was the cultural values of *kapwa* and *bahala na* that upheld collective strength, support, and healing. In this case, community was deeply embedded in culture, where once again, the well-being of Filipino-Americans could be traced back to their support system and greater community (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011).

Arts-Based Reflection

In completing this literature review, an arts-based reflection was created to record initial reactions in response to research. The art created alongside the writing process involved the use of a large 16” x 20” canvas. The initial idea was to divide the canvas into small, equal sections to be filled in each week the writing process was completed. Due to many factors and a tight schedule filled with classes, internship, and working a part-time retail job, the goal of creating small weekly art reflections was not fulfilled. The process started in the beginning of January of 2024. About three sections were filled in with artistic reflections before stopping due to a packed schedule that often led to drained energy. The canvas was eventually covered with paint to ‘start fresh’ after feelings of dissatisfaction with the current product. The colors used to fill the canvas

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

were red, blue, and yellow, blending towards each other with white - all colors on the Filipino flag. The colors were chosen based on a few reasons, one being that they directly represent the Filipino flag. The colors are also representative of the three roles of the art therapist - the artist, the counselor, and the art therapist. Cultural identity, as well as the intersection of other identities, can come into play in each of these roles, and can have various impacts in working with clients.

The process of 'starting over' symbolized many things, one being the feeling of finally finding motivation to continue the process of writing and making art. To completely cover an already started canvas also represents the process of unlearning to relearn, a process where there were opportunities to be educated on a culture where not much was known about the true origin due to layers of colonization. The symbol of the Filipino sun from the country's flag was created in the center of the piece, with yellow embroidery thread on the edges. This symbolizes learning more about oneself in relation to cultural identity and how one can be positioned in the work of mental health, especially when working with clients of other cultures. The use of white thread and the process of embroidery symbolizes the process of lifelong learning and growth, a process that is slow and intricate, yet steady and ongoing.

In working on this ongoing arts-based reflection, various feelings have been coming up in the process of transforming personal thoughts and reactions into visual art. Initially, I had the vision of completing a piece that would represent weekly reflections. Instead, I have been working on a piece that represents how I feel a sense of overwhelm, yet progress, as this piece has turned into a visual that depicts myself going into the research process. More specifically, I often felt overwhelmed when approaching this literature review, as I felt that I had some sort of responsibility and pressure to find as much as I could on my topic of the mental health of

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

Filipinos and any relations to art therapy. I felt a bit disappointed and discouraged when struggling to find literature, yet I expected limited results as I am aware that mental health is still a fairly new topic to be uncovered. The feelings of disappointment, discouragement, and overwhelm is represented by the decision to cover the canvas with paint rather than continuing my original plan - to provide a fresh blank canvas and accept that 'starting over' is a part of the process. Incorporating embroidery and other mediums represents my own slow, yet continuous progression in completing this research.

Discussion

The purpose of this literature review was to explore how art therapy could be effective for the Filipino-American population. Prior to focusing on art therapy as a specified form of intervention, I examined the quality of mental health treatment for the target population. In focusing on the culture of origin, I discovered that there is a high need for quality treatment in the Philippines, as such that recent data reveals that the number of qualified professionals do not satisfy the ever-growing population in need. There is also the consideration of stigma and cultural values that add barriers to those thinking of seeking support, with many remaining hesitant to do so due in fear of damaging one's social standing. With Filipino-Americans, although there appears to be more access to quality treatment in the US, individuals remain hesitant due to many factors. These factors include not only cultural beliefs and stigma, but also the inability to find culturally sensitive care. The use of the arts in therapy transcends beyond cultural differences, where art as a tool for exploration, expression, and communication creates a safe and open space where clients are able to express their issues and lived experiences in an authentic way. Visual art, music, and dance, are forms of self-expression that allow individuals to feel more connected with themselves and their community, where the emphasis on community

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

and family is an essential factor to better understand the culture. In Filipino culture, attunement to one's community may provide the most care, as many values tie back to the family dynamic and one's relation to others.

