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Online Marriage and "Buhay Ko" (My Life): Views from Filipino Prospective Brides, Wives, and their U.S./British/Australian Husbands

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ONLINE MARRIAGE AND "BUHAY KO" (MY LIFE): VIEWS FROM

FILIPINO PROSPECTIVE BRIDES, WIVES, AND THEIR

U.S./BRITISH/AUSTRALIAN HUSBANDS

BY

MARIA JESSICA CASTILLO CRESPO

B.A., Communication, Franciscan University of Steubenville, 1994
M.A., Communication, Wichita State University, 2004

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

August, 2009

DEDICATION

To my family:

Tatay, Nanay, Manong, Toto, and Aleks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Online marriage programs or mail-order-bride programs have gained tremendous popularity and international reach in the recent years. Online marriage programs are venues in which women can advertise themselves as available for marriage and where men can find potential wives. These programs have both critics and proponents. Critics say it is a form of exploitation and control while proponents argue that it leads to happiness and romance. Although critics' and proponents' views have been well presented in many of the mail-order-bride literature, there is little information or account of the experiences of the participants.

This study gives attention to the discursive interview accounts of prospective Filipino online brides, wives and their husbands. The goal is to build understanding of the multiple and multi-faceted factors that contribute to the practice by focusing on the voices of potential online brides as well as online wives and husbands. Drawing on feminist postcolonial lens the study is guided by the following questions: What are the

similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? What are the similarities and differences between the prospective brides' and wives' discourses? How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity and class issues? What do the interview discourses reveal with regard to contextual, structural factors such as history, religion and education? Face-to-face and phone interviews were conducted with 24 participants: eight prospective Filipino brides living in the Philippines (ages 23-48), eight Filipino wives (ages 24-36) living in the Philippines, U.S., England and Australia, and their Western husbands (ages 46-71) living in the Philippines, U.S., England and Australia.

The interviews revealed numerous overarching themes. There was expressed marital satisfaction among majority of the online couples interviewed in this study although the small number of couples and the tendency for satisfied couples to agree to be interviewed preclude generalizing to any degree. Prospective online brides and wives cited economic factors as major reasons for joining the online marriage programs. Husbands expressed their desire for traditional wives with traditional values. Both critics' and proponents' views of online marriage programs were corroborated in the participants' narratives.

Research indicates that online marriage programs continue to flourish. But no matter how online marriage programs are viewed, as overseas migration, as a natural way for people to meet, or as a form of commodification and exploitation of women, it remains vital that its widening and increasing reach are recognized. This study offers a medley of information that allows one to see through the window of the experiences of prospective Filipino brides, Filipino wives and their husbands.

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My Story

I grew up in one of the most remote and pristine places in the southern part of the Philippines. I bore witness to the passion and fortitude of my parents in trying to serve the marginalized tribal people of our province as missionaries. Our house was positioned on a hill overlooking the most breathtaking view of the rice fields, encircled by tall, magnificent mountains. Looking out my window I felt I was on top of the world. Ingrained in my brain and heart was the belief that I lived in the most perfect of places, and lived with the most benevolent of peoples. I was taught that one does not live for one's self only, but that life and existence are opportunities to champion the rights of the oppressed and occasions to better the world. This may have been an idealistic view, but it fueled and engendered my desire to pursue courses of action that would facilitate such end-results. Albeit modest, this project endeavors to contribute to that objective. It is my hope.

My desire to make a difference did not come as a coincidence. My parents are strong, courageous, and compassionate individuals who taught me profound and invaluable values that made me strive to become a better individual--one must always live by example. I take pride in my independence and self-autonomy as a woman. This did not come by happenstance either.

I come from a family of strong and independent women. My grandmother, although small in stature, was a woman who knew what she wanted and made sure she asserted her rights. My mother is the epitome of strength and independence. She ensured that my two brothers were taught to uphold the value and worth of every woman they

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meet, no matter from what walks of life. She raised us in an environment where women were given ample opportunities to become self-sufficient and independent. This she said must come through education and in the belief of one's own self-worth. In the Philippines in which I grew up, this belief did not seem uncommon. In fact, this did not seem unusual at all. After all, the Philippines, before colonization, had always been a matriarchal society. So to me, I never thought being around strong and independent women was anything extraordinary. I have always believed that this has always been the case. I witnessed it in my own family, in my parents' interaction with each other. I saw it in the way my neighbors and my mom's colleagues interacted with their husbands or other male colleagues.

In addition, the media during the 1970s (at least in my experience), unlike today, did not perpetuate the objectification or subjugation of women. In fact, rarely were women presented in erotic or seductive poses. Love scenes were a rarity; if done at all, they were done in subtle and respectable ways. Sex always came in the context of love and marriage. Women were always given the highest regard. In my high school, women were "courted." A boy who was interested in a girl was expected to woo her; he might send her love letters, flowers, visit her in the home and meet her family. In essence, he was expected to first show her that he was deserving of her love or worthy of even a date. This courting could take months even years. The boy would be expected to show perseverance and determination. All this hard work did not always guarantee a good end-result for the boy; sometimes the girl turned the boy down despite all his efforts. These were the norms that were followed when I was growing up.

The Philippines I knew growing up, perhaps because of the remoteness of where we lived, was a place where people cherished their indigenous customs and traditions. It was close to being an unadulterated environment, seemingly uncontaminated by the remnants of the colonial past and unaffected by the postcolonial present. Looking back, it seemed like a place frozen in time. Globalization seemed an unforeseen occurrence. Capitalism did not seem significant. The destructive and positive elements of globalization and capitalism did not seem to impact my everyday life. Those childhood days were the best days of my life. The world seemed peaceful and uncomplicated. And this by no means should be dismissed as mere childhood naiveté or illusion. It was real to me, my family, and my friends. This all changed, however.

My last visit to the Philippines in 2007 brought about tremendous revelations. Firstly, my brief stop in Manila was a rude awakening. The streets were littered with U. S. American fast food joints. The products that occupied the shelves of the stores that were once covered with traditional Filipino products were now replaced by Korean, Japanese, and American goods. This was not to say that these products were not around in the past. But what was extremely disturbing was the fact that I had to search for Filipino products for they were buried under the flood of foreign products that were being displayed. To me this observation was unsettling. I began to ask, what has the Filipino society become? Are we now reduced to being the imitators or "mimickers" of the West? Do we now valorize foreign values more than our own?

If I thought that the first revelation was shocking, nothing prepared me for the second one. As the streets of Manila were lined with Western fast food restaurants and gift shops, so too were its streets littered with Filipino women in the arms/clutches of

foreign men, who were mostly 30 years their senior. It used to be that such sites could only be found in the streets of Ermita, the red light district of Manila. Even in the remote provinces of the South, including where my family resides, Filipino women and foreign-looking men walking the streets were no longer uncommon. Could one say then that the Filipino people have yet again been conquered and colonized not only through and by Western products and pop culture, but I began to ask, could it be then that the Philippines is yet again being subjected to another form of colonization—the colonization of its women?

I believe that there is no other place or venue where this type of conquest was more clearly manifest and more clearly revealed than in online marriage programs. As a Filipino woman, raised in what was once a matriarchal culture (Arguelles, 1991) where women were highly valued, respected, and occupied positions of power, it was difficult for me to witness so many examples of that which I consider is a form of commodification and exploitation. What was even more difficult was that the Filipino mail-order-brides, at least on the surface, appeared complicit to this subjugation. Although it is reasonable to assume that many of these women were compelled by economic exigencies, it is useful to know the roots of and rationale given by these Filipino women's choices. Additionally, Filipinos' overall preoccupation with the West, and the multiple representations that contribute to those views, need to be understood by scholars who wish to better understand the existence of and peoples' resistance to colonialist influences. This preoccupation with the West is entrenched in multiple and complex factors, factors that need to be unpacked and deconstructed, to provide a detailed picture of the context driving the success of the online marriage industry.

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I feel it is also important to note that I used the terms "online marriage programs" in this study as opposed to "mail-order-bride programs" because of the discussions I had with the participants, many of whom viewed the label of "mail-order-bride" as pejorative. Throughout this study, therefore, I refer to "online marriage programs" instead of "mail-order-bride programs." It is out of respect for the participants' wishes that I do so. I do, however, refer to the "mail-order-bride" practice in providing context and historical background and because other scholars use that term.

In the rest of this chapter, I explain the relevance and rationale for my study and explain my personal investment and stake in the process. I provide a historical context for the study, explain the problem of human trafficking, and present background on the online marriage programs. Further, I map out the various claims of two opposing camps (proponents and critics of the online marriage programs), and finally, I delineate the contributions of my study to communication scholarship and the lives of Filipinos.

Purpose and Scope of Study

My project contributes to the literature on online marriage programs through giving attention to the discursive interview accounts of prospective Filipino online brides, as well as wives and their husbands who met online. My goal is to build understanding of the multiple and multi-faceted factors that contribute to the practice by focusing on the voices of potential online brides as well as online wives and husbands. I also examine the extent to which the practice of online marriage reveals any histories, ideologies, and/or colonizing elements that may be shaping the attitudes and belief systems of the Filipino prospective online brides and wives.

Through a feminist postcolonial lens and responses from in-depth interviews this study is therefore guided by the following questions: What are the similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? What are the similarities and differences between the prospective brides' and wives' discourses? How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity and class issues? What do the interview discourses reveal with regard to contextual, structural factors such as history, religion and education?

It is my hope that the results of this study can ultimately result in educational programs to increase awareness and vigilance among young women in the Philippines. It is also my hope that access into experiences of selected prospective Filipino online brides, Filipino online wives and their husbands, and contextual factors such as background, national identity, economics, education, religion, etc. may provide some understanding of what precipitates this phenomenon. I also wish to see if the valorizing of the West, which can be seen in the prevalence of U.S. products, Western dress, Western media and advertisements is also seen in the Filipinas' descriptions of their desires and values as they talk about their relationships with Western men.

This research is warranted for several reasons. Practices or programs such as the online marriage programs tend to homogenize Filipino women (Halualani, 1995; Ordonez, 1997). For instance Filipino women are represented as being the "perfect wives and companions" as subservient, acquiescent and deferential (Halualani, 1995; Ordonez, 1997; Villapando, 1989). This is the most frequent portrait being painted by the online marriage programs on the Internet. Such stereotypes are problematic for they paint an incomplete and a distorted picture of the Filipino woman. While a Filipino woman may

be a good wife and mother, she also has other qualities that need to be exalted such as her intelligence, her bravery, her innovation, etc. But these qualities are usually eclipsed by the servile qualities that are being described in detail. Related to online marriage programs, a woman's value is often measured by how well she serves the "other" (husband or significant other). Consequently, the online marriage programs present Filipina wives as a commodity and an object of gratification (Crespo, 2004; 2009). This I believe is a form of exploitation and control.

Practices like online marriage programs, the businesses that profit by them, the forms of marketing, and outcomes are good venues to mine histories, ideologies and colonizing elements. The experiences of those using the online marriage programs are lacking. Hence, it is fitting to look at how Filipino women in this particular context articulate their identities, feelings, and perspectives. Such perspectives may be emblematic or indicative of the consequences of being positioned in particular ways, feelings of inferiority and preoccupation with her colonizer. Understanding the perspectives of the Western husbands is equally important. They may articulate values and positions that are complicit with colonizers, acknowledge their status as Western males with the economic means to utilize the marriage programs, or some other position. Aligning my cultural membership with Filipino culture, and being a Filipino woman myself, I believe that this analytical task is imperative. If we wish to maintain our sense of cultural identity and integrity as Filipinos there needs to be an effort made to understand this phenomenon.

Benefits of the Study

I believe that accounts of everyday experiences provide important and profound details about individuals' views and practices of human communication (Foss, 1989). Since the goal of this study is to understand the online marriage programs through the accounts of the prospective Filipino online brides, Filipino online wives and their husbands, one benefit of the study is that it demonstrates the active and integral role communication plays in the lives of prospective Filipino online brides and online marriage couples as they journey through the online marriage process. Illuminating gendered expectations and norms by comparing potential to actual wives' expectations and experiences is warranted. Proponents argue that online marriages are a "dream come true;" critics maintain that online marriages are sexist and patriarchal forms of domination. This study provides information to answer proponents' and critics' claims. As well, the study elucidates a social process that has become more and more popular therefore having increased influence on Filipino society as a whole. Additionally mail-order-bride programs are also increasing in popularity in many Asian countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Finally, this study reaffirms the utility of communication as a potential tool that can facilitate change and transformation. That is, through the accounts of the participants and through the information provided by their narratives, certain programs and plans based on first-hand experiences may be designed.

As I have contended earlier, I believe that the online marriage program is a microcosm of the overall social economic and cultural condition of the contemporary Filipino society; hence, the greater the understanding that is gained about such a phenomenon, the better equipped are those who seek to address it. It is my intention that

through the findings of this study, a grassroots educational program may be designed to help prospective Filipino online brides, online wives, and Filipino women as a whole. This grassroots program could provide resources to women and men in communities, political decision makers, as well as to teachers and international/national non profit service providers.

Context and Background

Human Trafficking

Critics of online marriage programs like Sulaimanova (2006) and Jackson (2004) posit that such programs are a form of human trafficking. Because of this, I believe that it is necessary to provide a background of what critics believe constitutes human trafficking as well as information on how the online marriage programs originated. This section, therefore, provides a brief background of human trafficking as well as supplies historical information about the mail-order-bride concept and programs.

Trafficking affects an awesome number of people around the globe. Delila Amir and Karen Beeks (2006) explain the extent of human trafficking in terms of the number and group of people it affects and victimizes.

> The United Nations estimates that 4 million humans, mostly women and children, become victims of international trafficking each year and are forced to work in construction, farming, mining, fishing, landscaping, domestic and childcare work, or in the carpet, garment and brick industries. They are also used as warriors and camel jockeys and coerced into drug trafficking, begging, and illegal adoptions. Victims of sex trafficking are forced into prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, marriages, and the mail-order-bride trade. (2006, p. xi)

Haque (2006) emphasizes harm as the most ominous element of trafficking. It is what makes it extremely dangerous. She states, "Trafficking in persons is the 'dark side' of population movement, which places people in a 'harmful' situation. It is a form of modern-day slavery" (Haque, 2006, p. 4). Sanghera (2002) contends that trafficking carries with it elements of violence and coercion and therefore needs to be prevented. Since trafficking comprises movement, deception or coercion of the person/persons involved it usually results in some type of exploitation which places the individual/individuals involved in harms way or in a compromising situation (D'Cunha, 2002).

Although trafficking involves movement of individuals across national borders, it is of a different type than migration. Haque (2006) admits that trafficking and migration are interrelated, but differentiates between them:

> Migration is the movement of people from one place to another in order to take up employment or establish residence. It applies to various types of movements guided by diverse causes…..on the other hand, trafficking in persons as a subset of migration is the movement of a person under a situation of deceit, force, threat, debt bondage, etc., involving exploitation and violation of human rights. Trafficking in persons therefore results in abusive exploitation and human rights violations. (p. 6)

Amir and Beeks (2006) posit that the advent of human trafficking has been precipitated by numerous factors. The change in the political, technological, and economic structures of many countries contribute to its growth. Globalization has not only allowed increased flow of resources and capital but it also promulgates the flow of

human beings from one country to another. This is true in the case of the citizens of many developing countries. Stiglitz (2003) defines globalization as,

> The closer integration of the countries and people of the world which has been brought by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and people across borders (p. 9).

More and more people from economically disadvantaged countries immigrate to core countries in search of a better life. But such moves do not always yield positive outcomes as in the case of many women who have become victims of prostitution and sex trafficking in the industrialized countries.

Critics believe that the capitalist systems enable this type of exploitation to continue by exploiting the work of a particular group of people such as women and children in order to benefit another group of individuals like operators of online marriage programs (Amir & Beeks, 2006; Wallerstein, 1989). The operators of the online marriage programs then make profits by catering to the needs of another group of people, for example, men (Amir & Beeks, 2006; Wallerstein, 1989).

As economies in the Third World countries like the Philippines continue to deteriorate and as people find it more difficult to find opportunities, commodification and trafficking of women and children may likely continue. As Amir and Beeks (2006) claim:

> The economic resource gap between the rich and poor countries and between categories of people in the same society, including the gender gap, and the commodification of sex as organized by the sex industry, creates the global

phenomenon, not only of the sex industry, but the commerce of women and
children for this sex industry. (p. xiii)

Trafficking of Women

For centuries many women across international sites have been subjected to
numerous forms of control. They have been told to adhere to idealized notions of female
beauty; they have been subjected to restrictive and archaic roles of femininity; they have
been made to believe cognitive/intellectual inferiority; and finally, they have been made
to become marketable sexual commodities. Scores of women endured various forms of
control from numerous perpetrators. Many suffered abuse from their own husbands (as in
the case of battered women); they underwent oppression from societal systems (religion,
government, economy, etc); they experienced exploitation from the media (as in the case
of being stereotyped and essentialized); they suffered abuse from
slaveholders/traffickers/pimps (as in the case of bride-trafficking and prostitution);
finally, they bore oppression from their own selves (as they internalized the oppression
which they experienced from society). These forms of control continue today of which,
critics believe, the commodification/sexual exploitation of women is the most prevalent.

Javate-de Dios (2005) argues that the commodification/sexual exploitation of
women illustrate their ongoing/continued marginalization. Globalization also hastens this
marginalization as national barriers begin to disappear. The flow of goods, services, and
people across borders allow for the commodification of women and children to flourish
as they are converted into "tradable goods" (Javate-de-Dios, 2005).

Hughes, Sporcic, Mendelsohn, and Chirgwin (1999) in the 1999 Factbook On
Global Sexual Exploitation state that there are four ways/methods in which sexual

exploitation is carried out: trafficking, prostitution, pornography, and organized and institutionalized exploitation and violence. Barry (1979) contends that there are a variety of ways in which a woman can be exploited. She,

> May be purchased, kidnapped, drawn in through syndicates or organized crime, or fraudulently recruited by fronting agencies which offer jobs, positions with dance companies, or marriage contracts that don't exist. Or they may be procured through seduction by being promised friendship and love. (p. 4)

Perhaps one of the most telling forms of sexual exploitation is the trafficking/sex trafficking of women. It has grown exponentially and has been the most attractive to traffickers because of the high profits it yields. Sulaimanova (2006) estimates that about 7 to 12 billion dollars a year are gained by organized criminal groups through this form of enterprise. Thailand, the Philippines and recently Eastern European countries have been considered as the top "sending-countries" of women (Sulaimanova, 2006). Sulaimanova (2006) presents several factors which serve as exigencies as to why women become entrapped in trafficking,

> In general, women engage in trafficking because of poverty, unemployment, low social status of women in their home countries, lack of opportunities and prospects for the future, and, in many cases, because of an idealistic view of the Western world and the wealthier countries in general. (2006, p. 62)

Although proponents of the mail-order-bride programs contend that their businesses are legitimate and are channels or avenues to empower and emancipate women, critics such as Barry (1979), Hughes (1997), and Sulaimanova (2006) argue that these channels are just another form of trafficking of women. Critics cite several reasons

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as to why they consider the online marriage programs as a form of human trafficking. They involve recruitment and transfer of persons; they involve deception (women are seduced by promise of love and romance, marriage and friendship, hopes for a better life, etc.); they involve force and control; and they involve the abuse of power (Jackson, 2004; Sulaimanova, 2006).

According to Sulaimanova (2006), most of the women who take part in this practice are "naively searching for happiness, and often become victims of men who 'order' them and sell them to pimps" (p. 389). Suzanne Jackson (2004) claims that online marriage programs or international matchmaking organizations as she refers to them as IMOs are a way for criminal trafficking organizations to recruit girls/women. These girls/women are then forced into prostitution, are forced into marriage to men who may end up being their pimps, or are held as domestic slaves. Jackson (2004) argues that online marriage programs are also used by some men to obtain control over a woman. She cites examples of U.S. American men who forcefully obtain domestic and sexual services from online marriage brides by threatening them of deportation, by isolating them or by simply dominating them (Jackson, 2004). Since there are hardly any mechanisms put in place to screen the men who subscribe to these programs, anyone including those who have criminal backgrounds can participate. In many cases, according to the critics, this lack of background check and scrutiny of male clients can place online brides/wives in precarious, even dangerous, situations (Jackson, 2004; Sulaimanova, 2006; Villapando, 1989).

Historical Roots of Mail-Order-Bride Practice

Arranged marriages have been taking place for centuries. The first documented mail-order brides to arrive in North America were Japanese. This group, which came between 1905 and 1930, has often been referred to as "picture brides" (Makabe, 1944). Since the importance of the visual representation of the picture bride has some similarities to online marriage processes, this practice is discussed in detail here. Although the exact number was not determined, a sizable number of mail order brides may have come between 1910 and 1930 (Makabe, 1944). The first wave of immigrant women came to British Columbia, Canada from Japan.

Japanese men who immigrated to the U.S. were mostly laborers. After years of hard work and sweat, they left the ranks of common laborers and became small farmers and businessmen. Many of these men believed that an economic interest in agriculture and settled family life would change laborers from sojourners to permanent residents (Ichioka, 1980).

Some men journeyed back to Japan to meet and pick their brides; others summoned the wives whom they have left behind. These two avenues, however, proved to be financially and politically taxing. Not only was the trip to Japan expensive, it was also time consuming (Ichioka, 1980). Many of the men were on deferment status, which meant that they had to return to the U.S. within thirty days or their status would be nullified. Such a restriction created a dilemma for many Japanese men for the search for a spouse could take 30 days or more (Ichioka, 1980). The best alternative available then for these bachelors was to resort to a picture-bride practice.

Taking part in the picture-bride practice was not a clear deviation from traditional Japanese custom.

In Japan, marriage was an individual matter but always a family affair. Heads of households selected marriage partners for family members through go-betweens. Go betweens arranged parleys between families at which heads of households discussed proposed unions. Although prospective spouses normally met each other for the first time at such meetings, they rarely if ever exchanged words. (Ichioka, 1980, p. 342)

Based on customary guidelines, the picture-bride system diverged from Japanese matrimonial customs in only one way; the grooms were absent during the wedding ceremonies. Unlike other marriages that legitimized the ceremony only with the presence of both parties—the picture-bride system still met the legal and social requirements of matrimony in Japan despite the practice of "absentia" on the part of the groom (Ichioka, 1980).

Through the picture-bride system, bachelors were given the prospects and opportunity to marry. Most important of all, the practice enabled these men to save money. With these incentives, the picture-bride system generated tremendous appeal and popularity. As a result, over half of the women who came to North America between 1910 and 1920 were picture-brides (Ichioka, 1980).

Some studies also pointed to the involvement of many other nationalities in the practice of mail order-brides for the U.S. and Canada. Along with Japanese women, another group of women refugees who came from Armenia arrived in North America in the 1920s as picture brides. Many of these women managed to survive the obliteration

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and oppression induced by their Turkish government. They came to North America to escape the turmoil and mayhem in their homeland:

> A disparate band of humanity, predominantly women and children—that belonged nowhere. Poor and unwanted, homeless and stateless, they had nowhere to go. Prohibited from returning to their homes in Turkey, some remained confined to refugee camps or orphanages for many years; some managed to set down new roots in the country of first asylum, usually in the Middle East or the Caucasus; others migrated to Soviet Armenia to build up that struggling nation; and still others resettled in a third country—any country which would give them refuge. (Kapriellian-Churchill, 1993, p. 4)

Many of the Armenian women were in search for a place to reunite with family members. Others longed for normalcy and intimacy, hence, created new family structures (Kapriellian-Churchill, 1993). Like the Japanese customs, marriages in Armenia were also rooted in tradition and arranging marriages similar to the picture-bride system was part of the convention. Very few women engaged in courtship. Most marriages were arranged by family through matchmakers (Kapriellian-Churchill, 1993).

When Armenian male refugees who settled in other countries including in North America decided to marry, family members found suitable brides for them based on their perceived elements of compatibility (Kapriellian-Churchill, 1993). Some of these women were summoned from distant places. Like many of their Japanese counterparts these Armenian women never met their future husbands and only communicated with them through letters and pictures. Many of these women were admitted to Canada between 1920 and 1930 (Kapriellian-Churchill, 1993).

Joining the above mentioned groups of women was another separate group from Korea. They came to the U.S. between 1910 and 1924, the period covering Japan's annexation of Korea (Sunoo, 1978). Following the annexation, anti-Japanese activities grew among Korean immigrants in Hawaii and the United States (Sunoo, 1978).

The Japanese became alarmed by these negative demonstrations and decided to grant exit permits to young Korean women willing to go abroad under marriage contracts as a way to appease the mounting tensions (Sunoo, 1978). The end result was picture bride marriages between 1910 and 1924 (Sunoo, 1978).

The picture-bride system was not only a common mode of matrimony for many women in earlier centuries, but apparently has become so for women in current times as illustrated through the online marriage programs today. Kelson and Delaet (1999) posit that U.S. men have long been enthralled with foreign women, particularly Asian women, and online marriage arrangements have enabled the fulfillment of such fascinations. With the birth of the World Wide Web, the mail-order bride practice has become more organized (Mirkinson, 1997). In addition, the World Wide Web has encouraged the practice to grow. Such growth was not surprising since mail order bride agents have identified the Internet as the most effective marketing venue available today. A report released by The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women identifies several of the web's advantages. First, it reaches a group of potential buyers such as men that come from more affluent countries. Second, it allows for the quick and easy updates of women's profiles. Third, it is cost-efficient and has the ability to reach a global audience (Hughes, 1997). I can add, because of the continuing success and expansion of the web sites, the online programs are profitable.

Using Mail-Order-Bride Web Sites

From the perspective of the bride-to-be, you are a woman from a Third World country. You go online to meet your future mate. You correspond with him through emails and chat rooms. After months of online interaction you agree to meet him. He proposes marriage. You say "yes." He brings you to his country of origin. This description is a typical journey of the so-called online marriage bride or "mail-order-bride". According to Ordonez (1997), "mail-order brides" is a term used to refer to women who are wives or fiancées of men from the United States and other European countries that enter such arrangements through matchmaking agencies. Online marriage brides immigrate to foreign countries through spousal or fiancée visas. In the United States, the first step involves a husband applying for a spousal or fiancée visa to bring his bride into the country (Belleau, 2003). The husband and the fiancée-bride then have ninety days within her arrival to the U.S. to get married (Belleau, 2003). The online wife, however, remains on conditional status of residence for two years (Belleau, 2003). Three months before this two-year-period expires, the husband and wife must file a joint application for permanent residency (Belleau, 2003). According to Belleau (2003), the wait for the permanent residency status to be approved, however, could take up to four years.

To be successful, online marriage programs must a) attract women who want to live in the United States and other prosperous nations to advertise themselves as potential brides; and b) attract men willing to pay fees to select potential wives. To qualify as a potential bride, a woman must be willing to post a picture and profile listing many of her personal information (age, height, weight, etc.) online. She must be willing and open to

receive emails and other forms of correspondence from male clients who may be interested in her. She must be willing to leave her country and live abroad. A male client must be willing to pay certain fees in order to obtain a list of women's names that have posted their profiles online. He must be willing to invest money, time and resources to meet the potential mate/partner.

Although data is difficult to acquire, it appears that many of these programs are profitable. Based on the research conducted by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, there are about 100,000 to 150,000 women that participate in the online marriage programs each year (Scholes, 1997). They come from a variety of countries.

Mail-Order-Bride Programs and Filipino Women

As explained earlier, online marriage programs thrive in countries that are economically challenged. The Philippines is one of these countries. Hence, it is not surprising to see Filipino women among the top recruits of the online marriage programs. Testimonials published in online marriage web sites focus on the happiness such arrangements bring to the men and women who engage in the practice.

But what exactly are the experiences of Filipino women who become online marriage brides? Some studies say these women's marriages are successful; others say they place women in precarious situations. In one study, data was compiled by the Centre for Philippine Concerns-Australia (CPCA) documenting 34 cases involving Filipino mail-order brides and children who disappeared or were murdered, or were victims of attempted murder. In the majority of these cases, the accused, the perpetrators, were the women's husbands or partners. There is also the well-publicized case of Timothy Blackwell who shot and killed his estranged pregnant Filipino wife and her two friends in

a courthouse (Consalvo, 1998). In addition, the study predicts that there is an unknown number of others who did not have their experiences documented and who regularly suffer from sexual, other physical, or emotional abuse.

Such atrocities have led to public criticism. Certain legislative initiatives therefore, were devised to reduce or eradicate the practice. In 1990, the Philippine government passed the Republic Act 6955, a law that prohibits mail-order-bride agencies from operating in the Philippines (Hunt & Sta-Ana-Gatbonton, 2000). According to Hunt and Sta-Ana-Gatbonton (2000), in a paper presented in 2000 at the Immigrant Women's Support Service Forum, the Philippine government established the "Mail-Order-Bride Law" or the Republic Act No. 6955 which prohibits mail-order-bride agencies from operating in the Philippines or from matching Filipino women to foreign men. Although advertising for such agencies disappeared after the law was established, the practice did not entirely disappear (Hunt & Sta-Ana-Gatbonton, 2000). According to reports mail-order bride businesses continued to prosper through underground operations (Hunt & Sta-Ana-Gatbonton, 2000). This was altogether possible since no monitoring agency was assigned to implement this law. Also, it is important to note, marriage matching via the World Wide Web was beyond the scope of this law.

Furthermore, Amir and Beeks (2006) contend that laws do not usually prevent online marriage programs from operating in a country like the Philippines where there exists entrenched corruption in the government and societal structures. According to them many governments either report difficulty in defining and conceptualizing the problem, or they merely deny it exists. In addition,

The illegality of prostitution in many countries does not create a barrier to the

traffickers, who bribe their way into the country and leave the smuggled women

with an illegal status and vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and victimization. This

system reinforces the networking and cooperation of international and local

criminal groups, as well as the corruption of law enforcement authorities and

individuals. (Amir & Beeks, 2006, p. xiii)

Views of the Mail-Order-Bride Industry/Programs

Critics

The mail-order-bride practice has both critics and proponents. Its critics complain

that the mail order-bride system treats women as commodities, and that it entices them

into dangerous and, at times, even deadly situations. Critics say that women are

commodified when their value is measured based on just their physical attributes. As

Callaghan (1998) asserts, "Over time, if women are valued solely on outward appearance,

they will strive to achieve this feminine and beauty ideal not for self-actualization or

accomplishment, rather, for men's approval" (p. 23).

Critics emphasize that cross-cultural marriages themselves do not pose a problem.

It only becomes a problem when these cross-cultural marriages are used as a channel to

prostitute women. As the primer published in the Gabriela (a solidarity group established

in 1989 to empower Filipino women) web site entitled, *Stop Sex Trafficking of Filipino*

Women and Children states:

The problem is not with cross-cultural marriages, but with the recruitment of

women into prostitution. These women end up being sex slaves of their supposed-

husband and or are pimped to other men. The system of mail-order bride is

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another instrument to traffick women. These syndicates capitalize on the Internet

and e-mail to advertise Filipinas as "pen pals" to circumvent the Philippine law

banning the system of mail-order-bride.

Hunt and Gatbonton (2000) contend that introduction agencies circumvent the

"Mail-Order-Bride Law" by using the Internet. They argue that while there are laws to

prohibit these agencies from operating, no monitoring agency is assigned to implement

these regulations. Other critics contend that with the advent of the Internet, unregulated

and instantaneous circulation, mail-order bride agencies operate successfully under the

guise of "introduction agencies and pen pal clubs."

The exploitative nature of the mail-order-bride program is further explicated by

Glodava and Onizuka (1994). "The more I became involved with the mail-order bride

issue, the more I realized the inequity presented by this exploitive situation" (Glodava &

Onizuka, 1994, p. vii). Glodava further contends that most of the mail-order brides in

abusive relationships have been rendered totally dependent on their husbands.

Villapando (1989) explains further the problems that plague these types of

arrangements. He writes, "today's mail-order brides are products of a very complex set of

situations and contradictions" (Villapando, 1989, p. 318). The matches mainly involve

women who are poor and economically dependent on much older men who come from

more economically prosperous backgrounds. Villapando (1989) contends that racial and

economic factors define such marriages and that many complications and factors

compound their difficulties. Firstly, there is the inequity of the man and wife partnership;

the wife is economically challenged and totally reliant on the husband's support and

finances. This is further complicated by the online marriage bride's immigrant status.

Villapando (1989) states, "Consequently, she is a foreigner not only to the culture, language, and society, but to her husband's race and nationality as well" (p. 319). As a result of this inequality, critics say, the mail-order bride is deprived of any means for self-autonomy and independence and eventually becomes susceptible and vulnerable to abuse and oppression.

Villapando (1989) cites Professor Bok-Lim Kim's testimony to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which states that mail-order bride marriages are naturally beset by a whole range of problems, including "negative reactions and attitudes toward foreign Asian wives and spouse abuse, desertion, separation, and divorce" (p. 325).

Furthermore, critics claim that mail-order bride agencies treat women as commodities as well as sexual objects by presenting them as marketable goods that can be bought or sold (Halualani, 1995; Serita, 1984; Villapando, 1989). They are also depicted as compliant, obedient and willing to cater to male demands (Halualani, 1995; JACL, 1985; Joseph, 1984; Lai, 1988; Serita, 1984; Villapando, 1989). Critics also say that in these marriage agencies not only are Asian women marketed as subservient and exotic, but as the better alternatives for men fed up of Western women who are overly independent and extremely career-oriented (Halualani, 1995; JACL, 1985; Joseph, 1984; Lai, 1988; Serita, 1984; Villapando, 1989).

"Commodification in Asian mail-order bride catalogues legitimizes the American capitalist system and its dominant social relation of gendered and racialized domination-subordination" (Halualani, 1995, p. 50). Almquist (1984), Chow (1991), Gitlin (1986), Goldman & Wilson (1983), and Lai (1988) make similar points about commodification and U.S. capitalism. Halualani agrees with Goldman and Wilson (1983) as she asserts,

"An instrument of hegemony, commodification strips Filipina women of their uniqueness as humans and transforms them into signifying products of Anglo male power that can be purchased, attained and therefore socially legitimated" (1995, p. 50).

According to Szyskowski (1998), mail-order bride advertisements identify the man (the consumer) as superior, and the Filipino woman (the commodity) as inferior and the object for sale. Szyskowski (1998) argues that the male client is addressed as "gentleman" and is portrayed as respectable and having a higher social status. The woman on the other hand is abstracted, not given any sort of identity. She is identified merely by a picture and a number next to that picture.

Other critics contend that the mail-order bride practice is an avenue for trafficking women. Some of the agencies, critics believe, recruit women for prostitution without their knowledge. As Mirkinson (1997) writes:

> Entertainment girls, hospitality girls, prostitutes, mail-order brides and massage girls: They're all part of the globalization of the world's economy. Around the world, women and children are being sold for profit and shipped across borders, through one airport to another, sometimes overland—commodities in the multibillion dollar transnational sex-trafficking industry. (p. 30)

The Gabriela Network claims that some online marriage businesses recruit women for prostitution, but present themselves as introduction or pen pal clubs. Gabriela contends that many of these women end up in compromising positions such as becoming sex-slaves to their husbands or being pimped to other men. Gabriela contends that the lack of monitoring agencies and the unregulated use of the Internet allow for these agencies to operate freely.

Despite critics' claims that the mail-order-bride industry perpetuate a form of exploitation and control of women and that many of their matches result in abusive and deadly situations, there is a dearth of research that points to such outcomes. Such claims need to be further substantiated by conducting more comprehensive research and obtaining first hand accounts of how the brides experience their relationships. For example, the extent to which potential wives describe their husbands to be "respectable gentlemen" (Szyskowski, 1998) and husbands describe their wives as lacking uniqueness (Halualani, 1995), are of interest in the current study.

Proponents

Proponents for the mail-order-bride system claim that the women who advertise themselves on these sites are adults who know what they are doing. Further, they support these women's efforts to improve their lives through arranged marriages. They complain that the "mail-order-bride" label carries with it a pejorative element.

Cecilia Julag-ay (1997), say that the criticisms of the mail-order bride arrangements do not do justice to successful marriages that resulted from these arrangements. Julag-ay interviewed 40 people who have entered into mail-order-bride channels. She claims her study shows the majority of these marriages are stable relationships that have lasted at least for 20 years (Julag-ay, 1997).

Constable (2003) also notes in her study that even though social inequalities invoked by the political economy in these women's country as well as issues of gender, race, and imperialism may have goaded these women to choose to marry foreigners, this does not preclude their opportunity to make informed decisions for themselves. What Constable (2003) argues is that these women, by virtue of choosing foreign men over

Filipino men (according to Constable, choosing the dependable over the unreliable) they have exerted their own self-agency and autonomy. Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that these women are merely helpless victims.

Online marriage operators further contend that many of the women who participate and utilize these agencies do so of their own accord; the women are willing participants in the practice and are "never coerced or threatened." Their participation in the practice is described as their way of expressing their own independence and self-autonomy. Online marriage operators also argue that the women who participate in the programs are educated, independent women capable of determining their own destinies.

Among some of the strongest proponents for the system are those who have entered into marriages through its channels. They contend that the agencies enable women to improve their economic status as well as help them find independence and prosperity as brides. They emphasize that the media and other social institutions have under reported the rate of success of their marriages.

One of these satisfied and happy customers for example, was so pleased with the results, that he was even inspired to start his own website. The operator of Filipina Lady writes,

> I began this website in tribute to Josie, my Filipina Lady cause I was so very
>
> proud of her and her family and friends. We have been fortunate to introduce
>
> several couples that are now married or engaged and we have had complete
>
> respect from everyone involved. Because of our love story that is true and real, we
>
> have inspired many others to have the adventure that we have.
>
> (www.filipinalady.com)

Online marriage operators and successful/happy couples also claim that the term "mail-order brides" is an archaic reference to a system that was dismantled centuries ago. Their emphasis is on the "introduction sites and pen pal clubs," not on the so-called "mail-order bride agencies." As Cherry Blossoms explains,

> We offer an Internet personals, dating and marriage service which years ago was referred to as a "mail order bride" service. However, since mail order bride services were only used back in the early 1900's, our modern version of helping men and women meet is by way of publishing their "Picture Personals Ads" on the Internet. (www.blossoms.com)

> Filipina Ladies objects to the idea that they engage in prostitution:

> Filipina Ladies International deals only in providing contact information of Filipino women to help you correspond with them and to start building friendship. However, we are not engaged in any service that sells a woman for an instant bride or in activity that will bring to prostitution. (www.filipinaladies.com)

> Operators of the sites object to being labeled "mail-order-bride" web programs.

They argue that they treat Filipinas with respect in their sites. Pinay-brides claims:

> We maintain an extensive database of the addresses of Filipina ladies who are seeking husbands and all sorts of pen-pals. Strictly speaking, ours is not a mail order. It goes without saying that you are a gentleman who treats a lady with courtesy and respect. Filipinas are not doormats, and as such they are not going to put up with a man who treats them badly. (www.pinay-brides.com)

> According to them, many participants do find true love and happiness in their

relationships. Amidst such claims and testimonies, proponents, like the critics, however,

fail to provide adequate data to support their claims that such marriages are indeed successful and beneficial to women.

The debate on whether online marriage programs have positive or negative effects on women continues. Critics say that the industry exploits women and ushers them into dangerous situations. Proponents argue that these women participate in the industry of their own accord and that by doing so they obtain some degree of liberation and self-autonomy. While scholars from both camps remain strong in their beliefs and perspectives, conducting a more thorough and comprehensive survey of potential and actual marriage experiences is warranted. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is, in part, to obtain first hand views of prospective Filipino online brides, Filipino online wives, and their husbands. These voices and views add essential data to the debate about whether choices are made with full information or some level of deception. This study also provides rich detail as to the benefits and challenges experienced by those involved.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

As stated earlier my goal in this study is to try to understand the practice of online marriage programs through the experiences of the prospective Filipino online brides, online wives, and husbands themselves, in an attempt to understand the multiple and multi-faceted factors that contribute to and are produced by the practice. These factors include race, class, and gender issues as well as histories, ideologies, structures, and norms. This chapter delineates the theoretical perspectives and approaches that form the foundation for the following research questions in this study: What are the similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? What are the similarities and differences between the prospective brides' and wives' discourses? How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity, and class issues? What do the interview discourses reveal with regard to contextual, structural factors such as history, religion, and education?

A Critical Center Perspective

Since my ultimate goal is to be able to develop a grassroots program for Filipino potential and online marriage brides and for Filipino women as a whole, my focus and concentration, therefore, is interventionist, transformative and emancipatory. It is for this reason that I elect to begin with an overall critical perspective. Critical theorists combine theory and action in order to enact societal change (Littlejohn, 2001). They look contextually at the experiences of real people, the social conditions in which they are situated as well the various power arrangements that surround them (Littlejohn, 2001). According to Collier (2005) and Halualani, Fassett, Morrison and Dodge (2006) scholars

working from a critical perspective seek to understand the relationships between contextual structures (here a history of colonialism and economic challenge, for example) and communication messages and discourses (here interview responses). Other key constructs include status positioning such as gendered position of husbands and wives, and Filipinos and U.S. Americans. Critical theorists believe that "Values should guide scholarship, and theorists should work as change agents in supporting those values" (Miller, 2005, p. 74). My own personal values play a major role in my study. It is my hope that my study in some way (no matter how modest) would contribute to the amelioration and betterment of conditions and choices for Filipino women as well as to the Filipino society at large.

<div align="center">**Feminist Postcolonial Theory Center**</div>

I believe that prospective Filipino online marriage brides and Filipino online wives, as members of the postcolonial world, face interlocking challenges, not only as women, but also as women of color who have spent most of their lives in an impoverished/economically depressed nation. These multiple challenges necessitate a theoretical lens that allows for the all-inclusive and far-reaching analysis of such factors. A feminist postcolonial perspective is instrumental in fulfilling this objective.

The interlocking oppressions that Third World women face and the challenges that confront them serve as the main impetus in the study of feminist postcolonial scholarship. Although postcolonial theory on its own does address such issues as gender, class, race, and ethnicity and does claim to go beyond issues of colonization and decolonization (Shome & Hegde, 2002), many feminist postcolonial scholars still believe there is a shortfall and meagerness in its address of gender and women's oppression in

postcolonial societies. Lewis and Mills (2003) among other postcolonial theorists critique the tendency for male theorists to use British men's action and behavior as symbols to represent the behaviors of all British subjects.

Other feminist postcolonial theorists cite examples such as Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and other works done by male writers that have paid very little attention to female agency in their deliberations of colonialism and postcolonialism (Lewis & Mills, 2003). Feminist postcolonial writers also cite another irony. Amidst scholars' propensities and efforts toward challenging master narratives produced by Eurocentric ideologies, as well as working for the inclusion of non-Western writers in the curriculum, race continues to be an often overlooked, contentious, and litigious issue (Lewis & Mills, 2003).

White second wave feminism's theorizing is predicated on the concept of global sisterhood, according to Lewis and Mills (2003), while the concept itself may be notable, many of the concerns and issues that are tackled by mainstream feminist theory and global sisterhood fail to account for all the experiences of non-White women. Critics such as hooks (1984) and Smith (1983) contend that principles employed by feminist theory are loosely based on the experiences of White middle class women and are assumed to be the overall concerns of all women. As a consequence, voices of other groups of women such as Black women and Third World women remain largely unheeded (hooks, 1989; Lewis & Mills, 2003).

My own discussions in graduate school with women of color/Third World women reflect this discrepancy. In many feminist theory/women's studies classes, many of the women of color/Third World women with whom I spoke felt out of place. The

discussions and issues being studied did not resonate with us. There was a general feeling that our issues/concerns as women of color/Third World women came as afterthoughts, often overlooked and overshadowed by the concerns of White middle class women. One Chinese classmate complained about how difficult it was for her to connect class discussions to real-life situations and circumstances in her native country. As she proclaimed, challenges faced by women in these countries (like the Philippines and China) were often multi-faceted. For many of these women, challenging hierarchies and cultural traditions/ideologies often come at a high cost. For this reason, many were often hesitant to challenge the status quo. Suggestions as to how to confront these issues would have been beneficial for us in these class discussions. However, these types of dialogues came very rarely.

The insufficient attention given to gender overall, the reluctance to discuss race, and the silencing and essentializing of Black and Third World women are the backdrop in which feminist postcolonial theorizing emerge. As Lewis and Mills (2003) contend,

Feminist and anti-racist politics was born out of recognition of the differences between women and out of the anti-imperialist campaigns of 'first' and 'third world' women. We have given feminist and anti-racist political writing a prominent place because for many women (white and not), these debates within the women's movement were an important foundational moment. Tensions and struggles within the women's movement faced white women with the necessity of recognizing that gender is always racialized. (2003, p. 4)

For women of color, race, gender, and class are always intertwined. Smith (1983) states, "sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the

politics of class and race….We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual" (p. 275). This urgent need for racializing gender serves as an impetus for feminist postcolonial theorizing and using this orientation to understand Filipina experiences.

According to Lewis and Mills (2003) feminist postcolonial theory has two general objectives: "To racialize mainstream feminist theory; and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualizations of colonialism and postcolonialism" (p. 2). Postcolonial theory chronicles issues of colonialism, makes attempts to understand colonial conditions in an effort to unravel and modify them, makes necessary reconnections with the past in order to better understand the oppressions and mechanisms of colonialism, and finally, helps to facilitate active intervention that could lead to the emancipation of the oppressed/colonized (Gandhi, 1998; Shome & Hegde, 2002). Feminist postcolonial theory also makes note of the various forces that characterize the colonial and the postcolonial world, and it also adapts transformative and interventionist stances. However, it underscores one particular feature that many feminist postcolonial theorists argue is lacking in postcolonial theory, the emphasis on gender and power relations.

As mentioned earlier, many feminist postcolonial theorists critique postcolonial theory for its failure to underscore gender and for its shortcoming in addressing issues related to gender. In essence, feminist postcolonial theorists believe that women face interlocking oppressions; not only are they subjected to oppressions related to race, ethnicity and class, but they also must endure oppressions related to gender. This is what feminist postcolonial theory endeavors to address.