Art Therapy as a Modality for Connection and Healing

In literature discussing the importance of the arts in culture, the pre-colonial Philippines was a nation that rooted itself in natural and spiritual practices. Traditional healing methods often involved singing, chants, herbal medicine, and prayer, as well as more physical art-based practices, such as weavings made of natural elements used to promote good health and protection. Greymouse Marketing (2022) and Pascasio (2021) discussed how singing had been integrated in healing traditions, in which the modern-day form of karaoke is still presented as a time of celebration, self-expression, and togetherness. Moya (2021) discussed how weaving as an indigenous practice promoted well-being and other healing aspects depending on the motifs, patterns, and colors of the textiles. The utilization of arts-based practices were ones that involved the community, where unified support was believed to heal one physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In many forms of treatment, therapy itself has many oppressive roots to it. Lacking culturally attuned care with a population that is just starting to become more open to mental health care is a theme that has come up in presented literature. In the United States, the field is still predominantly white, though is slowly becoming more diverse as more opportunities open up. It is also a field that requires intensive training and higher education, factors that are identified as privileges due to financial constraints and lack of access to education for many. In literature discussing work with the BIPOC community in mental health, it has been mentioned that many approaches lack proper research with marginalized populations, where the application

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

of these established approaches with underrepresented groups would result in unsuitable care due to the lack of multicultural considerations, and could potentially be harmful as well. Menjivar (2023) discussed the importance of ‘unlearning’, or being open to other forms and perspectives of healing and well-being in order to provide care that attunes to individual cultures and strays away from the oppressive roots. As the arts have been seen as a tool for healing in pre-colonial times, the arts in therapeutic practice for Filipino-Americans would be a more culturally sensitive approach.

Resilience through Colonialism

The Philippines is a nation that has been able to survive through centuries of colonialism. Although modern-day traditions and practices have influence from its oppressors, pre-colonial roots remain embedded. Resilience is another theme presented in literature, in which many sources discuss how colonialism has had its impact on the culture, but has not led to a complete erasure of indigenous roots. Extending on the theme of needing more culturally-attuned care, the theme of resilience has also emerged through the evidence of the continued presence of the arts and community - aspects that have existed since pre-colonial times. Insider Business (2023) covered Apo Whang Od, a Filipino icon to continue the indigenous practice of *batok*, or tattooing, a practice that lived through both Spanish and American colonization. Pagulayan (2022) discussed how traces of Filipino languages also outlasted colonialism, how terms that refer to people are still gender-neutral as opposed to the gendered language that was introduced from the Spanish colonial era. Bender and De Leon (2018) discussed how the traditional way of eating through boodle fights continues to live on in modern-day as a way to honor pre-colonial traditions. Filipinos have created a culture for themselves that resulted from various cultural influences, where the ability to change and adapt can also be used to improve and lessen the

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

stigma surrounding mental health. Integrating cultural beliefs, values, and practices will increase accessibility and openness to mental health treatment.

Importance of Community and Family Therapy

Much of the literature centering on Filipinos and mental health discussed family and community as sources of support, thus emerging as a shared theme. The commentary from “Counseling Filipino Americans” (2011) presented case studies with clients of Filipino descent. Many clients presented issues that were rooted within the family dynamic, as such that conflict occurred between caregivers and children, where clients expressed shame, guilt, or even anger in response to their parents not being able to reason with them - that the parents are the ones to dictate how their children must live and uphold pride for the family (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). As Filipinos are inherently attuned to connection with others, family therapy would enhance the healing process as it directly involves the support system in connection to well-being. This form addresses the many cultural values that are deeply rooted in the community. Cheung and Jahn (2017) share a case study with a Chinese-American family completing family therapy, in which all members were able to share their experiences and be validated as the clinician allowed for an open and safe space for all. As ‘traditional’ talk therapy is still viewed as intimidating by many, the arts provide a more accessible modality for self-expression, encouraging symbolism to speak for lived experiences if words are not currently accessible. The use of the arts in a family setting provides a space where all are equal to one another - a space where there are no hierarchical structures (Bregman & White, 2010). This type of structure challenges traditional values, such as that children must obey their parents in following the belief that one must respect those who are older (Counseling Filipino Americans, 2011). The integration of the arts allows all members to have an equal opportunity to provide

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

their perspectives, allowing for a balance in power dynamics as the tools utilized in art therapy are defined by the clients. Kalmanowitz (2012) discusses how the creative process transcends beyond cultural norms, providing a safe space to explore and experiment meanings behind both the conscious and unconscious mind.