The interlocking challenges that women face also call for the employment of a new and more comprehensive model or method as Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama and Yep (2002) posit,

> Our lives as citizens in an increasingly interdependent global community, as well as in culturally diverse local communities, call out for the need for new models of dialogue. There is a demand for new models that move beyond those that privilege specific types of advocates and speakers and that reinforce already unbalanced hierarchies. Examples of actual dialogue among scholars in communication journals, however, are few, and still fewer are exemplars of dialogue in which the scholars address the complexities of culture, let alone deal with intersecting forces of race, class, gender and sexuality and incorporate discussions of structural forces such as histories, institutions and ideologies. (p. 220)

Like many other women of color, Filipino women also face interlocking oppressions related to race, class, and gender. Feminist postcolonial theorizing can be instrumental in analyzing how race, class, and gender interplay in the practice of the online marriage programs. Feminist postcolonial theorizing is essential in deconstructing or unpacking how issues of colonialism and postcolonialism influence or shape the histories, ideologies, structures, and roles that are being produced through the online marriage programs.

To understand Filipino online marriage practice, it is not enough to merely look at gender-related factors. It is equally crucial to look at how race and ascriptions based on skin color affect how Filipinas are being treated and viewed through these online

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marriage programs. Furthermore, many of the women (including the prospective Filipino online marriage brides and online wives), who take part in this practice may originate from economically impecunious nations (Sulaimanova, 2006). They may engage in mail-order-bride programs only to escape abject poverty and indigence. Therefore, another dimension, socio-economic class, is also necessary to examine. Feminist postcolonial theorizing is appropriate for it is designed to address these various interlocking and multi-layered factors.

Feminist postcolonial theorizing is also essential in creating the opportunity for the Filipino mail-order-bride as a woman of color and as a woman of the Third World to be heard. I define Third World woman here as a woman who comes from an economically disadvantaged background/country (like the Philippines) and whose experiences and history have been shaped or influenced by years of colonization. Rectifying what critics believe as a limitation of mainstream feminist theory (which they believe represents/reflects mostly the experiences of the middle class White woman) feminist postcolonial theorizing instead places the voices and experiences of the Third World woman at the center. Feminist postcolonial theorizing is tailored to address the diversity of needs and challenges of the Third World woman. It is also helpful in facilitating the emergence and fulfillment of the Third World woman's voice, specifically in this case that of the Filipino online bride/wife.

The experiences of the Filipino online potential bride/wife, being a colonized woman of the Third World, is vastly different from the experiences of the colonized Filipino male. As Ketu Katrak (2006) explains, "For female subjects, experiences of colonial domination are gender-specific and rooted in the control of female sexuality

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throughout a woman's life" (p. 9). What Katrak argues is that the oppression of colonized women is further aggravated because universal patriarchal ideologies and hegemony are compounded by indigenous patriarchy. She posits:

> Postcolonial women have to deal with multilayered traditions rooted in indigenous custom with overlays of colonial influence. Within patriarchal structures, women often need to negotiate rather than reject regressive interpretations of tradition outright…traditions are used often to control female sexuality, and controls of the female body are mystified as being faithful to tradition. Tradition in itself is ahistoricized and regarded as fixed, timeless, and unchanging. Women must pay severe costs for confronting tradition. (Katrak, 2006, p. 159)

Since women are designated the responsibility of protecting tradition, she is expected to uphold certain values and customs that may not always be beneficial to her, and in turn may constrain her agency. Katrak (2006) states:

> Key controls of female sexuality are located in the arena of "cultural tradition" particularly when women are expected to be the "guardians of tradition" in anti-colonial struggles. Further, "traditions" most oppressive to women are located within the arena of female sexuality—not only the glaringly violent ones such as sati, but other more normative forms of objectification in customs like dowry, multiple child rearing, as well as in fulfilling traditionally expected roles as daughter, wife, mother. (p. 11)

The Filipino online marriage practice was born out of a colonial past and a postcolonial present. The act of colonizing a particular culture or society is engendered

by the desire to civilize (Spring, 1998). "Arrogantly, Romans, and later, Europeans and Americans justified Western expansionism as necessary for civilizing the world" (Spring, 1998, p. 9). In the words of Vicente Rafael (1993) this is what is called "white love." "White love," is "the desire to save the savage and heathen by conversion to Christianity, replacement of native languages with English, and changing native cultures" (Spring, 1998, p. 10). This so-called "white love" is a way or a reason to justify imperialism (Spring, 1998).

The Philippines has not yet disentangled itself from its colonial past (San Juan, 1998). In many ways, it continues to be colonized. San Juan (1998) states:

>…like most Third World societies plagued by the vestiges of the past, the Philippines today suffers from neocolonial bondage. Although nominally independent, its economy is controlled by the draconian "conditionalities" of the IMF-World Bank, its politics by semi-feudal warlords, bureaucrats, and military officials beholden to Washington, its culture by U.S. mass media. (p. 60)

The historical context of the Philippines includes being subjected to years of Spanish and American domination and colonization; it is my belief that the Filipino psyche and morale have been deeply affected by this history. These effects have clearly manifested themselves in the various cultural practices and beliefs of the contemporary Filipino culture, including the online marriage practice. I believe that this practice may be a microcosm of the overall condition and state of contemporary Filipino cultural identities and self-image. Hence delving into its intricacies is significant in unveiling the various elements that may have contributed to the way Filipinos view and position themselves in the international arena as well as how they perceive themselves as Filipinos

in the company of each other. Therefore, a goal of this study is also to revisit the Filipino potential bride/wife's colonial past in order to understand her postcolonial present and future.

It is also important that one looks at the colonial past of the Philippines in order to better understand why in the online marriage program Filipino women are most often, if not always, paired with the foreign Anglo White male. My own personal observation during my last visit to the Philippines leads me to believe that Filipinos have developed a certain preoccupation with their colonizers— particularly the U.S. Americans. One needs only to look at the Filipino obsession with U.S. American products, culture and lifestyle, as evidenced by the preponderance of U.S. American stores and fast food joints that line the streets of many cities, as well as Filipino women's fascination and fixation with "marrying up" or "marrying White or American." As Bergano and Bergano-Kinney (1997) quote one Filipina, "Because of the American colonization process, Filipinas are being taught that 'marrying up' means 'marrying white' " (p. 202), as maybe in the case of the Filipino mail-order-brides. Pierce (2005) contends,

> When consistently faced with messages that you are backward, inferior, barbaric, and uncivilized –and then promised that there is an alternative—it is tempting to opt for that alternative, at first. However, the alternative—assimilation—implies assimilation into something, some normative standard or ideal. Socially, politically, and historically that ideal has been to assimilate to whiteness; when dealing with "outmarriage," such assimilation promises to be an actual possibility. (p. 35)

This fascination may be evident in the interview discourses of prospective brides and wives. This enthrallment with the West may be symptomatic of the Filipino colonial past. As San Juan (1998) claims, "Although direct colonial rule was finally terminated in 1946, the cultural and political hegemony of the United States persists to this day" (p. 60). The question for this study is, does this preoccupation reveal anything about the relationship of the Filipino online wife to her U.S. American husband (the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized) or the Filipino in general to his/her colonizer? Do the interviews provide any evidence to support Memmi's (1968) contention, "The colonial condition chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, moulded their respectives characters and dictated their conduct" (p. 45)?

Who, where and why do some Filipinos appear to desire their colonizers? As Memmi (1968) asks,

> The desire of the colonizer for the colony is transparent enough, but how much more difficult it is to account for the inverse longing of the colonized. How could the colonized deny himself so cruelly? How could he hate the colonizers and yet admire them so passionately? (p. 45)

If valorizing of the Anglo white male is revealed in the online marriage interviews, then this may explain the perceived complicit relationship of the Filipino online marriage bride to the mail-order-bride practice.

Prakash (1995) and Gandhi (1998) posit that modern colonialism endorses another kind of violence. This violence is accomplished through the establishment of "enduring hierarchies of subjects and knowledges—the colonizer and the colonized, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilized and the primitive, the scientific and the

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superstitious, the developed and the developing" (Prakash, 1995, p. 3). These relations based on clear either/or dichotomies, may explain how Filipino women are being portrayed on online marriage web sites as subservient, submissive women waiting to be rescued by their foreign White knight. It may also explain why the Philippines, a country of the Third World, compares and contrasts itself to more affluent countries like the United States.

Gandhi (1998) posits that this "schematic reinscription," as illustrated particularly in the recruiting materials of the web sites, make the assumed legitimacy of the colonial relationship more pronounced (p. 15). She states,

> The colonized was henceforth to be postulated as the inverse of the negative image of the colonizer. In order for Europe to emerge as the site of civilizational plenitude, the colonized world had to be emptied of meaning. (Gandhi, 1998, p. 15)

Since feminist postcolonial theorizing calls attention to the plight of Third World women and endeavors to ameliorate their conditions, it therefore allows for a transformative and interventionist focus. It is my desire that the outcomes of this study afford me the appropriate knowledge to permit me to first bring out the voices of individuals who affiliate with both colonized and colonizer peoples, and who are participating in a practice which may reveal further colonization or resistance. Second, I apply these insights to develop a constructive grassroots program for Filipino online prospective brides and wives.

A feminist postcolonial perspective enables several tasks in this particular project to be accomplished. These tasks include the following. First I analyze the various

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compounding factors that help shape the experiences of prospective Filipino online brides and online wives, issues of race, gender and class in colonial history, contemporary context and accounts of experiences. Second I give a clearer and more comprehensive account of prospective Filipino brides, and online wives' experiences and perspectives as colonized women of the Third World (different from that of the colonized Filipino males). I also invite the emergence of multiple voices and views of prospective Filipino online marriage brides, wives and husbands. I give attention to levels of individual agency and their descriptions of contextual factors such as economic resources. I address issues of power relations by incorporating interview discourses from wives and husbands, thus providing the means to study how male and female positioning is negotiated. Finally I encourage the procurement of transformative interventionist resources in an attempt to ameliorate conditions that may be identified in need of change through the development of a grass roots program geared towards the protection and welfare of prospective Filipino online marriage brides and online wives.

The multitude of contextual factors and challenges that a colonized woman of the Third World, such as the Filipino online bride/wife, are addressed through applying the tenets of feminist postcolonial theory. The feminist postcolonial lens is useful for it allows for the blending of feminist principles with postcolonial ones. However, one final theoretical layer is warranted to bring attention to the experiences of individuals as they engage in the online marriage programs, an interpretive approach.

<div align="center">**The Incorporation of the Interpretive Approach**</div>

According to Carbaugh (1996), Collier (1998), and Martin and Nakayama (2002), the interpretive approach is a useful tool in gaining insight into people's experiences,

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sense-making strategies, and views of relationships with partners. Using the interpretive approach one is able to look at the relationships among codes, norms and contexts (Collier, 2005). Collier (2005) argues that analysis often centers upon examining both themes/forms of discourses as well as what the discursive account produces or accomplishes. By looking at the descriptions of Filipino online brides, wives and husbands, I am able to examine how issues of race, class and gender intersect in the interview accounts and narratives, and identity positions that are constructed and resisted (Collier, 2005).

Consequently, an important lens into knowledge building about online marriage involving Filipinas is to analyze the views and experiences of the Filipino online brides, wives and husbands. As argued earlier, while claims by both critics and proponents of the practice abound, there is scant evidence or firsthand accounts from the women and men who participate in these programs. Several authors point out the limitations of previous studies that were focused mostly on online marriage catalogs and web sites. Wilson (1988) suggests that researchers should go beyond the online marriage catalogs and explore the accounts of men and women behind the stereotypes and representations in the catalogs. Robinson (1996) admits that, "there have been a few studies that focus on the women themselves: their motivations, and aspirations, how they come to advertise on the web sites, or what their experiences are once marriages have been contracted" (p. 3). This is another gap in the literature that I wish to address in this study. Also, since my project functions as an audience assessment in preparation for the development of a future grassroots training program, having situated interpretations and examples are essential.

Therefore incorporating an interpretive approach is justified. I believe that the more structurally oriented feminist postcolonial analysis of the broader context and critiquing of the web sites should be complemented with descriptions of even small samples of people with actual experience of the online marriage programs. Interview responses may also reveal ideologies and gendered norms.

Research Questions

Because of the need to understand the extent to which the attitudes and experiences of wives and husbands differ or to which they are similar, as well as how they negotiate issues such as money, love, and their relationships as a whole, the first research question is posed: What are the similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? Since it is important to explore diversity and multiplicity of voices among the women, and to uncover various positionings of being a Filipina (being a prospective bride and wife), comparing and contrasting the discourses of prospective brides and wives was also essential. Therefore the second research question is posed: What are the similarities and differences between prospective online brides' and online wives' discourses?

Because of the need to study the ways that gendered positioning, class positioning and national identities influence the experiences and perceptions of the prospective brides, wives and husbands in relation to the online marriage practice, as well as in their relationships with each other, the third research question is posed: How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity and class issues? Lastly, the need to understand how the prospective brides' and wives' beliefs and attitudes about marriage and life are influenced by the history of the Philippines especially in the context of

colonization and how structural factors like religion and education shape their belief

systems, the last research question is posed: "What do the interview discourses reveal

with regard to contextual and structural factors, for instance, history, religion, and

education?"

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the project's research design, provide an explanation of how I assessed the contextual and structural factors, and identify the methods that were employed in the data collection interviews and analysis. To review, my research questions are the following: What are the similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? What are the similarities and differences between prospective brides' and wives' discourses? How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity and class issues? What do the interview discourses reveal with regard to contextual and structural factors, for instance, history, religion, and education?

The tenets of feminist postcolonial theory, being able to address the multiple challenges or forces that affect the experiences of the woman of color, being able to address colonizing elements, being able to draw attention to the experiences of the Third World subject, and being able to incorporate an interventionist focus (Lewis & Mills, 2003) are helpful in understanding how contextual factors both enable and constrain the participants' options and abilities to act. By looking at the intersections of gender, class, and national identity I am able to draw out how these forces affect the experiences of the Filipino online marriage brides/wives and husbands, and how these factors influence their decisions to participate and experiences in the online marriage programs. Postcolonial feminism coupled with interpretive goals, also suggest the need to examine the role of context and structures such as education, religion and history as they emerge in the participants' responses. Therefore I address contextual factors including history, economic factors such as capitalism, politics including U.S. colonialism, and traditional

and contemporary positioning of Filipino women. I look at participants' interview

discourses to examine gender positioning of husbands and wives, prospective brides and

wives with Western husbands, references to gender, national and class identities and

references to history, religion and education.

Recruitment of Participants

As I had mentioned earlier, the online marriage practice may carry with it a

stigma. Based upon my experience with the online marriage program, many individuals

who are involved in this practice are usually hesitant or unwilling to discuss details of it

with outsiders. Because of this, it was extremely challenging to gain access to these types

of communities.

My recruitment process therefore, involved a network of friends and family

members who identified willing participants. The process took place in the following

manner. I made a list of family members and friends who were willing to identify willing

participants; these family members and friends then contacted their prospective

participants and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. When the

prospective participants agreed to participate, family members and friends then obtained

permission for me and for participants in the Philippines, another interviewer to contact

them. I believe that it was appropriate for others to make the first contact because it

allowed the prospective participants to make an informed choice and to develop a sense

of security and assurance knowing that the researcher/interviewer was someone their

friend trusted. Once permission was obtained, the interviewer or I contacted the

prospective participants. The interviewer or I either made first contact through email or

phone. The first email or phone conversation entailed initial greetings, introductions and

a brief explanation of the interview process. It was also at this juncture where time and

day for the interview was set. The interviews were then conducted at the participants'

convenience. This was the scenario for most of the recruitment process.

There were a few occasions in which the participants themselves, after completing

the interview, volunteered names of their own families and friends who used a marriage

web site. They contacted these individuals and asked if they would participate in the

study. They also acquired permission for me or the other interviewer to contact them.

Once they agreed to participate, one of us contacted these individuals and conducted the

interviews. Informed consent procedures were followed at the time of the interview. The

duration of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to one hour and took place mostly at

the residences of the participants.

Participants

My participants included eight Filipino prospective brides using marriage web

sites who were living in the Philippines, eight Filipino wives who used marriage web

sites and who were either living in the Philippines with their husbands or in the U.S.,

England or Australia, and eight husbands from the West— three living in the U.S., three

living in the Philippines, and two in England or Australia. There were eight couples

interviewed, three were living in the Philippines; three were living in the U.S.; one

resided in England, and one in Australia.

The prospective brides came from Visayas and Mindanao islands. Respondents

offered their own details about age, language, and family size when answering the

question about their personal background. Their ages ranged from 23-48 years of age.

They spoke T'boli, Ilonggo, and Visayan, but were also able to understand and speak

Tagalog and English. All the prospective brides came from big families of 5-12 siblings. Five of the prospective Filipino online brides had college degrees; three had some education (completed high school, 1-2 years of college education).

Filipino wives were originally from the provinces of Visayas and Mindanao. They were between 24-36 years old. Their primary languages were Ilonggo, Visayan, Tagalog, and English. Most came from big families as well. Three were degree holders. Five completed high school or since leaving the Philippines, have gone to college for a year or two. Five were in their first marriage.

The husbands were composed of U.S. Americans, British, and Australian citizens between the ages of 46 and 71. One is in his first marriage. Seven were in their second or third marriage. The majority of the husbands had college degrees and were either working for a company or were self-employed. The spouses came from the following countries: One from the U.K., one from Australia, and the rest from the United States. Couples have been married three years or less. Couple participant information is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Filipino Online Wives and U.S. American/British/Australian Husbands

Couple	Age gap	Children born to couple
Maricor-Stan	28 years	0
Zhai-Ron	23 years	1
Claire-Poolbum	27 years	0
Ayen-Philfun	40 years	0
Bianca-Loco	17 years	0
Melanie-Peter	32 years	0
Roxanne-Doug	35 years	0
Maria-Robert	22 years	0

Interviews

Justification

Since the mail-order-bride practice may carry a certain stigma and may be considered a volatile topic to discuss for most people, particularly for the Filipino online marriage brides/wives/husbands, it became extremely important that the method chosen and employed took into account the context in which the online marriage program occurred. In essence, this method must have the capacity to mine significant information without it being obtrusive. It must be a method that places the interviewees at ease so as to allow them to answer the questions as openly and candidly as possible without making them feel the discomforts of interrogation. This method must also allow for trust to

develop between the respondent and the interviewer. In-depth interviews therefore were most suitable for this project.

Berger (1998) claims that although their purposes may vary, an in-depth interview is much like an extended ordinary conversation: "The conversation can ramble and move in many different directions. The in-depth interview, in contrast, is highly focused. It is conducted to get at particular issues, such as hidden feelings or attitudes and beliefs of which a respondent may not be aware or that are dimly in his or her consciousness" (p. 55).

There are several advantages to in-depth interviewing. First, it is flexible (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Darlington and Scott (2002) note, "Their immediacy and relational quality afford considerable flexibility to the data collection process, both in terms of areas explored and the direction of the discussion" (p. 49). Brenner, Brown and Canter also concur,

> Probably the central value of the interview as a research procedure is that it allows *both* parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved. There is an implicit, or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation which is not so central, and often not present, in other research procedures. Any misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer or the interviewee can be checked immediately in a way that is just not possible when questionnaires are being completed, or tests are being performed. (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985, p. 3)

This flexibility as well as opportunity to probe and ask follow-up questions within the time frame of the interview is extremely important as well as valuable. One question may

not always "get it right," or asking the first question once may not always be sufficient to spark in-depth reflection or provide adequate detail. So, having the flexibility of clarifying answers or doing follow-up probing enhances the likelihood of excavating more relevant and significant information especially crucial to the study. As Berger (1998) declares, "You can collect a great deal of detailed information when you conduct depth interviews. You can ask follow-up questions and pursue topics that interest you for a considerable length of time" (p. 57).

The order of the questions is important in order to build trust and allow comfort with the process to emerge. The participants may initially be reluctant to disclose personal or sensitive information. "The more people talk, the more they reveal (give away) about themselves" (Berger, 1998, p. 57). Therefore structuring the questions to build trust allows for a more open and more conversational engagement. Darlington and Scott (2002) also say that when the interview process allows for the opportunity to clarify meanings, it becomes less structured becomes more conversational.

With in-depth interviews one has the opportunity to adapt if and when the situation requires. "If a promising topic comes up you can pursue it. You can ask the respondent to be more specific or to try to generalize, whichever will be most useful to you" (Berger, 1998, p. 57).

Another benefit an in-depth interview brings, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1997) is that in-depth interviews allow for the active creation of meaning. They say,

> Both parties to the interview are necessarily and ineluctably *active*. Meaning is
> not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent
> replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter.

Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge—treasuries of

information awaiting excavation, so to speak—as they are constructors of

knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p.

114)

This was important in this study for interviews allowed the participants to feel

that they were actively taking part in an important project and that they were not just

subjects that were under study. In turn, this allowed them to develop a greater personal

stake and investment in the interview and in the research process as a whole. I believe

that the more invested they were, the more substantive and comprehensive the experience

is for them and for the researcher. At the end, not only does the interview experience

become more satisfying, but also the findings become more noteworthy and more

consequential.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) posit that in-depth interviews are most helpful when

direct observation of the phenomenon is not possible or if direct observation poses as too

intrusive as in the case of the online marriage study. Directly observing interactions

between the Filipino online wife and her husband and other individuals in their lives was

beyond the scope of this study and would have been viewed as intrusive.

In-depth interviews are helpful for they allow people to talk about their past and

present experiences extensively. Darlington and Scott (2002) say the following about in-

depth interviews,

They are an excellent means of finding out how people think or feel in relation to

a given topic. They also enable us to talk with people about events that happened

in the past and those that are yet to happen. These retrospective and anticipatory

elements open up a world of experience that is not accessible via methods such as

observation. Other than through diaries or other records made at the time,

interviews in the present are the only way to access a person's perceptions of past

events. Even then, we are as reliant on what the reporter chose to write down at

the time as we are on what interview respondents choose to tell us. (p. 50)

In sum, in-depth interviews are appropriate for this particular study because they

allow flexibility, give the opportunity for clarification, and provide the chance for

participants to engage in the interview and research process more actively in terms of the

creation of meaning. In-depth interviews are useful to complement the contextual

analysis by adding situated voices and accounts of those directly involved in the online

marriage practice.

Data Collection Procedures

Face-to-face and telephone in-depth interviews were conducted. Interviews were

conducted with three different groups: prospective Filipino online brides who were still

living in the Philippines; Filipino online marriage wives living in the Philippines, United

States, England, or Australia; and their Western husbands living in the Philippines, U.S.,

England or Australia. There were 24 participants interviewed overall. Eight of these

participants were prospective online brides (living in the Philippines and who are still

searching for a partner/spouse), eight were online wives (already married to U.S.

American/British/Australian and living in the Philippines, U.S., England and Australia),

and eight were U.S. American, British and Australian husbands (living in the Philippines,

England or Australia). Interviews with members of these three groups were useful since it

was important to understand the experiences of those who were considering becoming

online marriage brides/wives (mail-order-brides/wives) and the husbands who chose to marry them. Further, the focus on three groups enabled me to see if there were patterns of described positions, subject locations, norms, or power relations for each group.

I was unable to personally conduct the interviews in the Philippines because of feasibility and funding issues; therefore, I worked with a cultural insider and reliable interviewer in the Philippines to conduct interviews of the prospective Filipino brides and two of the couples. The spouses were interviewed separately and were instructed to leave the room/area when one spouse was being interviewed (although the extent to which this was carried out was difficult to determine for phone interviews). I personally conducted 12 separate phone interviews with six Filipino wives and their six husbands residing in the Philippines and the U.S. All the interviews were audio recorded.

The interviewer in the Philippines was a native speaker of Tagalog and was proficient in the various languages of the Philippines. She had adequate knowledge of the online marriage programs. She had lived in both the United States and the Philippines and had traveled to Australia and Europe and hence had ample understanding of the context and background from which the participants were operating. We both maintained a goal of featuring the participants' voices and views. The interviewer and I upheld principles of privacy and confidentiality required by the University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board and followed Informed Consent procedures. Finally, we both concentrated on trust and a personal relationship with interviewees that enabled rapport building and sharing.

Confidentiality

Since many of the prospective participants may have been disinclined to disclose intimate information for fear that their identities may be made public, it was of utmost importance that the respondents were assured of privacy and confidentiality. Real names were replaced by pseudonyms, no identifying information was used in any of the analysis; no form of monetary compensation was given to any of the participants; and the participants were given the option of not answering any question or opting out of the study without penalty.

Saturation

As Morse (2000) contends, a large sample is not necessary if the method allows for the participants to elaborate in detail about their experiences. The saturation for my study means that the, "new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category" (Cresswell, 1998, p. 151). Therefore, once the interview reaches a juncture in which the questions no longer yield any new information (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) interviewers consider that the saturation point. I reached saturation with eight interviews each of prospective brides, wives, and husbands.

Interview Guide

The interview questions were designed to extract from the participants their personal experiences, feelings and perspectives in relation to their using an online marriage program. Please see Appendices A, B and C for Interview Guides. These questions were crafted in such a way to elicit responses that related to the key concepts addressed in the research questions. The questions addressed such factors as: general

background, how and why they became involved in the online marriage programs, background, experiences, and/or hopes, expectations, and advice.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to flesh out identifiable patterns and themes contained in the participants' discourses and narratives as they related to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79). According to Daly, Kellehear, and Glicksman (1997), thematic analysis entails searching for a theme that plays a significant or important role in describing a phenomenon. It is the "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). Since thematic analysis also focuses on the patterns of lived experiences and/or behavior, it is suitable for this study (Aronson, 1992).

There are advantages to using thematic analysis. First, it allows for a diverse, complex and nuanced analysis of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since I believe that online marriage programs and the experiences of the participants entail complex and multi-faceted factors, it is beneficial that a method was used that would adequately account for these multiple forces. Second, thematic analysis offers flexibility. It allows for the type of analysis that sufficiently reports the realities/experiences of the participants as well as the meanings behind these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is able to account for a rich data set like the ones presented in this study. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) claims, "you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews" (p. 226). The goal therefore, was to use transcribed interview discourses to pinpoint descriptions and patterns of experiences, and then selecting direct quotes to illustrate the patterns and themes (Aronson, 1992).

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Data Analysis

To begin, I transcribed all interviews. I then read and re-read the transcripts multiple times. The next step was to look at the groupings of my respondents to see if there were unique ways in which the responses of the couples who were living in the Philippines stood out from other responses (couples living in the U.S./Britain/Australia). Therefore, I conducted a regional comparison to see if the respondents' answers differed. Respondents answered in almost the same manner and maintained similar stances and perspectives about marriage and life as a whole. Overall, I found no significant distinctions. I also examined the telephone versus the in-person interviews to see if there were any distinct differences in either quantity or quality of responses. I found no distinctions. I also verified if there were any differences between interviewers. Since the interviewer and I followed strictly the rules and guidelines established and agreed upon rules of conduct and behavior, there were no distinct differences discovered. Therefore I chose to code the responses of the eight wives as one overall group and the eight husbands as another overall group.

I then looked for themes and patterns. Themes are exchanges that can be described as, "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings and feelings" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p. 131). I then categorized the themes by using the process described below, and these were then used to answer the four research questions.

I identified themes and patterns based on the key concepts that were addressed in the research questions. A theme in this case was that which "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

Specifically, I looked at articulations/attitudes/beliefs/perceptions about gender roles, national/cultural identities, class positionings and desired positioning, history, religion and education within the discourses. In identifying attitudes about gender roles for example, I began by analyzing participants' answers to the question "How would you describe your ideal man/woman?" or "How would you describe your relationship with your husband/wife?" I also gave attention to gender if it was brought up in any answers.

I then grouped the answers based on their prevalence. Prevalence was based in this case on how often the answers appeared in the discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What appeared the most frequent was identified as one emerging theme or pattern. I applied the same principle to other concepts such as national/cultural identities, class, history, religion, and education. I then grouped the responses into emergent categories under each theme. The themes then were used to answer the four research questions.

Since the first research question asked for the comparison between the wives' and husbands' discourses, I looked at the way in which both groups were similar and different in answering particular questions. For example, if asked how they felt about the online marriage programs, and the answers from both parties were mostly positive or beneficial, I considered this a similarity, and labeled it as a "positive feeling" theme. I did the same thing with their differences. This same procedure was also applied in addressing the second research question in which the narratives and discourses of the prospective Filipino brides were compared to the Filipino wives.

For the third research question, I identified themes that related to the issues of gender, national identity, and class. If participants were asked about the qualities of their ideal wives and husbands and their answers were, "I want to have a husband who is a

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good provider, who can take care of the family," or "I want to have a wife who is traditional and wants to stay home and take care of the children," the first response was labeled as a "breadwinner" category and was placed under the "gender" theme. The latter was labeled as a "homemaker" category and placed under the "gender" theme as well. I repeated the same procedure for national identity and class.

The process I used to address the last research question included a look at discursive examples that marked certain norms, values and standards of conduct (Collier, 2005) with regard to contextual and structural forces such as history, religion and education. I used interview questions such as, "How do you picture your life while living in the United States/Europe?" or "How would you describe your ideal man?" If the prospective Filipino brides' answer was, "I want a man who is Catholic" or "I want a man who is professional and educated," and if I found these answers to be common and prevalent among the two groups of women, I accordingly categorized them as "husband should be Catholic" and "husband should be professional" and "husband should be educated." I then looked at these themes along with their own educational level or religion.

Role of the Researcher

I position myself as a scholar with cultural membership in the Filipino culture. I see myself as a Third World woman living in the United States and having the privilege of higher education. I realize that although I speak the same language and share the same cultural membership, my experiences diverge from the experiences of the Filipino women I interviewed. Nonetheless, my aim in this study was to be able to execute fairness towards the participants. My goal was to give the people in this study the

opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words as well as to present their varied voices in a manner that was meaningful to them. But just like any research, however, certain biases were unavoidable. As I have stated earlier, conducting this study was engendered by my desire to understand and problematize this phenomenon; I want to understand why online marriage programs depict Filipino women mostly as subservient, submissive and easy to please; why using these online marriage programs has become prevalent in Filipino society, and what draws Filipino women to use them. I came into this study with a critical stance. How Filipino women were depicted in these online marriage web sites affected me, for I felt they also depict who I am. All throughout the interview process, however, I tried to remain open and to allow for the multiplicity of participants' voices to emerge. The narratives and experiences of the Filipino women I interviewed invoked a host of emotions on my part. I felt sadness for the kinds of racial and gender discrimination they have endured as well as for the difficulties they have experienced in their lives coming from families of poor and modest backgrounds. At the same time, I felt admiration for the women's courage and desire to help their families as well as their determination to survive. Overall, I recognize that the reasons for why these women engage in the practice are not simple and that looking at this topic from one point of view would be reductionist and would not account for all that is taking place. Hence, it was extremely important that I try to understand the experiences of these women in a way that was not only holistic, but respectful, meaningful, and profound. As a researcher, it was my goal to do all of these things.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I report the findings of the study. I outline the themes and patterns that emerged in the participants' narratives and relate these themes and patterns to my research questions. Again, my research questions are the following: What are the similarities and differences between the husbands' and wives' discourses? What are the similarities and differences between the prospective brides' and wives' discourses? How do the interview discourses reveal gender, national identity and class issues? What do the interview discourses reveal with regard to contextual, structural factors such as history, religion and education?

As described in Chapter 3, I used a thematic analysis to flesh out identifiable patterns and themes contained in the participants' discourses and narratives. Thematic analysis was appropriate in this instance because it drew on themes and patterns of lived experiences and behavior (Aronson, 1992). My goal in the analysis was to use transcribed discourses/conversations to describe and list the patterns of experiences using direct quotes or paraphrased ideas (Aronson, 1992). In the quotations below respondents have been given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

What are the Similarities and Differences between
Wives' and Husbands' Discourses?

Filipino wives' and their husbands' narratives illustrated both similarities and differences. The following are the identified themes that emerged: a) Both groups emphasized the difficulties and challenges in dealing with cultural differences in views of family, age differences, and language/communication styles; b) most wives and husbands expressed satisfaction in the marriage; c) husbands wanted a wife with traditional values ,

and d) husbands tended to be more assertive and confident in their discourse while wives tended to be more tentative, less confident, and ambivalent in their discourse.

Challenges Dealing with Differences, Cultural Belief Systems/Attitudes, Age, and Language

According to the wives and husbands, cultural differences proved to be one of the challenges in their marriages. They cited these cultural differences as one factor in creating tension and conflict. The most profound and significant of these cultural differences was the concept of family. Filipino wives placed more priority and value on family (their parents and siblings) concerns and needs than did their Western husbands. This imbalance is illustrated in the following narratives.

According to Ron, a Western husband, family is a challenge because it is one of the most, if not the most important aspect of a Filipino woman's life, "…it's not all about them…it's all about the family. That was one thing I had heard about is that…Filipinas are very much family-oriented…family comes first…"

Philfun, summarized this Filipino concept about family,

You have to understand that Filipinos are far more family-oriented than most Westerners, even Western women you know…I mean the family here in the Philippines is far more important to people than it is in the West which I think is a great thing but sometimes it does cause troubles because Filipinas' first loyalty will always be to her family I think.

On many occasions, the wives' desire to help their families resulted in the husbands having to extend financial help and support to their wives' immediate families. Philfun stated,

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The third cause of any arguments has been her family's need for money. And how

much I can give. I am paying for the college education of her sister…one of her

sisters…and two of her brothers plus another sister has cancer…or had cancer

which I paid to get removed. But now we needed…basically more…she has to

have more treatment.

Philfun expressed difficulty understanding his wife's constant need and desire to take

care of her family. "And I sometimes have difficulty in understanding why Ayen

sacrifices so much for the sake of her family who in my opinion perhaps could do more

for themselves."

Robert, also saw the same desire from his wife as that of Philfun's. He said,

…Maria has a dream house…and to have a car….and be able to help members of

her family…you know…who are extremely poor…..Funny! because she never

asked me for any single amount…but I do believe…at the back of my mind that

like any typical middle-class family in the Philippines…they expect me to offer

some help.

The Western husbands regardless of whether they live in the West or the

Philippines, related the types of adjustments they had to make with regard to their wives'

ideas and concepts of family. They discovered that to their Filipino wives, family does

not only mean the immediate family, it also involves the extended family; which can

include cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles. To the husbands, this had further

implications for the dynamics of their marital relationships.

There are deep historical roots as to why Filipinos place such tremendous value

and priority on the family. This vision of the "extended family" predominates in the

Filipino culture. According to Gelia Castillo and Juanito Pua (1963) the Filipino family is, "residentially nuclear but functionally extended" (p. 116). This means that a Filipino household consists of a father, mother and children, but is usually relationally extended among a wider kin group (Nadeau, 2008; 2009). Even if members of a kin group do not live together, they are expected to take part in family activities as well as to help family members during hard times (Nadeau, 2009). For many of the Western husbands this posed a challenge for they found themselves in many instances having to support the "extended family" in so far as sending other siblings to school, providing financial support to parents and other members of the kin. As many expressed, this has presented some conflict in their relationships with their wives.

Because all of the couples reflected at least a 17-year-age-gap, the men's age range was from 46-71, while the women's age range was from 24-37, managing the age difference was a source of conflict. This was true for couples that live in the West and the Philippines. Although the husbands did not mention this respect, many of the online wives did. Melanie, an online wife said, "I want to have a child…but he can't…he no longer wants to have children because he is already old…and he said his bones are now aching…" Bianca credits some of the conflict and tension between her and her husband to her age in combination with her personality. "I always create drama…even in the slightest little thing…I cry and I clam up and I don't want to talk." Maria, another online wife bemoaned the fact that her current older husband cannot have children as she simultaneously described her ideal husband, "my ideal husband…I wish is open-minded…someone who can give me a child that is cute…a mestizo..."

Since many of the wives were in their first marriages and had not had the chance to bear children it is not difficult to understand why they desire children in their current marriages. The husbands on the other hand, were either in their second or third marriages and therefore believed they are either too old to have children as in the case of Melanie's husband; or they no longer wish to have any since they already have children from their previous marriages. Although some of the online wives said that the age differences were relatively minor concerns, several described that these differences did present some difficulty in managing their relationships.

One other difference expressed by both online wives and Western husbands who live in the Philippines and the West was the variation in language and communication styles. Since most of the wives and husbands had not yet acquired proficiency in each other's languages (English and Filipino) the occasions for misunderstandings and misinterpretations were frequent. Philfun said,

> I think most of our arguments…the little…the big arguments we've had, have been really on three things…one is…just simply misunderstandings because her…she says…we talk almost exclusively in English because I don't know Visayan that well and she…speaks in English and she really…she means something slightly different than what she is saying…

Ron, another husband shared his thoughts about this challenge,

> I have to be patient first and…because she doesn't understand things a lot of times, and I have to explain them. I can't just give her a quick answer. I have to explain it out…[so] that she would understand and be a part of things…

Loco, another online husband said, "There's always some type of communication error…and you learn to read those and to understand those and what to expect."

The wives also expressed the same level of difficulty. Roxanne, an online wife had misgivings and apprehensions in communicating with her husband and in-laws. "I was afraid…I thought what would it be like…what is in store for me there?...how will I talk to his relatives…what if?" Bianca, another online wife shared her confusion when her husband addressed her in what she perceived as a "too direct" tone. She described the scenario,

> There was one time when he asked me to sign the papers (referring to
>
> immigration papers)…I cried…well you know how we sign (in the
>
> Philippines)…we just scribble it…well they won't be able to tell it was me…so
>
> he raised his voice on me…because he was running out of time and he was trying
>
> to beat the deadline…then I just scribbled the signature…so I cried cause he
>
> raised his voice.

Maria, an online bride shared her challenges in dealing with her husband's and family's accent. "The most difficult…is how to understand their language…they have an accent that's hard for my understanding…" The differences in language and communication skills expressed by both parties (husbands and wives) in this study are also prevalent in many intercultural relationships. According to Martin and Nakayama (2007) differences in communication styles, values, and perceptions are common in such relationships as exhibited in Bianca's and her husband's relationship. Bianca's discomfort may have originated from different cultural norms about directness. The exchange between Bianca and her husband is also representative of how the couples

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described negotiating their cultural differences; the wives tended to "clam up" or "cry" when language difficulties complicated disagreements.

Coming from a high-context (Hall, 1976) culture and using an indirect approach, Bianca, described that instead of directly stating that she was hurt, merely "clammed up" and burst into tears. Bianca's actions would not be considered unusual in the Philippines. As Nadeau (2009) explains, Filipinos tend to shy away from confrontations and conflict. Hence, instead of expressing exactly what they mean and feel (as what an individual from a low-context culture might do), individuals tend to use indirect speech or mediators in order to resolve the conflict. Since Bianca's husband comes from a low-context (Hall, 1976) culture and he used a more direct approach of revealing and stating exactly his true intentions, needs and wants (Martin & Nakayama, 2007), it is not surprising that conflict arose. Bianca's actions like those of other wives' may have also been a result of desires to save face, both hers and her husband's. In the Philippines, saving face is extremely important. Face is a person's perceived positive social and public self-worth or other-worth (Oetzel, 2009; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Self-face is "the protective concern for one's own image when one's own face is threatened in the conflict situation" (Oetzel, 2009, p. 167). Other-face is "the concern for accommodating the other conflict party's image in the conflict crisis situation" (Oetzel, 2009, p. 167). Nadeau (2009) explains that this is one of the reasons why Filipinos tend not to say or do anything that they believe would cause embarrassment to the other person. It is in this context that Bianca's and her husband's behavior becomes more complicated. Each may be behaving consistently with their traditional culture and socialization.

Satisfaction in the Marital Relationship

Most of the online wives and their Western husbands expressed contentment in their marriages. Loco, when asked if expectations in his marriage were fulfilled, said,

I would say yes…because…um…(name of wife) is a down to earth person…I don't think she's at all selfish. I think she is more of a giver than worry about herself more, and that's sort of how I am. So things can work out…

Philfun, similarly articulated,

Yes I think so…I mean I am very happy…that's not to say we don't have arguments…and some of those are cultural I guess…but I'm really happy…so I won't change it if that's what you mean…

Peter described his relationship with his wife,

We have a very comfortable relationship…like we just got another television if she wants to watch a Filipino show she just goes to the bedroom and watches that…and I watch the American shows…cause I don't speak Filipino… and we're comfortable…we don't have to be with each other…you know…she doesn't feel uncomfortable that she goes into the bedroom…so that kind of thing…

Ron, expressed his happiness with his wife when asked if his expectations were fulfilled,

Yes they are…because I have a very loving wife and she is devoted to the marriage…that was one of my expectations…to have somebody who's gonna be loving…be there for me and for me to be there for her…to have somebody who's very happy and energetic.

Most of the wives shared the same happy sentiments as their husbands with respect to their relationships. Zhai, an online wife, said this when asked if her expectations were fulfilled,

Oh my dreams were fulfilled…because…I was dreaming of coming to America and that came true…and I found a good husband who is unlike others…that treat you like the other… and...he's my prince because…he treats me as a princess too…

Maricor, another online wife said her marriage/relationship with her husband exceeded her expectations. She said,

Yes it's really fulfilled. In fact, it went beyond my expectations…I thought this was just a dream…this commitment…but I was wrong that it is exhausting…because in my experience with (name of husband) it's really nice to be married and you add to that a child that's obedient…it's really nice…I don't know but my life now is so convenient…

Roxanne, another online wife said her life is much better than before. "It's good compared to my life before…I am content with my life with (name of husband)…he loves my children as if they were his grandkids…"

Although both online wives and husbands expressed satisfaction with respect to their relationships, there were some observable differences in terms of the level and focus of their contentment and gratification. The husbands' satisfaction centered mostly on the qualities of their wives and the treatment they were getting from them. The wives, on the other hand, although they also made mention of the desirable qualities of their husbands, talked more about the convenience and comfort that their marriages have in terms of

economic status and lifestyle and treating their children well. What they articulated was that their lives were much better than before, for they were able to come to America and live with ease and comfort; something they admitted they did not have back in their home country. There was also a sense of indebtedness and gratitude toward their husbands. They believed their husbands were responsible for bringing them into this life of comfort and convenience, something they said they would not be able to attain if they had married Filipino men.

This revelation also pointed to the difference in the definition of a successful/good marriage between parties. Generally, the online wives rated their marriages to be a success for they were able to live a good life (access to resources/material possessions, convenience, and financial stability/security). For the majority of Western husbands, the marriages were a success because they were able to find wives who have traditional values and were committed to family and the marriage. Proponents of online marriage processes say that both parties were able to obtain positive outcomes from the marriage, and the couples interviewed here did describe their mutual satisfaction. Both parties had their needs fulfilled. Critics however, may also argue that the outcomes described also demonstrate that the wives were expected to fit into norms of being "devoted" and "happy" and grateful for their financial needs being met. The consequences for violating norms for behavior also were much stronger for the wives in that divorce would affect the wives' socio-economic status but not the husband's status.

Husbands Desired Traditional Values

The Western husbands also expressed their desire to marry a Filipina for they believed that Filipinas exhibited traditional values. As Loco said,

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I knew I had a preference for Filipinos because I had dated them in high

school…one of the major draws for me was their traditional family values…they

put a lot of emphasis on family and that's important to me.

Ron had this to say, "when I was researching…women of different cultures and

stuff…and what their…what I was looking for was…some…you know…the

women…somebody with you know with good morals…that wasn't Americanized…that

wasn't always me…me…me…" Stan, a U.S. American husband expressed his frustration

with dating American women.

I think I've just gotten really frustrated with dating American women…you know

I just wanted somebody that was a little bit more traditional…a little bit less

career oriented …cause you know most American women…they want it…they

want it all…you know I wanted to find someone that would…you know be

interested in just a more traditional relationship.

Based on these narratives, it is evident that many of the so-called stereotypes were

substantiated, confirming what the critics have suggested. Some of the women indeed

wanted to marry American/Western men because they felt these men were their tickets

out of poverty. Many American/Western men did want to marry Filipinas because they

believed they possessed the so-called traditional values which would serve as key factors

in fulfilling a traditional, family-oriented type of marriage. The portrayal of American

women is comprised of bad morals, "me, me, me" overly career oriented and "wanting it

all." This image becomes the negative in comparison to traditional, giving, good morals,

and family oriented Filipinas.

On the other hand, the proponents of the online marriage web sites offer another

point of view. Constable (2003) states, "I have come to see the men involved in

correspondence relationships as a very diverse group of people; many are decent and

well-intentioned human beings who have learned a great deal in the process of their

relationships" (p. 6). Constable (2003) in her research also refers to the group of women

she interviewed whom she believed were not helpless victims as critics would have

portrayed them to be.

> These women were not desperate, economically or otherwise. They did not write
>
> to just anyone. They were not pressured by families, brokers, or economic
>
> circumstances to form relationships with foreigners, and none of them were eager
>
> to leave their local communities (p. 28).

Constable (2003) says it would be inaccurate or presumptuous to say that these women

possessed no agency. By the mere fact that they were able to choose to whom to write

and with whom to correspond illustrates their self-autonomy and agency.

Assertive/Direct Discourse vs. Tentative/Indirect Discourse

During the interviews, the majority of the Western husbands expressed more

confidence and conviction in their answers, while many of the online wives demonstrated

tentativeness and indecision in some of their answers. The husbands provided descriptive

accounts of their backgrounds without much hesitation. Many were willing to volunteer

intricate details of their background and lifestyle as well as supplying opinions on issues

well beyond the purview/scope of the question being asked. As Loco's answer illustrates,

> I was born in California. My father's Russian. My mother's Scottish-Irish. They
>
> actually call that Hein which refers to Heinz 57; basically a conglomerate of all

sorts of races. I have, I went to, went to the army in 1982. I have some college—maybe a year of college. My father was born on the east coast—my mother was born in Texas. I'm currently living on the east coast. I left California because I still feel there's too much violence in California, for raising a family so I decided to move more in the northeast area where there is less violence.