CBT, Humanism, and Narrative Therapy

David and Okazaki (2006) discuss colonization and its impact on Filipino culture and well-being, where the concept of colonial mentality remains to be an ingrained ideology. David and Okazaki (2006) also bring up how many presenting problems of Filipino-Americans could essentially be traced back to colonial mentality, in which is a way of thinking that can be identified as unhelpful, negative, and potentially irrational. To address this, cognitive behavioral therapy is a tool that can combat irrational ways of thinking through exercising cognitive restructuring, turning unhelpful thoughts into more rational and functional ones. Many Filipinos may have struggles that ultimately stem from colonial mentality and internalized racism, in which CBT would provide a safe space to focus on the individual's own sense of identity and worldview.

A humanistic approach is valuable in providing a form of treatment that emphasizes emotional warmth and genuine compassion. As the culture relies heavily on the community and support from others, this approach centers around personal connectedness and fulfills the value of *kapwa*, or fellow being (Nadal, 2020). Nadal (2020) often brings up how Filipinos are attuned to interconnectedness by nature, where personal resources are identified as family, friends, and the greater community are utilized in times of need of support and guidance. Narrative therapy provides a voice for the clients to tell their story as it validates lived experiences. Alfonso and Byer's relief work from 2006 in response to Typhoon Reming incorporated narrative therapy as a

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

way to allow clients to share and process their experiences without having to relive the trauma. Completing this work in a group setting provided validation and support from others, that no one was alone in experiencing such devastation. From this, narrative therapy affirms a client's story and allows them to seek support that attunes to their culture.

Limitations

Like many studies, there are several limitations to this literature review. The literature aimed to primarily focus on the Filipino population. However, due to limited sources, other marginalized groups in the context of mental health were also analyzed to provide data as many BIPOC communities also face similar challenges in receiving equitable resources.

In focusing on the target population of Filipino-Americans, it is acknowledged that many resources utilized focused on those in the West Coast. Numerous studies recorded results based on a sample of Filipino-Americans residing in the West Coast, mainly due to the fact that there is a large population of Filipino-Americans in the identified area. To focus on one specific region of the United States would only provide data that pertains to that specific area, as such that it would be unethical to make a generalization and assumption that all Filipino-Americans think and feel the same way across all regions of the US. Each region contains their own culture and social climate, where people will adapt differently according to their location.

Implications

It has been acknowledged that Filipinos are largely underrepresented in the context of both mental health and art therapy, with very limited academic data available at the time research was conducted for this literature review. From this, it is recommended that more studies are to be conducted and published to fill in the gaps with more representative and relevant work.

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

Conclusion

The aim of this literature review was to focus on how the arts in therapeutic practice can enhance the well-being and mental health of Filipino-Americans. In the literature, different themes have emerged, engaging in further discussion on what can be done to promote wellbeing. Themes included lacking culturally attuned care, resilience through colonialism, and a natural need for connection with others. Currently, the Philippines still continues to build its foundation in supporting mental health in increasing accessibility to quality services. For Filipinos abroad in the US, conflict still arises between the generations, with those having closer cultural ties to face difficulty in assimilation or being open to other ideologies. The identities of Filipino-Americans have rather complex roots, with many influences tied to Western cultures as a result of years and years of colonization. When looking into cultural values, as well as the arts of the culture, themes of community, interdependence, and connection arise - all values that are essential to consider in approaching mental health treatment. To seek the importance of taking care of oneself means to enhance the overall well-being of the community, where one feels validated in their lived experiences and are not considered 'selfish' in wanting to seek support. Integrating the arts in treatment creates a more accessible approach in addressing mental health needs, as the arts have always been important in the culture, as well as provides a safe space for authentic self-expression without fear of judgment or invalidation.

Overall, Filipinos are one of many cultural groups that are often overlooked in the field of mental health, in which any and all research completed is crucial in data analysis to push the continuation of furthering studies to fill in the gaps.

THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

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THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

Arts-Based Reflection



THE ARTS AS A BRIDGE FOR CONNECTION

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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