Philfun, answered similarly:

Okay. I'm 68 years old. I was born in London, England and raised in England for the first 25 years of my life then we moved… when I was 25 I was already married…umm…we moved to Africa for three years in Zambia and 11, 12 years in South Africa… and in South Africa both my children were born. Then we moved to America and then we… we live there for 30…29 years. During that time I took out American citizenship. I have dual nationality really…two years ago I got divorced.

Peter detailed his life quite extensively:

Alright…um…I was born and raised in Hawaii…moved to Chicago in my teens…in the Airforce at 18 served 4 years…came back to Hawaii, worked there for a couple of years on to Chicago where I spent a majority of our, my life. I am 63 years old…the last six years I spent in Detroit when my company moved. I had spent 23 years working for the (name of company). It's a company based…they deal with (inaudible) tools…systems…big high-end appliances…like five-thousand dollars for a dishwasher that kind of stuff. They also own…speakers which are applied to Ferraris and Lamborghinis…things like that.

Many of the Western husbands were willing to provide details about their reasons for seeking a bride online. For example, Ron answered candidly when asked how his background influenced his decision in joining the web site.

Like I said…my background as far as dating other women influenced that. Because you know the women I was dating around here did not have what I was looking for…and you know I dated a variety of age ranges here in the US…and just didn't have the qualities I was looking for.

Stan presented a detailed answer in how he and his wife met:

We met you know…what's interesting is that what we tell people isn't what we…you know the truth…we don't tell people the truth…we don't feel comfortable with, you know, we don't wanna be judged… What I tell people is that…we met, you know, in a chat room and…on yahoo messenger. But that's not the truth… So…the truth is…is that we met in Cherry Blossoms…which is this like online…it's like a dating site. But you know it's uh…the women are usually from Asian countries and the men are…mostly Americans…

Ron's response typified those of other husbands' views that most local women weren't what they were looking for. However, Stan's description of how he and his wife do not tell others how they met shows some discomfort with how others might judge them negatively.

Some of the responses of the online wives to questions like "Were all the expectations you had in your marriage fulfilled?" showed the use of qualifiers. For example, Melanie, an online wife had this to say: "Hmmm…ah…not all…life is not

perfect anyway…" Bianca, an online wife was asked the same question and said, "In our relationship? I don't know how to answer that…well we don't have children yet…"

When asked if there were any conflicts and tensions in their marriage, Zhai an online wife, at first hesitated to answer. Then she answered,

> Okay…sometimes our child would want something and I would say no and he would say yes…that's what we argue about…and sometimes I get lazy in cleaning…it's not just once a week it has to be three times a week…three days a week that I need to clean…sometimes I only clean once a week so he doesn't like that…he wants me to clean at least twice a week.

This response also implies that, in her view, they have different ideas about authority in their relationship.

The differences in the manner in which the online wives and Western husbands presented their answers overall may be better understood through additional cultural factors. This was true for couples that live in the Philippines and in the West. One factor may be self-autonomy and sense of liberty, the other may be the concept of face. The husbands demonstrated more autonomy in their answers by describing watching television alone, directing wives how often to clean house, and decisions to seek an online wife because other women were not suitable. Their answers show that they maintain some degree of command and control overall. There did not seem to be as much concern with the issue of face which is different from many of the online wives.

The wives expressed ambivalence in their answers to some questions. Many of them tended to second-guess their own answers. There were others who sought approval from me on whether or not they were answering the questions correctly. There was a

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general feeling during the interview that some of the wives were hesitant to disclose information that would put their husbands or their relationships in a bad light. Again according to Nadeau (2009), Filipinos in general and Filipino women in particular, place great value on the concept of self and other face. Since both self and other face are highly valued among Filipinos, Filipina wives may enact certain behaviors that would allow them as well as their husbands to preserve or maintain positive face amidst conflict or uncomfortable situations. This may serve as one explanation as to why many of the online wives and one husband put forth effort in making sure that the outside world sees their lives and their relationships as successful.

Another explanation that can be put forward is the Filipino concept of "utang na loob" or "indebtedness." As Dolan (1991) explains, "utang na loob" is a dyadic bond that constitutes an interdependency between the debtor and the grantor. This interdependency can exist for a protracted length of time (Dolan, 1991). Many of the online wives expressed a sense of gratitude towards their husbands for bringing them into a life that they believed was easier and convenient from the life they had once lived. Since the debtor (wife) is expected to be appreciative of the grantor (Western husband), it would be inappropriate for the debtor to say things that would place the grantor in a bad light.

Critics of the online marriage industry may say that this hesitation to articulate negative comments about their husbands may be attributed to issues of power relations and difference in status. Villapando (1989) argues that many of these types of marriages are characterized by power differentials. Villapando (1989) contends that racial and economic factors define such marriages and that many complications and factors compound their difficulties. Firstly, there is the inequity in these husband and wife

partnerships; the wife at least in the early years of the marriage, if not throughout, is economically challenged and totally reliant on the husband's support and finances. This is further complicated by the online wife's immigrant status. The matches mainly involve women who are poor and economically dependent on much older men who come from more economically prosperous backgrounds.

The online wives therefore, tend to be reliant on their husbands in many respects. Their immigration status constitutes one of the challenges they face once they enter such arrangements. According to the critics, many of these wives may be reluctant to do anything that would induce displeasure from their husbands for fear that the husbands might retaliate and send them back to their home country. In this case, not only would they lose their immigration status, and their so-called convenient lifestyle and ability to contribute to the extended family, but also, they would endure ridicule and scorn when they went back to their homeland.

What are the Similarities and Differences between Prospective Brides' and Wives' Discourses?

The narratives offered by both the prospective brides and the wives presented several similarities and differences: a) Their descriptions of their background were similar and parallel; b) their ideas of a good life were congruent; c) they had similar concepts of an ideal husband; d) they had similar vision and perception of life in the West; e) they described their experience with online marriage web sites very differently, and f) they offered similar advice to women who wish to engage in the online marriage programs.

Similarities in Background

All of the prospective online brides and wives identified themselves as members of families that come from poor/modest background. They were raised in large families (5-12 siblings) a characteristic not uncommon among Filipinos who believe children are blessings; the more you have the more blessed you are. According to Mendez and Jocano (1974) the desire to have big families stems from Filipinos' values about family that tend to favor large rather than small families. Since Filipinos rely mostly on family for emotional and economic security, having a large family is believed to be more beneficial (Jocano, 1974). Having more children could mean having more helpful hands to do the work as in the case of families who live in the rural areas (Jocano, 1974).

All of the potential online brides and wives expressed their sense of duty and responsibility towards their families. Since many of them were the eldest in the family, they described strong beliefs that it was their primary responsibility to take care of their parents and the rest of their siblings. This dedication to family is considered one of the most important values of being Filipino. The Filipino culture is characterized by close family ties; parents must work hard to provide for their children and children in return must take care of their parents in their old age (Nadeau, 2008; 2009).

The Good Life

A majority of the prospective online brides and wives offered the same description of a "good life." According to them, this meant having a "loving and reliable husband," having adequate material and financial assets such as having a nice home and car, having access to education, having opportunities for career development and advancement, and having the chance to live peacefully with no stress.

Laura, a prospective online bride, said,

My idea of a good life…is one that is free…free from oppression and

slavery…that…that I have more than enough material goods…but of

course…above all…that I always live my Catholic beliefs and ideals…and

thankful to my Creator…and to be direct and specific…of course I want my own

beautiful and big house…and a good husband…professional with stable job…

Joanne, another prospective online bride expressed almost similar sentiments, "This is a

good life…if you have a home, a loving and romantic also faithful, husband; that…you

have a car, beautiful children…and financially stable for the rest of your life…"

Zarina, a prospective online bride said,

To me a good life is something that brings happiness and joy…I mean to all

members of the family…good life is fun…no stress…happy and no emotional

problem…then you have money…house…land and a car…

Zhai, an online wife explained her fear of experiencing the same hardships as her mother

had endured. She wanted her life to be much different. Her idea of a good life was, " I

don't want my future to be like my family's…you know always in a crisis…so I want,

you know,…that my situation will improve…my future to be bright…I don't want to

have to suffer…"

Ayen, an online wife, declared that she was living a "good life,"

I don't work anymore because he doesn't want me to work, even at home,

because he said he didn't marry me to make a maid out of me…so at home my

work is only to take care of my child…and then go to the gym…go shopping…

It is perhaps not difficult to understand why these women's definition of a good life translate to financial security, given the economic and social conditions that have served as a backdrop to these women's current or previous lifestyle and circumstances. The Philippines faces many more long term economic challenges; in essence, there is much to be done in terms of alleviating poverty before any macro recovery can be attained. Because of the prevailing poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources, ten percent of the population earns or owns 90% of the country's wealth (Zaide, 1976). With 70% of the population comprising the poor or lower class, it is not surprising that many Filipinos feel the need to go abroad in order to find better livelihood or to search for a "better life" and economic stability.

There seemed to be consensus among the women that I interviewed that finding the "good life" would be difficult, if not impossible to obtain, in the Philippines. It is my belief that unless the Philippine government can find ways to bridge the gap or remedy the inequity and inequality between the rich and the poor, this tendency of Filipinos to look outside of the country for economic options may endure.

Kate, a prospective online bride encapsulated her feeling of hopelessness in the following statement, "The life here is so miserable…belonging to a poor family…" Zarina, another prospective online bride said, "…being a single mom, an employee…you know…struggling to survive with a…very small amount…of take home pay…I thought…how could I make my life…you know…worth living?" Ayen, a Filipino online wife described her frustration in her situation,

> I work at an office and I have a child…heaven forbid if he gets sick…and then my
> pay is not even enough for our daily needs…so my kid if I haven't saved anything

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and if he gets sick…that's why I worked and I chatted so I can find myself a

"White"…that way I can be saved from this predicament where I just work and

work and I can't even save…the pay is so low for my position…really low…

The women admitted that while they felt melancholy in leaving the Philippines, they

found it difficult to see any hope in improving their lives unless they went abroad.

Ideal Husband

The prospective online brides and wives defined the "ideal husband" almost

identically. The common characteristics of an "ideal husband" were: dependability, good

provider, a Catholic/Christian, professional (educated), handsome and romantic, has the

capacity to love whole-heartedly, and has the ability and willingness to support the

immediate and extended family.

Zarina, a prospective online bride said, "My ideal husband should have

been…and should be…someone who is smart, professional, Catholic, and is financially

established….the one who is willing to take me…and love my children…" Joanne, a

prospective online bride, presented similar ideas, "I want my ideal man to be good

looking…macho…and well-off." Another prospective online bride, Lilia, wanted her

ideal man to be:

> … A good father to my children…and my romantic lover everyday…not only
>
> that…he is also the kind of guy who is capable of providing for our family…a
>
> comfortable life with a home and material possessions too.

The online wives also expressed the same concepts of an "ideal husband". Bianca,

an online wife commented, "I want someone who is caring and can give me what I

want…someone who can love my family in the Philippines." Melanie, another online

wife, echoed what others have said, "…someone who is responsible at the same time romantic…" Zhai, an online wife described her husband as the "ideal." "He is kind, responsible…sweet…loving…respectful…and most of all loving…"

One can see the similarities and parallels in all of the women's answers with regard to their notion of an "ideal husband." This consistency in their descriptions was perhaps prompted by the women's similar past experiences in many of their relationships with Filipino men. A majority of the prospective online brides and wives clarified why they emphasized the quality of dependability and reliability, and why they insisted that the husband be a good provider for the family. According to them, they had negative experiences in their relationships with Filipino men. As shown in the examples below, the men simply neglected their duties and responsibilities, such as providing for the family, finding a stable and secure job, and did not nurture the relationship overall.

Bianca, an online wife described her experiences with her Filipino boyfriend, "I had a boyfriend in the Philippines before…they are liars…that's why I am upset…the men (referring to Filipino men) you know…you can't trust them…" This lack of faith and trust in Filipino men was also echoed by Ayen, another online wife, who highlighted the appeal and attractiveness of a foreign man by comparing and contrasting him to the Filipino man.

> Most of the White men if you compare them to Filipino men…it's better…if you marry a White man they are kinder and nicer…and they can really help…the Filipino man…most of the time he has no job and if he does have a job his salary is not enough.

Again in these articulations, there was the reemergence of the qualities of dependability and reliability. The characteristics described by these women in their explication of what an "ideal husband" entails are described in relationship to inadequacies they have discovered in the Filipino men they have met and with whom they had established relationships. While these women magnified economic and financial security as one of the primary reasons why they chose White men over Filipino men, perhaps other factors such as the perceived inadequacy of Filipino men may have also contributed to the increased desirability and appeal of White men.

This line of thought is consistent with Constable's (2003) assertion that "political economy—global and local patterns of power—plays a role in these relationships and in the gender ideologies that promote a perception of the attractiveness and desirability of western (usually white) men and Asian women" (p. 28). Constable asserts that even though social inequalities invoked by the political economy in these women's countries as well as issues of gender, race, and imperialism may have goaded these women to choose to marry foreign, it did not preclude their opportunity to make informed decisions for themselves. Constable (2003) argues that these women, by virtue of choosing foreign men over Filipino men (in this case choosing the dependable over the unreliable) are exerting their own individual self agency. The online brides/wives are making choices and negotiating contextual constraints such as poverty in choosing to better their circumstances.

What would be interesting to see is if this preference for White men over Filipino men would prevail, if Filipino men became transformed from the "perceived unreliable to the "perceived reliable" and financially productive. Although it is important to recognize

the diversity and the heterogeneity in these women's experiences, their beliefs, and their

personal and individual circumstances; it is also just as noteworthy to recognize the

patterns of similarities that emerged in their discourses as they related their notion of the

"ideal husband."

Romanticization of Life in the U.S./Europe

The prospective online brides and online wives believed that if they were to

immigrate to the United States/Europe, their lives would be greatly improved. When

asked "how would you picture your life in the U.S./Europe?" Joanne, a prospective

online bride exclaimed, "Wow! It will be 'heaven-like' to me…I have reached heaven."

To Jean, another prospective online bride, the "good life" was synonymous with living in

the United States,

> I will be financially well-off and visit places…I won't have any worries…I will
>
> be free from stress and worries…soon I will be able to help my brothers and
>
> sisters…I will have plenty of food to eat, clothes to wear and sufficient funds to
>
> buy medicine.

Daphs, a prospective online bride, expected to live like a "queen."

> I see myself as "queen"…because if my husband loves me I expect him to treat
>
> me…a special person…special in the sense that while I am adjusting to his
>
> culture…he will teach me to drive…he should provide me allowance…while I am
>
> still unemployed…he should take pride in introducing me to his family…and
>
> when I am homesick he will give me time to visit places…

> Bianca, an online wife said she expected her life in the United States to be much

better than her life in the Philippines. "I would be able to buy things…afford anything."

Ayen, another online wife also agreed, "Life would be easier…more comfortable." The prospective online brides and online wives are not alone in thinking that America is the land of milk and honey. Their assertions that life in the United States/Europe would be gratifying are shared by many Filipinos today. I cannot remember a time when even one Filipino I met during my recent visits home have refuted such a notion. There is almost a unanimous reaction and agreement to the idea that life in the United States at least in terms of economic conditions, is far better than life in the Philippines.

The Filipinos' romanticization of the United States/West has long been apparent. As Lowe (1996) points out, "For Filipino immigrants, modes of capitalist incorporation and acculturation into American life begin not at the moment of immigration, but rather in the 'homeland' already deeply affected by U.S. influences and modes of social organization" (p. 11). Constable (2003) and Cannell (1995) talk about this positioning of the U.S. as the place of 'fantasy.' Cannell (1995) describes these sentiments in her study of rural Filipinos from Bicol. She said they are:

> Extremely interested in thinking about the Philippines with reference to somewhere else. Usually that somewhere else is America, and usually the comparisons stress that the 'outside' or distant place—the imagined America—is a place of power, wealth, cleanliness, glamour, and enjoyment. (p. 12)

To many Filipinos America represents a place where they can obtain what cannot be had in their home country.

In this backdrop, it is important to mention that some of the women I interviewed also demonstrated ambivalence and uncertainty toward their previous romanticization of America/West once they arrived or settled in the United States/West. Bianca, the online

wife, who once described and was extremely confident that her life would be better in the United States, explained, "I thought it would be easy…I didn't realize that you also have to work hard." Maria, another online wife expressed her surprise when she arrived at her husband's place, "I tried to listen carefully to their table conversation…say hello and smile…I thought that when I arrived I would just sit there…hang-out…go to places but no…the opposite happened." Maria also noted other challenges. "The most difficult was to understand their language…they have an accent that is difficult for my understanding…and the weather…climate was so cold when I got there."

Several of the online wives themselves have admitted that their notions of the U.S./West may have been too naïve. Some acknowledged their romanticization and valorization of the U.S. may have been too extreme for it prevented them from seeing and anticipating ways that they were expected to adapt. The need for them to learn a new language and acquire new communication skills crucial in their interracial/intercultural marriages and relationships was overshadowed by the myth and the desire for arrival in the "fantasy land." As illustrated in Bianca's words, "living in America is not as easy and as comfortable" as many of the women have imagined. For many of these women, the hurdles they encountered in their marriages and the obstacles they faced in adjusting to life in the United States/West tempered their earlier extreme admiration and valorization of Western life. It would be interesting to see if this would also be the case for the prospective online brides once they come to leave the Philippines to live in the U.S., England or Australia.

Differences in the Views of Online Marriage Web Sites

A noticeable difference was discerned between prospective online brides' and online wives' discussion of online marriage web sites. When presented with the question, "How do you feel about online marriage web sites?" the wives shared positive comments about the web sites while almost all of the prospective online brides expressed negativity towards the same sites.

Ayen, an online wife shared her particular liking for the web site Filipinaheart.com because according to her it is where she met her husband.

> There are a lot of perverts in the web sites…but I was lucky for my husband was not like that…he didn't ask me to take off my clothes and show him my body…he didn't ask me to get naked and show him my boobs…that's why I liked him.

Ayen's appreciation for the web site was attributed to and centered mainly on the fact that it facilitated her meeting and union with her husband without involving nudity. Her comments also imply that nudity is the norm, and her husband's conduct an exception to the norm.

> Melanie, another online wife also gave credit to Filipinaheart.com:
> With other web sites many people just do crazy stuff…with Filipinaheart.com most are serious…first I discovered the web site…at first I was with Cherry Blossoms…but many of the people there were no good…so I went out of it and closed my profile…I tried others and then I was enticed by this web site…I was encouraged to try…because with the name Filipinaheart.com mostly Filipinas would be there…

Zhai, another online wife liked Cherry Blossoms. "This web site…Cherry Blossoms is really nice…they are friendly…they are not like the others that are rough." Maricor, another online wife thanked Cherry Blossoms for introducing her to the man she now calls her husband. "I really like Cherry Blossoms…without it I would not have found my husband…so we are really thankful to Cherry Blossoms." Roxanne, another online wife thanked Filipinaheart.com for introducing her to her husband. "First of all I want to thank…my big thanks to my friend who taught me to search…and then of course to Filipinaheart.com the web site…because through this…now I met my husband."

There was a distinct consensus among the Filipino online wives when it came to their ideas about the online marriage web sites. It is of interest, however, that their emphasis on the desirability and appeal of the web sites focused mostly on the ability of the said web site to connect them to men they deemed fit to marry. The web sites were not appealing because of their efficiency or organization; rather, they were attractive to these women for they provided a channel for which to meet their ultimate husbands.

Unlike the online wives who expressed gratitude towards the online marriage web sites, a majority of the prospective online brides conveyed their disapproval and misgivings towards these web sites. Daphs, a prospective online bride stated, "At first I felt cheap…I felt grossed out…because it felt like shopping…and I am not cheap you know." Another prospective online bride, Yvonne, described her experiences with one of the online marriage web sites to which she subscribed.

It did help me, but I find it risky…because there were many bad experiences in finding my "true guy"…I met one American and right at the get go…I was

pissed…because he wanted me to show him my…yuck…he wanted me to show

him my boobs…oh my gosh…that is not possible…take off my clothes? Never!

Laura, another prospective online bride, asserted her aversion. She believed that

the online marriage web sites represented a violation of Filipino traditional marriage

norms where the girl is courted by the man in a respectable and wholesome manner.

Well, even before…I already had a bad interpretation of online marriages or mail-
order-bride….it's like a cheap way you know…and the mail-order-bride
practice…it is a contradiction of our cultural beliefs of our ancestors…an idea
against what we call the "Maria Clara Way" where the woman…her worth and
value is treasured...women should be treated like precious jewels…and with great
respect.

Joanne, a prospective online bride did not enjoy the web sites for she met many

men who according to her were critical of Filipinas. "Some guys call Pinays (Filipinas)

cheap as 'money-oriented'…get visa…to see America…and opportunists…some guys

are show-off…they exhibit through web camera their jewelries as 'trap.' Jean, an online

bride was turned off by the condescension and egotism exercised by many of the men on

the web sites who came from more industrialized countries.

People usually who come from far away places (First World countries) think of
themselves as having super power with super extra resources so they can afford to
buy a woman's worth…when this happens, then we lose our dream, we will live a
miserable life.

The prospective online brides were critical of the online marriage web sites for

many of them had traumatic encounters with what they called "bastos" (perverted) types

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of men. In their search for the "right man" many expressed that they had experienced

discrimination and ridicule from some of the men they met online. According to them the

men made them feel as if they were commodities. The prospective online brides related

their discomfort with the various stereotypes and labels some of the men affixed on them.

These stereotypes were reminiscent of the popular and widely used stereotypes of Asian

women and mail-order-brides. Their comments were consistent with two stereotypes

described by Constable (2003): "One is the sweet and innocent, sexual-romantic 'oriental

doll' or 'lotus blossom,' the other is the conniving, devious, and shrewd 'dragon lady'"

(p. 13).

The sweet and innocent Oriental doll is the "utterly feminine, delicate, and

welcome respites from their often loud, independent American counterparts" (Tajima,

1989, p. 309). On the other hand, as dragon ladies, Asian women are the aggressors

(Constable, 2003). Constable (2003) cites Consalvo's (1998) analysis of the dual images

of mail-order-brides in the Timothy Blackwell case where a U.S. American man killed

his estranged wife who was pregnant along with her two friends in the couples'

annulment hearing. Constable (2003) said in reference to Consalvo's (1998) analysis of

the dual images:

> These images underlie the simplistic, dualistic images of mail-order-brides as
>
> either willing and helpless victims of controlling Western men, or alternatively as
>
> shrewd foreigners out for a green card and a free meal ticket through marriage
>
> fraud and immigration scams that dupe innocent U.S. men. (p. 13)

Although Constable (2003) asserts that such representations are highly inaccurate, many of the prospective online brides I interviewed said as far as their experiences were concerned, that many Western men they encountered held stereotypical views.

The online wives and prospective online brides differed in their attitudes towards these online marriage web sites by virtue of the differences in their encounters with various men as well as in the outcomes of these encounters. According to online wives, even though they felt that the web sites had some menacing elements to them, they were able to discover redeeming qualities. It is because of the web sites that they were able to meet their husbands. The prospective online brides' encounters, however, had yet to yield productive results in that they did not result into marriage or romance with the so-called "right man." Their search for the elusive "right man" took them on a path where they were exposed to objectification and racial discrimination, a path where their worth and value as Filipino women were compromised.

What is intriguing in this aspect of the analysis is that the prospective online brides' and online wives' narratives confirmed both the critics' and proponents' arguments about the web sites. The prospective online brides' experiences corroborated what many critics posited about the online marriage web sites or mail-order-bride web sites, as they are popularly known. According to the critics, the web sites essentialize Filipino women. They serve as channels in which universal patriarchy and Western hegemony are kept alive. As Halualani (1995) argues, these web sites are a reification of Western domination: "…the Pilipina woman reifies Anglo patriarchal power and superiority, and has value only as a mirror for that image" (p. 53). Villapando (1989) states that such web sites are venues in which traditional and archaic male and female

roles and stereotypes are reinscribed. These web sites according to Villapando (1989) paint the Filipino (Asian) woman as someone who wants to be rescued from poverty by way of marriage to a rich and powerful man. The American man is painted as someone who dreams of meeting an Asian woman who will devote her life to taking care of him (Constable, 2003; Villapando, 1989).

The majority of the prospective online brides and wives on many occasions during the interviews admitted their utmost desire to marry foreign men (preferably U.S. American men) because they believed that these men could indeed rescue them from poverty. To these prospective online brides and wives the American man represented a better life.

Advice to Other Filipino Women Who Wish to Engage in the Practice

The prospective online brides and online wives offered similar advice to other Filipino women who wished to meet and marry foreign men. Both groups warned other Filipinas to be wary of certain men on the web sites. They also insisted that Filipinas conduct themselves appropriately so as to gain respect. Lilia, a prospective online bride said,

> I would advise other women, especially Pinays, to choose the right words to express their intention, why they joined the mail-order-bride program…Never should they engage in sexual conversation…They should have a sense of humor…be extra careful in showing yourself in webcam…Wear decent clothes…so to gain respect….Be natural…Don't pretend to be sophisticated when you really are not…you turn men off!

Joanne, another prospective online bride stated, "It is necessary to be vigilant in their search for the guy they want to marry…they should check on the family background because they (U.S./Western) men might have mental disorders or they might be criminals." Jean, a prospective online bride warned others of the discrimination and subjugation that might be encountered,

> People who usually come from the first world countries think of themselves as having super power with super extra resources so they can afford to buy a woman's worth…when this happens, then we lose our dream, we will live a miserable life…so be very careful!

Bianca, an online wife advised others to be very selective of the men they marry.

> My advice to the Filipina is to choose a guy that is good and decent…not like…because there are some men here (referring to the U.S.) that are also neglectful of their wives…like this one guy who didn't process his wife's papers…look for a guy…look at the guy…ask yourself do you really know him?

Melanie, an online wife echoed the same sentiments,

> My advice is…because we can't really stop this…My advice is that they should be careful…They should observe first before they do anything…If possible take longer time…Don't go for it right away…Take a lot of time before going all the way.

Ayen, another online wife, on the other hand, believed that honesty would be the best approach. "My advice is that they should really be honest with a foreigner…because that is what is important to them…and that to be careful."

The advice and warnings both groups of women disseminated constituted

significant similarities. The most distinct thread is the emphasis on caution toward

unscrupulous and devious men that can be found in these web sites. Online wives who

considered themselves successful in meeting the right man and had fairly positive

interactions in these web sites, still insisted on the need for women to be vigilant and

prudent in choosing the right men. Prospective online brides who mostly had negative

experiences also vehemently warned other women and reinforced these warnings by

describing specific cases in which they felt harmed emotionally and psychologically by

their encounters.

Both groups of women confessed that although they felt that the online web sites

can result in some negative outcomes, they also believed that online organizations and

activities are unpreventable, and thus, will continue. In other words, Filipino women will

continue to pursue these types of arrangements. Hence, the only possible defense against

harmful encounters and consequences is to act proactively by taking the time to get to

know the men they meet more carefully. Others also described the importance of arming

themselves with the knowledge and information necessary in protecting themselves and

their rights.

How do the Interview Discourses Reveal Gender,

National Identity and Class Issues?

The analysis of the discursive accounts of prospective online brides, wives and

husbands revealed general patterns/themes with regard to issues of gender, national

identity, and class: a) All three groups described the importance of traditional female and

male roles; b) prospective online brides and wives emphasized the preservation of

particular aspects of Filipino culture and tradition; and c) prospective online brides and wives alluded to the superiority of the West and the superiority of the Western White male in terms of culture, economics, and physical characteristics/attributes.

Attitudes about Traditional Female and Male Roles

When the participants were asked about their concept of an ideal wife and husband, many of the participants expressed similar views regarding appropriate and appealing attributes of an ideal wife and husband. Ron said when asked his explanation of an ideal wife,

> …somebody who you know…want…is very family-oriented…who wants to you know help raise the kids…and take care of the kids…be there for the family all the time…and to be at times have time for me…and to be understanding of my work.

Peter put it, "…I think she's pretty much close to ideal…she is very you know…willing to please and like I said she caters to me." When asked to describe his "ideal wife," Philfun said, "Well…let me put it this way…(name of wife) takes care of me really well and I am very happy on that score…she's a good cook…she's a very good cook." Doug, professed, "I want my woman…to be my wife and friend and to take care of my needs while I share with her my little savings…"

The husbands' narratives outlined many of the so-called traditional female roles. Many expressed their desire to marry Filipinas because of their "traditional values." They defined women with traditional values as those that place family over career, those that do not think "me, me, me," continually, as Ron described earlier, and those that are happy with staying home and taking care of their husbands and kids. The traditional values

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these husbands referred to were reminiscent of what Barbara Welter (1976) referred to as the "cult of true womanhood." The "cult of true womanhood" includes four female attributes—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter, 1976). A woman must remain pious for she is considered the purifying force and source of strength for mankind (Welter, 1976). A woman must remain pure to maintain her virtue (Welter, 1976). A woman must practice submissiveness; she must accept her position in society with willingness and obedience (Welter, 1976). A woman must observe domesticity; she must perform her household duties with cheerfulness and happiness (Welter, 1976).

The descriptions elicited from the husbands here and in earlier sections demonstrated their preference for such traditional values. As Constable (2003) argues, one reason why Western men tend to seek out Asian women is because of a "stated preference for a so-called traditional division of labor, one that is imagined or remembered from parents' or grandparents' generations" (p. 66).

In her research on Australian men, Robinson (2001) attributes this preference to the decline of patriarchalism. Robinson (2001) argues that these men long for and are nostalgic for the past, a time when women were not contaminated by feminism and women's liberation. Constable (2003) believes that this is also true of U.S. American men who attribute failures in their marriages to feminism. Faludi (1992) claims that some men feel displaced; they feel powerless and therefore end up blaming factors such as feminism to justify the feeling of helplessness. These assertions may explain why the husbands that were interviewed showed preferences for Filipino women, for they believed that Filipino women (at least the ones they married) exemplify these traditional values. Perhaps by

being with traditional women with traditional values they may be attempting to recreate

some of the past.

According to Constable (2003) some men do not wish for the roles and duties to

be shared equally. Rather, they prefer a relationship "in which the roles are more

complementary, divided in a 'good old fashioned way'" (p. 67). These relationships are

described as "separate but equal" (Constable, 2003, p. 67).

> Some referred to a desire for a home in which the man is the "head of the
>
> household" or the "king of his castle," where his wife caters to his interests, and
>
> where he can view himself as dominant. But while the man may envision himself
>
> as "head" or "king," his wife may correspondingly view herself as a "queen" or
>
> "princess" who has been "rescued" from the drudgery of work and who is "in
>
> charge" of the home. (Constable, 2003, p. 67)

What Constable (2003) describes here is that men's and women's notions of status and

influence may be able to coexist. They need not limit each other. Hence, males and

females may each have influence in the home (Constable, 2003).

The wives echoed similar sentiments as that of their husbands. Melanie, an online

wife explained her disapproval of how her Filipina friend (who is married to a U.S.

American man) mistreats and neglects her husband by not cooking for him. "What? A

Filipino woman who doesn't feed her husband? What is that? She's not Filipino…that's

not right you know." She continued,

> When I got married everything is changed…yeah…right now…I have to think a
>
> lot of…and I have to…early morning…I have to get up early….to prepare
>
> breakfast for my husband…like that. So I have to think that he is okay for

my…you know the food that I serve to him…thinking that he is not mad at me…the…egg salted or whatever…

Melanie expressed her desire to please her husband. She was vigilant about acts such as seasoning the egg properly so she may live up to her husband's expectations. Bianca, another online wife referred to the same traditional values as she explained her vision of an "ideal husband," "someone who will love me and provide for my needs and love me and my family back home."

Zhai, another online wife, described her daily routine. "I wake up at 10 then I feed the baby, then I clean the house, bathe the baby then play with her. I then cook and do the laundry." Zhai also expressed her satisfaction in doing this routine. Constable (2003) said that for some women household duties are not considered punishment as other women would view it. In this context, it would not be difficult to make sense of Zhai's contentment and desire to perform these duties. Constable (2003) explains,

> For rural or working-class Filipinas whose day-to-day lives involve a combination of hard work in shops, factories, or rice fields combined with domestic chores and responsibilities for an extended household, the idea of working only at home, with the help of time-saving devices, and of being responsible for her own husband and children may constitute an attractive alternative. To some women in Asia and the West at the turn of the millennium, liberation is equated with the freedom to work outside the home and gain a degree of financial independence, but to others it is the freedom not to work outside the home. (p. 66)

Constable's claim can be seen in many of these online wives' comments. Melanie's confusion about her friend's refusal to cook for her husband, Zhai's

contentment in performing her household routines, and Bianca's desire to have a husband who can provide for her; these are all exemplifications of what Constable illustrates as the differences in women's definitions of a good wife and a good marriage. Some women feel that traditional female roles and values restrict and limit women and therefore are oppressive; while others see no harm in them. The Filipino online wives' narratives seemed to point to the notion that their definition of a good marriage, a good life, and their roles as wives and mothers were contingent upon their improved class, economic status and conditions. A majority of the women interviewed in this study came from a poor or modest background and were raised in mostly rural areas of the country where they were exposed to arduous work and hard labor. It isn't surprising to see how they found staying at home, cooking and taking care of the children a much easier way of life (Constable, 2003).

This influence of class and economic conditions on gender identities can also be seen in the prospective online brides' discourses, particularly in their desire to find a man who is a "good provider." When asked about their concept of the ideal husband Lilia, a prospective online bride said,

> My ideal husband is my forever partner through thick and thin….he is a good
> father to my children…and my romantic…hee…hee…hee…lover everyday…Not
> only that…but he is also the kind of guy…who is capable…of providing our
> family….um…comfortable life with a home…and the…um…material
> possessions too.

Zarina, another prospective online bride wanted her husband to be, "…someone who is smart, professional, Catholic and is financially established…the one who is

willing to take me and love my children [referring to children from previous relationship] too…as if they are his own children." Jean, a prospective online bride said she wanted to marry a man who "can give me a good life…will make me financially well-off and visit places…I won't have any problems…I will be able to help my brothers and sisters and build a happy family." Joanne, a prospective online bride had the desire to be with a man who is, "good-looking, macho, well-off and professional with a stable job." These women's desires towards acquiring economic mobility and financial security may be understandable in comparison to the harsh economic conditions in the Philippines.

The Filipino prospective online brides also emphasized the quality of men who are good providers and have a stable job because according to them many of the Filipino men whom they have established relationships in the past were not able to show such qualities. It is in foreign men that they find these qualities. These Filipino prospective online brides expressed their insecurity and lack of faith in Filipino men's ability to become good husbands and take care of their families. These articulations may be presented as a form of indictment of the Filipino man and his national identity and raise questions about the Filipino prospective online brides' ambivalence and ambiguity toward their own "Filipinoness." This may then serve as a justification or explanation of why these prospective Filipino brides and wives require a superior partner, like that of the "White male" (Arguelles, 1991).

Preservation of Filipino Culture and Tradition

The prospective online brides and wives articulated their commitment to preserving certain aspects of Filipino culture and tradition within their single and married lives. They emphasized the importance and significance of loyalty to family, the

preservation of family at all costs and the commitment to traditional female roles. Daphs, a prospective online bride said,

> I still believe that…we should keep as much as we can…the Pinoy (Filipino) values when it comes to women and family relations…But our culture…being able to serve our spouses…that…I think is what puts us ahead all the other women of other nationalities…To me I will use this to my advantage.

Laura, another prospective Filipino online bride presented a perspective on how the Filipino woman should be treated in adherence to Filipino ancestral beliefs and customs. She said,

> Well, even before…I already had a bad interpretation of mail-order-bride…it's a cheap way to do it…because the mail-order-bride practice…it's a contradiction of…of cultural beliefs of our ancestors…an idea against what we call…"Maria Clara" way…That is the woman's dignity and worth should be treasured…Women should be treated…precious jewels…and with great respect…in the "Maria Clara" way…preempting…to be the first to initiate romance…Oh my you should wait to be approached…wait to be adored and venerated…to win your heart…

Maria, a prospective online bride conveyed her concern for her family back home and her responsibilities towards them. "I am thinking about my parents and the future of my son…that's why I am persevering…so that I can start a business…I can't just depend on my husband." Most of the women expressed their desire to help their family monetarily, to be able to send money home, to send their siblings to school and to improve their families' overall economic and physical conditions. As Nadeau (2009)

explains, Filipinos believe in familism deeply and practice it in every aspect of their lives. Filipino parents are expected to care for their children and provide for them. Children are also expected to obey and respect their parents and take care of them in their old age (Nadeau, 2009). Some Filipino siblings even provided support and financial help to their younger siblings even after they get married, as many of the online wives were practicing. To the Filipino prospective online brides and wives, family was extremely important. This, they expressed, is one Filipino trait and value they wanted to preserve.

Superiority of West and Western White Male

Rimonte's (1997) claim that the Filipinos have the tendency to believe in the "inauthenticity" of their culture was clearly apparent in the answers provided by both the prospective Filipino online brides and the wives in relation to their "Filipinoness." This feeling of inauthencity and inferiority results in a diminished self-image, which may explain why Filipinos prefer to be someone else other than themselves (Rimonte, 1997).

Almost every prospective bride and online wife expressed feelings of inferiority in comparison to "foreigners" in one way or another. Zarina, a prospective online bride, explained,

> I joined the MOB program to activate my mind…to be drilled in the English language…and to learn how to deal with foreigners…Because foreigners are different…in the way they interpret life…compared to Pinoys (Filipinos)…The idea of marrying a foreigner…crazy right?....who is handsome…rich and famous hee…hee…hee…who am I to dream?…I am fascinated…a daydream…

Melanie, another prospective online bride showed her fascination with the "White race." She related the story of walking through the mall and envying all the Filipino

women who were married to American White men and carrying their half American half Filipino babies. She also disclosed one particular detail of her marriage; that since her husband can no longer have a baby, she may end up having to adopt. But, according to her, this adopted baby cannot be Filipino; s/he must also be a White U.S. American.

Bergano and Bergano-Kinney (1997) quote one Filipina,

Because of the American colonization process, Filipinas are being taught that "marrying up" means "marrying white." The Filipina's standard for beauty has changed so that they see white men as desirable and "bearers of ideal beauty,"…not the Filipino man. The "white-oriented" mass media has blinded and brainwashed today's Filipina as the expense of the Filipino male as maybe in the case of the Filipino mail-order-brides. (p. 202)

Filipinos may have developed the tendency to assimilate and imitate their colonizers because of their internalized inferiority and ambivalence about their own identities as Filipinos. Pierce (2005) contends,

When consistently faced with messages that you are backward, inferior, barbaric, and uncivilized –and then promised that there is an alternative—it is tempting to opt for that alternative, at first. However, the alternative—assimilation—implies assimilation into something, some normative standard or ideal. Socially, politically, and historically that ideal has been to assimilate to whiteness; when dealing with "outmarriage," such assimilation promises to be an actual possibility. (p. 35)

Melanie talks about how much her life would be improved if she marries a foreigner: "…my life would be much better than before…it wouldn't be that I will have

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to work so hard…not like that…simple living…where I can eat once or three times a day…and some snacks…right now there are no snacks..." Ayen, another online wife said, "I have a child…and his father is Filipino and I feel there are a lot of things/factors lacking in that life if you marry a Filipino unlike if you marry a foreigner…A foreigner is much better than a Filipino." Maricor, another online wife told the story of how she felt when she viewed her husband and his house through the web camera.

> At first I didn't like him…because I had this fear…because his house…I thought to myself this guy is so much wealthier than I am…I am not good enough for him…I was afraid that if I enter his life I would…I might end up just being the maid…and then he would treat me as a servant…

These women's explications showed the various ways in which they felt the Filipinos are inferior to the Westerners who are White. Zarina declared her belief in the inferiority of the Filipino man's philosophy and intelligence compared with foreigners who "interpret life differently," and are "rich." Melanie demonstrated how she believed in the inferiority of the Filipino features by favoring a "White" American child over a Filipino one; Ayen illustrated the incapacity of the Filipino man in handling life and managing relationships; and Maricor demonstrated the inferiority of the dramatic differences between Filipinos and Americans in economic/material terms.

In the narratives, prospective Filipino online brides and wives hinted not only of the inferiority of the Filipino culture, but also pointed to the superiority of the West and the White male. Both groups of women valorized the White man's attributes. They also romanticized life in the West. Melanie, an online wife described how she became obsessed with marrying a "Kano (American)."

It started when I was in elementary school…I had an aunt…but the niece of my stepfather who had a foreigner and they had a baby…I fell in love with her baby…it was then that I felt…so I strolled through the malls and I see all these foreigners carrying their babies with their Filipina wives…

Melanie expressed her enthusiasm and desire to have a "White" child for she believed that the "White" child has better features (whiter skin) and far more attractive than a Filipino child (darker-skinned).

Melanie, however, disclosed her disappointment about the fact that the person she married was no longer able to produce children. So when asked what she would do with her dream of having a "Caucasian" child, and presented with the idea of adoption, she expressed, "…yeah…but it has to be a foreigner also…I don't want to adopt a Filipino child…what would that be?" Melanie is not alone in harboring these fascinations. Most women that were interviewed conveyed their desire for a White man because they believed that the "White" man was not only more affluent, but they also possessed superior physical attributes. The women described that White men to be taller, fair-skinned and have finer and elegant facial features. As the subtext running through the articulations of these women seems to indicate, having Filipino features being smaller in stature, darker-skinned and having a "flat" nose—were signs of inferiority when compared with characteristics of American white males.

The interviews stated that the "White" man is a better husband for he is far more responsible and a better provider than a Filipino husband. Maria, an online wife stated, "I am turned off by Filipino men…they are irresponsible…deceitful and fake…they like to just lazy around almost everyday." Ayen, another Filipino wife posited,

I want to marry a White man mostly because the White man if compared to a

Filipino is better…they're nicer and they like to help…the Filipino man…he has

no permanent job and if he does he makes very little money.

The women presented a coherent and unified belief that living in the West or in

the United States would be greatly satisfying. They said there is greater hope and

opportunity in the West, something that is lacking in the Philippines. To them, living a

good life meant being free of financial burdens, being able to acquire resources to live

comfortably, and being able to take care of their families back home.

What Do the Interview Discourses Reveal with Regard to Contextual, Structural Factors such as History, Religion and Education?

The narratives of the prospective online brides' and wives' revealed various views

of history, religion and education. Out of the narratives the following themes/patters

emerged: a) Histories of colonization translated into the privileging of Whiteness and the

West among the prospective online brides' and wives' responses; b) the Catholic religion

had deep influences in the prospective online brides' and wives' beliefs and attitudes

toward life, marriage and relationships; c) level of education played a role in their

participation in the online marriage program.

Linking Colonization with the Privileging of Whiteness

"Being a Filipina American, or Pinay, means being colonized—first by Spain then

by the United States—and although you may not have been alive or present for the

process of colonization, you experience the fallout nonetheless" (Pierce, 2005, p. 31).

Maria P. Root further explains the effects of colonization on Filipinos, "The traumas

associated with colonization that lasted almost 400 years scarred us all, regardless of our

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nativity, language, class or gender. Trauma fragments and fractures the essence of our being and self-knowledge; it disconnects us from each other" (Root, 1997, p. xi).

The Philippines was under colonial rule for 400 years from both the Spanish and the Americans (San Juan, 1998; Root, 1997). These centuries of colonization have deeply affected the Filipino's view of herself/himself as the colonized as well as her/his view of her/his colonizer. Because of this history, I contend that the Filipino continues to be colonized to the present. As San Juan (1998) argues, "Although direct colonial rule was finally terminated in 1946, the cultural and political hegemony of the United States persists to this day" (p. 60). One of the effects I contend of this colonization is the Filipino's enthrallment and privileging of "Whiteness" and the West. These are both evidenced by the narratives of the prospective online brides and wives.

All of the women expressed their desire and preference in marrying outside of the Filipino race, particularly marrying a "White" male. They cited several reasons for this preference/desire. First, they believed that a "White" man could bring them a better life. Here a better life meant having access to material goods, being financially secure, and being able to live a comfortable-luxurious lifestyle in a more affluent country like that of the United States. Second, some believed that the "White" man has superior physical features. Being married to a "White' might mean having blonde-haired and blue-eyed children, something that is considered alluring in the Filipino culture. Overall, the narratives of these women were replete with claims and arguments that advanced the superiority of the West and the "White" race.

Yvonne, a prospective online bride, when probed as to why Filipino women prefer marrying a "White" man explained in her own words that,

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Well…in general Pinays look up to the economic status of these men…they see that because these men are affluent that they can give them a better chance…a chance to have a good life…that is also my hope that if I marry one of them that I will have a good life too.

Roxanne, an online wife described her thoughts and feelings during her encounter with a "White" man and his Filipina wife during a bus ride,

I thought to myself…is this woman happy having a "White" husband? I wondered…is she being provided for with her needs…is the man generous? Is he well off? Then I thought at least this woman could go abroad…good for her…I was envious of her. I wish I was in her place…if the White man is rich at least she could get whatever she desires…I started to go into self-pity…my thoughts went back to my parents…how can they do this to us…not send us to school…I hate them.

Earlier Bianca described White men as "kinder," "nicer," and having good jobs compared to Filipino men with no jobs. Ayen wanted to "find myself a White…that way I can be saved from this predicament." What can be observed in these women's outlining of their feelings towards the "White" man is their automatic and direct association of the 'White' man/race with wealth and a better life. "Marrying White," seems to mean having a life that is free of economic and financial constraints, free of hard work and labor, and full of opportunities for upward mobility in terms of social status.

As a Filipino woman growing up in remote sections of the Philippines I understand this privileging of "Whiteness." I have heard neighbors and friends talking and dreaming of coming to the U.S. or immigrating to the West. Conversations often

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circle around how wonderful life would be while living abroad—how all the misery and poverty would end if one could just leave the Philippines and make a life in a wealthier country. At the same time people also talked about marrying outside of the race and having children with "mestiza/mestizo" (fair-skinned, Caucasian) features.

During my recent visit to the Philippines in 2007, I felt and witnessed firsthand this privileging of "Whiteness" intensify. My neighbors and friends commented on how lucky I am to be living in the United States. Some of them even asked me why I have not yet married a "White" U.S. American. As one of them asked, "Don't you want a white blue-eyed child?" It was not surprising to me then to see how the prospective Filipino online brides and wives expressed the same preferences and desires. It almost seemed like the Filipino ultimate dream was to marry an American and to live the "American Dream." What was also notable and what was evidenced in the women's narratives was that the appeal of Western men was established through a comparison with Filipino men. The Western male is superior to the Filipino male because he can offer a Filipina more (nicer home, comfortable lifestyle, etc.). The Western male signifies wealth, status and convenience. He becomes the standard by which the Filipino male is judged. Scholars like Root (1997) attribute the Filipino's privileging of whiteness and the Western lifestyle largely to centuries of colonization by both the Spanish and U.S. Americans. She declares,

> Four hundred years of combined colonization, first by Spain and then by the
> United States, widened the Filipino gene pool with the possibility of lighter skin,
> hair, and eyes. The tools of colonization gave meaning to the variation in physical
> appearance among Filipinos. Spain introduced colorism; preferential treatment

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was clearly associated with lighter skin color. Centuries of this education primed

the Filipino for vulnerability to internalize American rules of race. Colorism and

then racism inculcated the notions: "White is beautiful," "White is intelligent,"

"White is powerful" in the psyches of many brown-hued Filipinos, thus

inferiorizing the Filipino. (p. 81)

Melanie, an online wife encapsulated the privileging of "White" features over

Filipino ones.

It started when I was in elementary school… the niece of my stepfather who had a

foreigner and they had a baby…I fell in love with her baby…it was then that I

felt…so I strolled through the malls and I see all these foreigners carrying their

babies with their Filipina wives.

Maria, another online wife, when asked about her concept of an "ideal husband" said,

"…someone who can give me a child that is cute…mestizo." Joanne, a prospective online

bride stated,

It is my desire to marry an American…who can give me two cute and blue-eyed

children…I have a lot of Filipino suitors but I have no interest in them…because I

want a 'White man" to fulfill my dream…

When asked what she hoped to accomplish by being part of the online marriage program,

Lilia, a prospective online bride presented a similar wish, "That I will meet the right guy

as partner in life…I really prefer American White guy with a high level of education."

The descriptions of the women illustrated the various ways in which they were

seduced by the "White" man and his way of life. Pierce (2005) alludes to this notion,

Being born into a colonized family, you inherit the ideals and learn the narrative

of colonization; as you come to consciousness, you are immersed in the promises

of the colonizer, from the benefits of Spanish patriarchy, aristocracy, and religious

authority to the promises of U.S. education, opportunity, and merictocracy. (p. 32)

To these prospective online brides and wives, the privileging and access to even a

semblance of "Whiteness" and the American way of life is a passage to a notable future,

a symbol of upward mobility and ascension. Thus, it reinforces and reaffirms the

relationship of the colonized (the prospective online brides and wives) with their

colonizers (U.S. American/Western husbands). Note that Joanne explicitly links U.S.

American men with the fulfillment of her dream, and this dream is not available through

marriage with any of the many Filipino suitors. Rimonte (1997) remarks about this

wanting to be someone else.

Filipinos do have a problem, that burden of persistent self-hate of which many

acts of anti-Filipinism are the chiefest manifestations. The condition produces an

acute, destabilizing, discomfiting self-awareness, akin to that situation in which

one feels ashamed, "nahihiya." Desperate to hide a stigmatizing defect, one

nevertheless feels naked, if not transparent, before the seemingly omnipotent gaze

of this observing, fully clothed, opaque other. The other is the colonizer,

representative of everything one regards as superior and therefore longs for.

(p. 42)

This is not unique to Filipinos, however, as other scholars like Freire (1970), Memmi

(1965), Dubois (1961), and Fanon (1965) assert. "It is the common fate of the oppressed"

(Rimonte, 1997, p. 42).

Catholicism and Beliefs about Life, Marriage, and Relationships

As a child raised Catholic by two religious parents I never once questioned why and how we came to believe and do certain things in life. Everyone I knew was Catholic, and my young mind never once thought that there were other religions besides my own. This feeling was shared by many of my friends, neighbors, and relatives. Considering the fact that the Philippines is 81% Catholic (The World Factbook, 2009), this belief was not uncommon among Filipinos. I argue that Catholicism has deeply influenced the Filipino belief system; I know this is true in my own life. Such deep influences are also evident in the narratives of the prospective online brides and wives as they explained their ideas about marriage, relationships, and life as a whole.

Zarina, a prospective online bride described her "ideal husband" as, "someone who is smart, professional, Catholic and financially established." Yvonne, a prospective online bride, when presenting details about her background emphasized, "We are devoted Catholics." She also listed the qualities of her "ideal husband." "My real man will love me as I am and he will support my needs and my family…a good Christian (Catholic) he must be." Laura, another prospective online bride credited her good values to her parents who taught her. "…with my parents who are devoted Catholics…they taught me the values…the values of chastity and respect for my womanhood." Laura also told the story of how she met an East Indian man online and connected well with him, but because of religious differences she decided not to pursue the relationship.

> I met one time an (East) Indian guy who has gained citizenship (U.S.)…the guy
> seems nice…nice and courteous but he said…he cannot be Catholic for
> sure…again I got scared of religious difference…I never talked to the guy again.

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Daphs, a prospective online bride admitted that in keeping with the Filipino and Catholic

tradition she has remained a virgin. Traditionally most Filipinos uphold the belief that sex

should remain within the confines of the marriage institution. Hunt and Sta-Ana-

Gatbonton (2000) argue that the predominantly Catholic Philippines derives its personal

and communal value systems from the Catholic Church teachings. Hence, majority of

Filipinos believe in reserving sex only for procreation, preserving virginity until

marriage, ensuring that the marriage institution is unbreakable and appointing the

husband as the head of the household having complete authority over his wife and

children (Hunt & Sta-Ana-Gatbonton, 2000). Zhai's and Daph's articulations illustrate

these values.

"I am still a virgin…you can refer to my doctor…" Zhai, an online wife said she

and her parents insisted that she get married first to her husband before living together

(co-habitating without marriage is deemed taboo by most in the Philippines for it violates

the social and religious norms discussed above); this also aligned with Daphs desire in

remaining a virgin so as to conform/adhere to social and religious traditions. Several of

the online wives also alluded to the notion that their "luck" in finding good husbands can

be attributed to their belief in a powerful source. A typical comment was similar to that of

Claire's who said,

> I kept praying to God. I had a lot of faith and hope despite all my problems…I
>
> had a dream about my (husband)…I asked God to give me a sign if he was the
>
> right one… I asked God that he would be the one…and he was the one…I guess
>
> God just had mercy on me.

It is easy to see the influences of the Catholic/Christian beliefs in many of the women's discourses. Daphs, a prospective online bride wanted to remain a virgin until she got married; Zhai wanted to be married before living with her man; and Laura insisted on her "ideal husband" being Catholic. They were taught that sex before marriage is immoral; having faith in God and practicing their religion is of utmost importance. Furthermore there is a strong ideology that observing and practicing these religious beliefs are key to living a good life. As a Filipino woman having been taught similar beliefs and ideas as these women, I can understand, how prevalent and deeply ingrained these ideas are.

Education

My grandmother once said that the only good thing that the U.S. Americans did for us during their colonization of our country was to teach us the value of education. Hence, growing up I was always told that the key to freedom, liberty, and prosperity was education. With this philosophy predominating the country, it is no wonder then that the Philippines has a literacy rate of 92.6% (The World Factbook, 2009).

When the United States came to occupy the Philippines they established a national public school system (Pido, 1997). Pido (1997) describes the public school system, "Aside from the basics, the thrust was inculcating Pilipinos with American values and the Coca-Cola culture" (p. 24). Although the American educational system provided more educational opportunities for the poor, it also disseminated information and propaganda about America (Pido, 1997). Pido says,

> Availability of educational opportunities in addition to information and
>
> propaganda about America as the land of milk and honey for the poor resulted in

higher or different life expectations for a coming generation of Pilipinos. Many no longer wanted to make a living from the land as their parents did, even if the land was available. The old land tenure system continued to prevail. In addition to having a different occupational outlook, this generation of Pilipinos also had different lifestyle expectations. They were becoming oriented as consumers toward American products. At the same time, they national economy was not developing fast enough to satisfy real or perceived needs. It was perceived that the only way to live like Americans was to be in America. (p. 25)

Education was mentioned by the prospective Filipino brides and wives related to joining the online marriage program. Roxanne, an online wife, declared her resentment towards her parents for not providing her and her siblings the opportunity to get an education, "…my thoughts went back to my parents…how can they do this to us…not send us to school…I hate them." She implied that had her parents sent her to school she would not be experiencing such tremendous difficulties in life. An American husband would offer her the chance to get educated and thus have a chance to find a better job, make a good living and provide for her needs and her children.

Kate, a prospective online bride said, "I promise to myself…I will finish my schooling even if it's just vocational (course)." Laura, another prospective Filipino online bride stated,

Because of our impoverished state…I was not able to fulfill my dream of taking up Nursing…I needed to stop and shift my course to Education…that's why I am BS Ed major…but to get closer to what I wanted I majored in Biology…when I

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stopped school…I helped my parents work in the farm to support my only

brother…

Jean, a prospective online bride expressed her desire to finish her studies. "Even

before…I really wanted to finish my studies…to have a degree so that I can also marry

someone who is a degree holder."

It is clear through these narratives that the women placed great importance and

emphasis on education. There seemed to be a consensus in believing that one of the ways

in which to succeed in life is to educate one's self. One general assumption held by critics

of marriage web sites and the general public is that many of the women who participate

in these types of programs have not acquired formal schooling. Hence, they were limited

in finding options in terms of employment and career development. While this was the

case for some prospective brides and wives, several others had bachelor degrees and the

rest had obtained some college education. Some of the online wives also acquired formal

schooling and held degrees in Social Work, Nursing, etc.

The prospective brides still valorized what education could give them in the way

of employment in the U.S. and Europe. Some of the women expressed frustration in the

fact that even though they had an education and/or a degree, they were not able to find

good jobs that paid well enough for them to support themselves and their families. In

essence, the lack of career employment opportunities in the Philippines was one of the

major reasons why they felt they had to explore other ways to improve their economic

conditions. Zarina, a prospective online bride said, "Being a single mom…an

employee…you know struggling to survive with a very small amount of take home

pay…I thought how could I make my life…you know…worth living?" Yvonne, another

prospective online bride expressed her frustration when asked why she decided to participate in the online marriage program, "I am a college graduate in Commerce…major in Management…about two years now…I did apply for jobs but never succeeded." Ayen, a Filipino online wife stated before she left the Philippines that,

> I work at an office and I have a child…heaven forbid if he gets sick…and then my pay is not even enough for our daily needs…so my kid, if I haven't saved anything, and if he gets sick…that's why I worked and I chatted so I can find myself a "White"…that way I can be saved from this predicament where I just work and work and I can't even save…the pay is so low for my position…really low…

The comments of the interviews show that the combination of an educational system that produced degree holders that cannot get jobs and social discourse widely circulated throughout the Philippines that promotes the notion that America is the land of milk and honey are the major reasons many of these women presented as to why they opted to join the online marriage programs. As they have expressed in their narratives earlier, these reasons are reinforced by their desire to better their economic status and their overall living conditions. Joining the online marriage programs, they had articulated may be one avenue to accomplish such goals.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I again explain the rationale and impetus for this study. I also outline my own personal stake as a Filipino woman in this research as well as my positionality as a researcher. I also discuss the findings of the study and their implications as well as list strengths and limitations.

Consistent with feminist researcher positioning I sought to recognize the voices of all participants and pay particular attention to their voices and preferences for labels. I quickly learned how much all of the participants objected to the label "mail-order-bride." Out of respect for the participants' wishes I used "online marriage programs" in this study as opposed to "mail-order-bride programs." The respondents were strong in their preference, so throughout this chapter I use the label of online marriage program. I did, however, refer to the "mail-order-bride" practice in providing context and historical background for the study.

My previous research/experience with online marriage programs included analyzing the various web sites' recruiting materials. My analyses of these web sites revealed a particular picture of the Filipino woman, a picture that I believe is often incomplete and even at times distorted. These observations, therefore, directed me towards a more critical view of the online marriage practice and hence, led me to want to understand the experiences of individuals using the web sites. My perspective as a researcher was transformative and interventionist. It was my wish that through my efforts and scholarship I may be able to enrich other's lives as many feminist scholars endeavor to do (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999). I believed at the onset of this study that if certain exploitative elements were uncovered they would require a certain degree of redress. As a

Filipino woman myself I wanted to address and rectify the incomplete and distorted picture that was painted on the web sites with regards to Filipino women. I too was implicated in this.

One of the forces that drove me in studying this phenomenon has been my own discomfort with what I believed was a negative and incomplete portrayal of Filipino women in online marriage program web sites and questions about who uses the web sites and who benefits from them. My experience has been that each time I type the word "Filipina" on the Google web site, hundreds of mail-order-bride web site links would emerge on the screen. Often the web sites contain catch phrases such as "Want a Filipina wife?" and advertisements on how to acquire one.

In my previous research and analysis of 15 web sites, I concluded that Filipinas were being portrayed as commodities (Crespo, 2004). Photos of Filipino women in different levels of undress were posted on the sites. The gallery of photos these web sites showcased of their featured Filipinas did not seem altogether different from the array of products listed on the Ebay site. Some sites even assigned item numbers to the women they featured. To me, it was similar to shopping for products (clothes, shoes, etc.) online.

The web sites I felt also essentialized the Filipino woman as being the "perfect wife and companion." The Filipina is the perfect wife and companion for she was described as possessing traditional values. She was described as docile and compliant; she puts husband and family above all else (Crespo, 2004). I wanted therefore to bring attention to the fact that the Filipino woman has more to her than being the "perfect wife and companion" as many of these web sites have described her. I wished therefore, that other aspects of the Filipino woman such as her intelligence, bravery and sacrifices were

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highlighted. I felt as a Filipino woman while reading these web sites' recruiting materials that our greatest asset was portrayed as serving others. This other was most often the "White" American/Western male. I did not see any references to show that Filipino women come from a proud matrilineal culture that has an immense and rich history. Nowhere did I see descriptions of how Filipino women have endured tremendous challenges and sacrifices nor outlined characteristics such as strength of character or perseverance.

As a researcher who wanted to obtain discernible, substantive and relevant data, as well as obtain as complete a picture as possible, I felt that looking at the web sites alone was not sufficient in order to understand the forces that drive this practice and those who are engaged in it. Researchers have not accounted for the experiences of the participants in online marriage programs nor did scholars present enough information as to results of these arrangements. This was the gap in previous literature that I addressed in this study.

My membership in the Filipino culture places me in a unique "insider" position in that I have familiarity with the context and cultures. Additionally however, being a well-educated, U.S. resident and researcher places me as an "outsider," to some degree. In studying this phenomenon, I have tried to maintain a delicate balance between being an advocate for these women where their options and choices may be constrained by environmental conditions such as economic challenge, and allowing their voices to speak for themselves. I am also aware that although we share a common national identity and language, my own experiences diverge from theirs. This was the reason why my goal was to allow the participants' voices to emerge based on their provided narratives, as well as

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add an additional critical lens to give attention to levels of agency and contextual factors. My being a Filipino woman also made this study a difficult task to accomplish. It was difficult and painful to hear the prospective brides' stories where they were experiencing discrimination, ridicule and being undermined as women and as Filipinos in general through their contact with some Western men via the marriage program web sites. It was also agonizing to hear their accounts of how limited their choices were as women of the Philippines, in terms of jobs, financial resources, quality relationships, etc. Although it was difficult, the experience also gave me the opportunity to see the courage and bravery of these women. It is noteworthy to see how, in the midst all the challenges and hurdles they had to overcome, they were able to maintain a sense of humor and optimism.

The rich interviews revealed that multifaceted factors affect online marriage programs and those who avail themselves of their services. Interviews with eight prospective Filipino online brides, eight Filipino online wives and eight Western husbands revealed that for the most part there was satisfaction in the marriage for both partners, although the sources of satisfaction differed to a degree between husband and wife. To improve economic conditions and lifestyle was the major impetus for the majority of the prospective Filipino online brides and Filipino online wives to engage the online marriage programs. To find a wife with traditional values who is committed to marriage and family was the most common reason why most of the Western men that were interviewed sought a Filipino wife.

Intersections of Gender, Class and National Identity Mediated by

History, Religion and Education

To preview, overlapping gender, class, and national identities were evident in the

narratives of all three groups and status hierarchies were also implicated. Contextual and

structural factors such as history, religion and education also played integral roles in the

interview discourses of the prospective brides and wives. These were particularly evident

as the women talked about marriage, romance and lifestyle. According to the women's

views, these contextual factors also influenced their decisions to participate in the online

marriage programs.

Interlocking Gender, Class and National Identities

The benefit of delving into this study with a feminist postcolonial prism is that it

allowed me to uncover the intersecting positions of gender, class and national identity

that were interwoven into many aspects of the experiences of prospective Filipino online

brides, Filipino online wives and their husbands. As Smith (1983) argues earlier, women

of color, including the Filipino woman, usually face interlocking challenges; these

challenges do not exist independently from each other. Most often, they exist and

confront women of color concurrently. I believe that this was the case with the women I

interviewed. Issues of gender influenced their decisions and attitudes, similarly their

economic status/class, national identity, desires to be with a "White" male, and access to

resources also played a role. In order to offer relevant interpretations of the interviews, it

is essential to recognize the position of the husbands as male, white citizens of countries

in the West, and having the status of earning sufficient income to support a wife and

family. Prospective brides/wives are best understood as women, Filipina, with lower

socio-economic status, and large families in need of financial support. Elements of gender, for example, (from the Philippines) can be gleaned in the narratives of the participants when they talked about what constituted an "ideal wife" (from the West.) Many of the women and their husbands suggested traditional gender roles such as the husband being the breadwinner and the wife being the homemaker. Many Filipino wives and their Western husbands who were interviewed described their preferences for these roles in their relationships/marriages.

Class/socio-economic status emerged in the responses of the women as the most significant determining factor in their participation in online marriage programs. Many of them expressed their distress and frustration in not being able to support their families and not being able to have a good life while living in the Philippines. A "good life" according to them, mostly meant having access to material goods/resources, having financial security, having a nice home and car, and having the capacity to support their families financially. Class, as well as gender may have also been one of the factors that determined how power was distributed in the relationships. Since it was mainly the men, husbands, who had the financial resources, the husbands were described as the ones who decided how and where money was spent. They also made the decisions in terms of whether or not there was a need for their wives to work or stay at home. Though some husbands did agree to support their wives' extended families, the husband, being the party with the resources, was the one to decide whether to provide this support or not and how much to contribute.

Class positioning and national identity also intersected and overlapped as evident in the interview discourses. Many of the prospective Filipino brides and Filipino wives

expressed the sentiment that being Filipino meant being poor and not having the capacity and options to exercise their rights and voice in comparison to those who come from wealthier countries. In comparing their circumstances to their Western husbands whom they believed had the options and choices to travel anywhere and live anywhere, wives' comments revealed that they felt constrained by their lives in the Philippines. Several wives, like Ayen, expressed that she felt she was not good enough for her husband because she was poor and he was rich. Both groups of women also felt that coming from a Third World country like the Philippines placed them at a disadvantage as opposed to if they came from a country like the United States. Their general views presented an image of a society and country whose position in the world was less significant and whose resources and economic capacity were not as substantive. As Filipinos, they linked their lack of economic resources with their nationality, and they linked the U.S. with being a land of prosperity.

Some of the husbands described the position of their countries of origin in relation to the Philippines. Poolbum described his experience when interacting with Filipinos, "…People assume that I am rich cause I have white skin…and that might relatively be true." He also compared and contrasted the Third World to that of a First World country. "…When you are dealing with a Third World country there's fewer legitimate opportunities so…people are more likely to rationalize why it's okay to take money from these rich Western pensionados…" Philfun, talked about how people warned him about unflattering things about the Philippines, "There's a lot of things I was warned about that I didn't really take it as serious as I should've done." Philfun did not elaborate on what he should have taken more seriously but his comments also raise questions about his earlier

glowing comments about his wife. Stan described the various limitations he encountered while visiting the Philippines, "It's one thing to go on vacation but still be able to check emails… you know take phone calls…make sure everything's okay…I couldn't do that from the Philippines…so I couldn't extend the trip any longer." Like many of the wives, the husbands made frequent comparisons between the Philippines and their home countries with the home country being the standard by which the Philippines was measured.

Colonial history, religion and education emerged in the responses of the prospective brides and wives with respect to their identities as Filipinos, the way they viewed the "White" man, marriage, romance and life in the West. My recent visit to the Philippines showed that many of my fellow Filipinos were imitating and buying whatever is perceived to be "American." This can be seen in the lifestyle, manner of dress, language and popular culture of many Filipinos; they valorize American/Western values and culture. For example, in 2007, in my daughter's school, English was the only language to be spoken in the classroom. Students were penalized (assessed a fine) for speaking any of the Filipino languages. Many of the shows on Filipino television were imitations of programs like "American Idol," or "Dancing with the Stars," or any of the popular American reality shows. The Filipino interviewees also described America as the "land of milk and honey," where opportunities seem endless. It is not difficult to argue therefore that centuries of colonization continue to impact the Filipino way of life and thinking and Filipino women are no exception. Ordonez (1997) argues that the "internalized colonization" of Filipinas provides the explanation for why Filipino women prefer Western men (p. 123). She claims that for many Filipino women, marrying a

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"White" American allows them to obtain positions with access to more power and status.

"When they look at their brown skin, they see white" (Ordonez, 1997, p. 123). This is

evidenced in comments such as those from Melanie, a Filipino online wife, when she

voiced a desire to have only "White-blue-eyed" children. It is easy to see with many of

the Filipino women I interviewed, this longing and desire to imitate and live the

American/Western way of life. Ordonez (1997) argues that the "most despicable evil that

colonization has wrought is the longing to be the oppressor that remains in the enslaved

consciousness of the colonized people long after the oppressor has gone" (p. 123). San

Juan (1998) also posits that although the Philippines gained independence from the

United States, it continues to be inextricably tied politically, economically, culturally and

psychologically to the U.S. I believe that years and years of colonization have resulted in

a certain ambivalence among Filipinos about their own identity as a group, and created an

almost senseless romanticization of their colonizers. The interviews with the Filipinas

show that this ambivalence and romanticization are evident today.

Centuries of colonization from the Spaniards who introduced Catholicism to

Filipinos have also influenced the attitudes and belief systems of Filipinos. This was also

revealed in the views of the Filipino women I interviewed. Religious/Catholic/Christian

influences permeated many aspects of the prospective Filipino online brides' and wives'

discourses. When describing the qualities they wanted in a man, they almost always

mentioned the quality of being "Christian," or "Catholic." They also upheld religious,

usually Catholic, norms such as saving sex for marriage and marrying in the Catholic

Church. They often attributed their happiness and success (i.e., success in the marital

relationship) to their faith in God. Many of them emphasized the importance of

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maintaining religious customs and beliefs even living abroad. The roles they believed they must perform as wives adhered to many Catholic principles. They suggested that being a "good Catholic," was synonymous to being a devoted and dutiful wife.

For many of the prospective Filipino online brides and Filipino online wives, education played an important role in their lives and experience as well as in their decisions in partaking in the online marriage programs. Some of them explained that had their parents sent them to school they would not have to endure such difficulties in life. One can surmise from this that education for these women was one of the key factors that they believed would enable them to achieve success in life and lead better lives. Many of the women expressed their desire to help their other siblings by sending them to school. Some of them believed that the best contribution they could make to their families and siblings was to give them the opportunity to acquire an education. Whether the women I interviewed had college degrees or had no formal schooling, all of them emphasized the importance of education. Interestingly, out of the number of wives I interviewed, only one was taking classes and the majority were homemakers.

It was apparent that a confluence of factors such as gender, class, national identity, education, religion and histories of colonization emerged in the narratives shared by prospective Filipino brides, Filipino wives and their husbands. These forces intersected and influenced each other in important ways to position the husbands as higher status, with more resources, and whose actions were enabled by their nationality, sex, class level and social standing and history. The women's levels of agency were constrained in varying degrees, by their Third World status, nationality, and class level.

However the women were making informed choices to varying degrees, and helping their extended families.

Critics' and Proponents' Claims Confirmed

In the previous chapters I have presented the views of the two opposing camps, critics and proponents of the online marriage programs also called mail-order-bride programs by researchers. Critics such as Halualani (1995), Villapando (1989), Sulaimanova (2006) argue that online marriage programs/mail-order-bride programs are exploitative and that these types of arrangements are characterized by inequality and power differentials where the males have the most resources and exert the most control. They argue that women in these types of situations are commodified and essentialized. On the other hand, proponents like the operators of the online marriage programs and successful couples that went through the channels, posit that these types of arrangements do work. According to them, those who engage in the practice usually find their needs met and end up in happy and meaningful relationships. They strongly argue that the women who engage in this practice do so of their own accord and freely choose to use the online services. These types of arrangements they argue, are by no means harmful or exploitative to women. Both critics' and proponents' arguments I believe were validated in the narratives of all three groups.

The couples I interviewed expressed their contentment in their marriages. According to the Western husbands, they were pleased with their wives for they were devoted and dutiful to the relationships. They described their wives as uncomplaining and expressing gratitude. The wives said they were satisfied with the marriage for they were able to live better lives in economic terms; they were able to live in a nicer home, have

financial stability and were able to help their families back home. Although many of the criteria that measured the success of these marriages were based on practical socio-economic factors, proponents may view these comments as endorsements or evidence that these arrangements do work.

Critics, on the other hand, may also say that these relationships remain exploitative if the standards for the couples include equity, each partners having mutual influence and for the women to be seen as more than an image of a wife and mother. Then the unequal distribution of resources, control of one party over the other, and the commodification of the Filipino woman in the relationship are problematic. They may also argue that the happiness and success that the couples expressed and proponents declare may be attributed only to the practical or lifestyle issues, which are important, but not the whole picture of the relationship. Critics may say that the happiness that was expressed may be due to face-saving and, perhaps, a lack of options for being a wife and mother. After having made the choice for an online marriage and relocating to another country, the wives do not have the funds to return home, and if they did, would be shunned. Critics may say that such relationships were merely business arrangements where both parties fulfilled each other's requirements.

It is important to take into account at this juncture that the couples I interviewed participated in the study voluntarily and those that agreed to do so considered themselves as successful couples who found contentment in their marital relationships. There were other couples that were identified during the recruitment process and were given the invitation to participate, but many of them refused, for according to them they did not want to reveal problems in their relationships. It was not unusual therefore, that those

who were willing to be interviewed were content in their relationships while those who refused to participate were not happy with theirs. The other couples' refusal to participate along with some of the women's hesitation and reluctance in disclosing negative elements of their relationships are extremely noteworthy. It raises questions about what is missing and whose voices are missing. It also reinforces the fact that the picture I have is limited. It would be interesting to see how many of these unhappy couples exist and to determine whether their numbers are far greater or far less than those couples who considered themselves happy.

Questions about level of agency and choice remain, however. With regard to the Filipinas' relationships with their husbands in the U.S., when examined in the context of U.S. culture, they appear to be governed by very traditional gender expectations. Not all of the wives described their husbands as meeting the ideal and romanticized version they held of U.S. men prior to coming to the U.S. The prospective brides and wives also expressed their frustrations in not having avenues (if they stay in the Philippines) to improve their economic status despite their acquisition of college degrees. They expressed that participating in the online marriage is a creative option not only for them to exert resistance against contextual constraints (no economic opportunities), but to support themselves and their extended families.

The narratives of the prospective Filipino online brides, Filipino online wives and their husbands provided an array of information with regards to online marriage programs. The respondents described positive as well as negative features of the practice. They described the online program as helpful for they provided venues for meeting people from different parts of the world and thus, helped individuals who participated to

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improve their communication and intercultural skills. The web sites, they said, provided spaces for individuals to meet partners/mates with whom some developed meaningful relationships. The participants also mentioned several ominous features of the online programs such as the possibility of meeting individuals who have questionable and dubious motives in searching for partners online. The Filipino women described, the likelihood of being discriminated against, ridiculed, and sexually harassed by the men they met online. The male clients mentioned the risk of being victimized by fraudulent and deceitful exchanges with the women with whom they interacted. The participants of this study suggested that those who wish to partake in this program must do adequate research as to which particular online program they should select. According to them, certain web sites were better and safer than others.

Some of the women I interviewed (from both groups) also mentioned certain cases (some of these cases happened to their own friends) wherein these types of arrangements have developed into abusive ones. Several were hesitant in sharing these stories for they were concerned for those women who have been placed in precarious situations with their partners. Their strategies to combat such abusive relationships were proactive. They suggested that Filipino women who seek online marriages should be extremely selective about the men they meet and should take extra time in getting to know their future mates. They also advised other women to do their own investigating regarding the backgrounds of the men with whom they interact.

Developing a support group or network within the community of Filipino online brides and wives would be helpful according to these women participants. Many of the women I interviewed have established relationships and friendships with other Filipino

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women who were living in the United States, Europe and Australia. They were able to share their experiences and stories with each other and thus were able to help each other not only to combat homesickness, but also to avoid risky and perilous situations. According to them, support groups and a network of friends also helped them to engage and celebrate their "Filipinoness." Not only were they taking care of each other, but they were also reminiscing about their home country, speaking their own language and eating their own food. These things they said helped them to cope with living in a foreign land.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Addressing an increasingly common practice that has international scope speaks to the relevance and need for this study. As it has been established in the previous chapters, online marriage programs have now become ubiquitous and have acquired world-wide reach. They not only have involved Filipino women, but other women in other parts of the world as well (i.e., Russian and Thai women). In essence, this is a practice that affects an enormous number of women. In addition, I believe that the online marriage programs are microcosms of the overall social and cultural conditions of the contemporary Filipino society. Hence, they offer scholars and practitioners who study them the potential to offer directions, information and measures that would be beneficial to those whose goal is to evaluate and assess as well as to improve and enhance the Filipino society as a whole.

Using in-depth interviews in this study provided rich and meaningful data. As Berger (1998) states, in-depth interviews allow respondents to talk through their views and experiences and perhaps to reveal feelings and attitudes of which the respondent/participant herself/himself was previously unaware. In this study, in-depth

interviews allowed the participants to elaborate and describe their experiences more extensively; these also presented an opportunity for the interviewer and the interviewee to develop a sense of trust and rapport therefore increasing the likelihood of relevant experiences being shared and allowing for the interview process to proceed more naturally and smoothly. Since in-depth interviews offer consistency in terms of the trajectory of the discussion and questions asked, as well as flexibility in the order of topics and subjects discussed (Darlington & Scott, 2002), these enabled the interviewers to clarify and follow-up answers that needed to be expanded and scrutinized more closely.

The conversational and relational qualities of in-depth interviews contributed to an atmosphere that was conducive to the discussion and dialogue of sensitive and delicate issues such as love and relationships. In-depth interviews were suitable in this study, as well, for drawing out information and data that otherwise would not have been mined had another method had been used. Participants were being asked to open up and reveal intimate details of their experiences and relationships with regard to the online marriage programs. Since the topic itself, not to mention the label of mail-order-bride programs, carry a stigma, it was challenging for the participants to discuss and elaborate on their experiences without feeling awkward and uncomfortable in the process. The stigma attached to the topic made some of the individuals who participated in the online marriage programs fearful and apprehensive. Initially they said they feared that if they revealed details of their experiences and relationships in relation to the programs, they would run the risk of being judged and derided. In-depth interviews however, helped in this case for they afforded the participants enough opportunity to get to know their

interviewers and build rapport and trust. Finally, the inclusion of husbands' views and experiences provided a richer picture of the wives' positions in relation to the husbands' positions, and offered both party's accounts of their relationship.

Another strength of this study was the way in which the participants were recruited. The participants were identified by employing networking. It was friends and families who were summoned and asked to identify various possible participants who were willing to participate in the study; so, there was already a built-in trust that existed. It would have been difficult to think of a better way that would have been effective in recruiting the participants. Even with the assurance of friends and families, identifying participants who were willing to be interviewed was challenging.

Using a feminist postcolonial lens was beneficial in this study. It allowed for the more effective scrutiny and analysis of the experiences of the Filipino brides and wives. As anticipated, there were interlocking and multi-layered factors that intersected the experiences of the prospective Filipino online brides and Filipino online wives. Gender, national identity and class intertwined as well as histories of colonization. For example, the prospective Filipino online brides related various experiences online where they were subjected to discrimination as Filipinas and as members of the Third World community. More specifically, they described how they were called "gold diggers" and "whores" by some of the men they encountered. They also described how they were asked by the male clients to pose nude or to undress in front of the web cameras. The women also explained that many foreign men assumed that by being members the Third World they were pre-disposed to unscrupulous activities and dealings; that is they were out to scam the men they meet.

Using a feminist postcolonial lens also allowed for the analysis of the multiple challenges that these Filipinas face. For the Filipino online wives, not only do they face challenges as women of color living in the West, but they also endure being stigmatized because of the way they entered their marriages (Ordonez, 1997). Many of the women interviewed expressed how they avoided discussions about the online marriage programs in many Filipino gatherings. They expressed their fear and anxiety towards being judged and mocked by marrying their husbands through online marriage channels.

In addition, the feminist postcolonial lens also was helpful in evaluating contextual and structural factors such as history, religion and education which also enabled and constrained the options and actions of the prospective Filipino online brides and Filipino online wives and their husbands. Years of colonization, it was gleaned through the descriptions of the Filipinas, have influenced how they viewed aspects of their lives such as marriage, romance, love and life as a whole. Colonization impressed on them the image of the West as the land of opportunity and the "White" man as the "Savior." Religious predominantly Catholic, principles shaped how they approached marriage and family life. Education was viewed as the key to bettering one's life and in saving others from harsh economic conditions, illustrating the intersection of education and class. The responses from the critics and proponents of these online marriage programs, as well as the responses from the women, can also be framed within two strands of post feminism. Critics of the online marriage and mail-order-bride programs may argue that capitalism and the need for socio-economic mobility is subverting feminism and independence for Filipino women. On the other hand, proponents may argue that these women are reclaiming tools such as attractiveness and family

orientations used in the past to oppress women when they utilize the online marriage programs. This is an example of what post feminist scholars like Camille Paglia and Naomi Wolf emphasize as the move away from the idea of victimization and towards the mobilization of using sexual difference as a source of power (Hua, 2009). In essence, the constraints (lack of economic opportunities and socio-economic mobility) faced by the prospective brides and wives may not necessarily be viewed as ways in which these women are victimized, rather, they may serve as avenues in which their levels of agency may be enhanced. In the case of the Filipino brides and wives, they may use the qualities ascribed to them such as "perfect wives and companions" to their advantage. By emphasizing these qualities, they may be able to increase their appeal and attractiveness to male clients who seek such attributes.

The inclusion of the different kinds of insider views, that is being a prospective Filipino online bride and being a Filipino online wife, allowed for the illustration of the different views and different positionings of being a Filipina. This was helpful in evaluating where the prospective online bride and the online wife differed or were similar in terms of their views and experiences with regard to the online marriage program. For example, a majority of the prospective Filipino online brides talked extensively about their identities as Filipinas, how they were perceived and treated online by male clients by virtue or their nationalities, how they were stereotyped and labeled by the men they met. Filipino online wives, on the other hand, did not talk about their Filipina identities as extensively as the prospective Filipino online brides. Their articulations focused mainly on their marriages and on their roles as wives. This raises questions about the extent of

expected adaptation to other national cultures. Scholars interested in intercultural adaptation might benefit from examining online partnerships.

The "insider views" from women about their cultural background and the importance of attention to the Philippines, therefore, may prove useful for scholars who are interested in groups having histories of colonization and for scholars who want to understand how individuals construct their understandings of contextual and factors such as histories, economic positions and religion. The importance of context was magnified in this study and the inclusion of it provided for one of its strengths. As illustrated throughout the narratives, structural and contextual forces such as history, education and religion are apparent in the experiences and views of the prospective brides and wives. For example, a majority of the prospective online brides emphasized the quality of being "Catholic" in describing their "ideal man." They also attributed much of their good fortune to God and emphasized the importance of prayers and adhering to the to Catholic and Christian principles. The Filipinas' valorization and romanticization of the U.S. American values as well as their perception of the U.S. as the "land of milk and honey" also show the persistence and endurance of colonialism. By bringing in the Philippines' history of colonization from the Spaniards and the Americans into the analysis, a greater understanding was gained as to why Filipinas tended to believe a certain way about marriage, love and life in general.

Some of the strengths listed above also became limitations for this study. Because of the stigma attached to utilizing online marriage services, it was difficult to recruit participants for many of them were apprehensive and hesitant to disclose information about their experiences. It was also difficult to gather a more comprehensive

and telling assessment of the success rate of the marriage (despite the declaration of contentment by the current participants) because there were others who were identified by friends as very unhappy, but who declined to be interviewed. According to their friends and families, these women had encountered problems and strains in their marital relationships and would have presented a different set of experiences in their marriages. Since those couples declined to share their experiences, it is difficult to pinpoint any sort of percentage of overall satisfaction. One of the possible future projects therefore, is to find an avenue to reach and interview a larger and more diverse group of couples.

Using the network of friends and families as a system to recruit participants proved to be very challenging and time-consuming as well. Although it was helpful to go through individuals who knew the researcher and who were already trusted by the participants themselves, the process was not always smooth and straightforward. There were several who committed themselves to participate at the beginning and then withdrew at the last minute. There were several who promised to take part in the study and then refused to take the calls of the interviewer when it was time for the interview. There were also several instances when the wives agreed to be interviewed and then were told by their husbands not to and therefore, had to withdraw from the study. These problems caused serious delays in the data collection process. Additionally, the stigma of the label "mail-order-bride practice," which is found extensively throughout the research literature, was problematic. Respondents strongly objected to the label and were willing to be interviewed when the questions addressed online marriage.

Applications of the Study

One of the goals of this study as I have stated previously was to utilize its findings to develop a grassroots program designed towards helping prospective Filipino online brides and online wives with issues related to the online marriage programs as well as to provide information about the practice to those concerned: political decision-makers, non-profit service providers, women in general and the Filipino population as a whole. This grassroots program will provide resources to women and men in communities, political decision makers, as well as to teachers and international/national non-profit service providers. This educational program will have multiple objectives. The first is to provide young women with more comprehensive and wide-ranging information about online marriage programs (mail-order-bride practices). For instance, I plan to develop teaching materials to be used in schools and non-profit agencies in the field that includes descriptions of the web sites along with accounts of women who have used the web sites, as well as accounts of women from satisfying marriages, those who describe problems, and those who declined to be interviewed due to fear of repercussions from their husbands. This type of information will allow women to make informed decisions about their futures.

I will also supply them with certain defensive measures such as how to react, who to call, and where to go in the event that they are placed in dangerous situations while taking part in the online marriage programs. For example, I will provide a list of women's shelters or organizations such as the Gabriela Network and CPCA that they can contact that would provide them the necessary assistance in order to leave an abusive situation. Third, I will familiarize them and their families with their various alternatives

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and rights when they go to a foreign land. For instance, in the United States there are laws established to protect immigrant women. One of these laws is the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (Belleau, 2003). This law protects immigrant women and children from domestic violence and deportation, an issue of utmost importance for Filipino online wives (Belleau, 2003). Under this law immigrant women are entitled to funds and legal representation.

Fourth, I will encourage them to work collaboratively and proactively to improve or change their conditions. I will provide information on microfinance opportunities in rural communities and options for financial aid to secure educational degrees. Finally I will work to resurrect their pride and belief in the authenticity and value of their culture affording them to see the honor inherent in their "Filipinoness" and in their being a Filipino woman, whatever choices they make.

The suggestions, advice and information that were provided by the participants through this study may be helpful to others who seek to educate and provide information to young men and women in the Philippines about these practices. Potential mail-order-brides with various nationalities, who plan to participate in the practice, may benefit from knowing about the process and the nature of the experiences of my participants in online marriage programs. Policy makers/political decision-makers, non-profit staff, educators, in the Philippines as well as in other Asian countries and Western countries may find these accounts and experiences useful to better understand why this practice has grown and why many Filipino women and Western men engage in it. The first hand experiences as well as giving attention to whose voices are not heard may enable practitioners to design certain measures that could provide support to those women who may require

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them. Therefore I will endeavor to publish results of my study not only in academic publications but also international NGO newsletters such as the Gabriela Network and local newspapers, web sites and list serves.

Conclusion

The interviews revealed numerous overarching themes. There was expressed marital satisfaction among majority of the online couples interviewed in this study although the small number of couples and the tendency for satisfied couples to agree to be interviewed preclude generalizing to any degree. Therefore the success rate assessment I believe remains incomplete. Both critics' and proponents' views of online marriage programs were corroborated in the participants' narratives.

Taking all of this into account, the appropriate question may now be, what can be concluded about Filipinos and online marriage programs? I agree with Ordonez (1997) who proposes that online marriage programs should be viewed in multiple ways. They can be viewed as overseas migration precipitated by poverty or harsh economic conditions; they can be viewed as commodification and sexual exploitation; they can be looked at as marriage fraud; or they can be viewed as just another channel for people to meet. As illustrated in the narratives of the Filipino women and Western husbands interviewed, the online marriage programs are all of these things.

No matter how we view online marriage programs, as overseas migration, as a natural way for people to meet, or as a form of commodification and exploitation of women; it remains vital that we recognize its widening and increasing reach. I believe that it would be foolhardy to ignore the pervasiveness of this practice and its impact on women and society as a whole (at least this is particularly true in the Philippines). This

study offers a medley of information that allows us to see through the window of the experiences of prospective Filipino brides, Filipino wives and their husbands.

Although this study offered a substantive data that may serve as instruments in addressing the issues much more deeply, it is important to note that there is still a lot of work to be done. My previous research on the mail-order-bride web sites showed that Filipino women were commodified and essentialized as subservient, eager to please men, erotic and rarely lose their figures (Ordonez, 1997). These types of stereotypes and labeling may be harmful to Filipinas for they paint an incomplete and distorted picture. Such materials may also present Filipinas merely as objects that can be bought and sold. This objectification I believe may have negative repercussions to the way Filipinas view themselves and how others outside view them, as demonstrated in their stories of how foreign men held stereotypical images of them similar to those illustrated in the web sites' recruiting materials. It may also affect the way others treat them. Hence, such negative campaigning warrants further study.

The narratives of the women interviewed also showed that many of them opted to participate in the online marriage programs because they wanted to escape poverty and live a better life. This to me shows that the options for these women remain partial and their levels of agency limited. Because of this, I believe that it is imperative that efforts to provide them the alternatives they need in order for Filipino women to gain greater agency continue. These alternatives need to allow them to develop and celebrate their own self-autonomy, self-reliance and independence, alternatives that would afford them the opportunity to celebrate their being a woman and treasure their being "Filipinos." It remains a worthy task.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR THE PROSPECTIVE ONLINE BRIDES

IN THE PHILIPPINES

1) Tell me a little bit about your background.

2) How did you become a member of the online marriage program?

3) What are your feelings about the online marriage program?

4) What factors led you to become a member of the online marriage program?

5) How did your background influence your decision to become a member of the online marriage program? (i.e. How do your different group positions, like being a young woman, being a Filipina, being poor or wealthy, being from the Mindanao/Luzon/Visayas area, being unmarried, level of education, and religion affect your decision to be an online bride?)

6) Please describe the experiences you have had so far in relation to the online marriage program?

7) What do you hope to accomplish by becoming a member of the online marriage program?

8) How do you picture your life would be if you marry a U.S. American/British/Australian White male?

9) What is your idea of a good life?

10) How would you describe the online marriage program in terms of its advantages and disadvantages?

11) How would you describe an ideal husband/partner?

12) What advice can you give to others who may want to participate in this practice?

13) Anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR THE FILIPINO WIVES LIVING

IN THE PHILIPPINES, UNITED STATES, ENGLAND OR AUSTRALIA

1) Tell me a little bit about your background.

2) Tell the story of how you and your husband met.

3) What are your feelings about the online marriage program?

4) What factors led you to become a member of the online marriage program?

5) How did your background influence your decision to become a member of the online marriage program? (i.e. How do your different group positions, like being a young woman, being a Filipina, being poor or wealthy, being from the Mindanao/Luzon/Visayas area, being unmarried, level of education, and religion affect your decision to be a mail-order-bride?)

6) Why did you choose to marry a U.S. American/British/Australian White man?

7) Before leaving the Philippines, what did you think your life would be like in the U.S., or England, or Australia?

8) What is a typical day or week like for you? How does that compare to before you were married?

9) Were all the expectations you had before marriage fulfilled in your current relationship? How? Why or why not?

10) What is your idea of an ideal husband?

11) Tell me about your relationship with your husband.

12) What advice would you give to those Filipino women who may want to marry U.S. American/British/Australian men through the (name of the web site)?

13) Anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR THE U.S. AMERICAN/BRITISH/AUSTRALIAN HUSBANDS

1) Tell me a little bit about your background.

2) Tell me the story of how you and your wife met.

3) What are your feelings about the online marriage program?

4) What factors led you to become a member of the online marriage program?

5) How did your background influence your decision to become a member of the online marriage program?

6) Why did you choose to marry a Filipina instead of another nationality?

7) What did you think your life would be like marrying a Filipina?

8) What is a typical day or week like for you? How does that compare to before you were married?

9) Were all the expectations you had before marriage fulfilled in your current relationship? How? Why or why not?

10) What is your idea of an ideal wife?

11) Tell me about your relationship with your wife.

12) What advice would you give to those U.S. American/British/Australian men who may want to marry Filipinas through (name of web site)?

13) Anything else you would like to share?

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