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Anthony C. Ocampo

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The Gay Second Generation: Sexual Identity and Family Relations of Filipino and Latino Gay Men

Anthony C. Ocampo

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While studies have considered how race has reshaped how children of immigrants adapt to US life, studies have not thoroughly considered how sexual identity affects their assimilation. With a focus on familial incorporation, this study draws from the narratives of second-generation Filipino and Latino gay men to show that sexual identity deeply shapes the degree to which gay children of immigrants are able to secure social support and moral acceptance from their parents. These men employ strategies to maintain rapport with their families before and after coming out of the closet, a process I term moral management. While this study focuses on a unique population, the findings have greater implications for uncovering the mechanisms of intergenerational conflict and consensus among immigrant populations, as well as the dynamics of overcoming social prejudices within minority communities.

Keywords: Gay; Second Generation; Filipino; Latino; Immigration

> I came out to my mom because I was going to graduate from college next year, and I needed to know if she was going to accept me or not because if she wasn't going to, I wouldn't come back home. I would stay in the east coast. When I came out it was a traumatic experience. She started crying and said, "I still love you, but I gave birth to a boy. I don't remember giving birth to a girl." I told her I'm still a guy—a guy who likes guys—and she said that's not normal. I started crying too. Not feeling that our love was strong enough to overcome this issue created a divide between me and my mom. It threw me into a depression with alcohol and drugs. That really messed me up my senior year. (Armando, 27, Mexican American city planner[1])

Anthony C. Ocampo is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Cal Poly Pomona, Pomona, CA, USA. Correspondence to: Anthony C. Ocampo, Sociology, Cal Poly Pomona, Pomona, CA, USA. E-mail: acocampo@csupomona.edu

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By any measure, Armando was the fulfilment of an immigrant parent's dream. Having grown up in a working-class neighborhood in Los Angeles, he always managed to be a straight-A student all throughout high school. Among his four brothers, Armando considered himself the 'favourite' of his mother because he had always spent the most time with her while his brothers were either getting into trouble or playing sports. Eventually, his academic drive led him to Georgetown University, a highly selective, prestigious east coast university. The only chink in his armour was the fact that he was gay, which his mother understood to be the antithesis of a 'real' man. As his remarks demonstrate, his sexual identity drove a wedge between him, his mother, and the rest of his family, despite his academic achievements—a rift that Armando said is only *starting* to be healed more than five years later.

Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in the assimilation of children of immigrants has exploded due to the rapidly increasing influx of migrants from Latin America and Asia. Previous studies demonstrate how second-generation assimilation is shaped by a constellation of factors, including race, gender, socio-economic status, neighbourhood and co-ethnic networks (Portes and Zhou 1993). However, the experiences of *gay* children of immigrants remain largely absent within previous studies. How does sexual identity shape the assimilation patterns of the gay immigrant second generation? Specifically, I focus on familial incorporation. Second-generation assimilation patterns are greatly influenced by the level of social support from the immigrant family. Drawing on 40 in-depth interviews, I examine how Filipino and Latino gay men navigate their sexual identity within the context of the immigrant family.

Second-generation gay men initially viewed their sexual orientation as inherently incongruent with the moral and gender ideologies of their ethnic culture, which in turn prompted many to manage their sexual identity with their immigrant parents—a complicated and slow incremental process that I term *moral management*. Moral management refers to the way that gay children of immigrants strategically display their sexual identity in order to maintain rapport and social support from family members. Moral management entails the hyperconscious monitoring of gender presentation, behaviors and mannerisms, voice inflections, clothing choices, cultural tastes and even friendship networks. The strategies of moral management vary depending on one's degree of sexual identity disclosure (closeted versus out). However, what remains consistent is the desire of gay children of immigrants to complicate gay individuals and communities beyond the rigid caricatured stereotypes internalised by their family members.

Given the recent emergence of both immigration and gay rights as hotbed issues within the US society, there is a greater need to examine the diversity within both immigrant and sexual communities, which are often treated as mutually exclusive. Immigration studies are often heteronormative in how they define family, and sexualities researchers have found it challenging to incorporate the experiences of non-white gay people (Cantú, Naples, and Vidal-Ortiz 2009; Moore 2011). However,

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second-generation Filipino and Latino gay men lie at the intersection of these two groups and provide a strategic case for 'queering' migration studies (Manalansan 2006). In addition to filling the gap on gay children of immigrants, this study also provides unique opportunities to better understand the underlying mechanisms behind both intergenerational conflict and consensus. Ultimately, the narratives of these gay men demonstrate the challenges and the strategies involved in overcoming prejudiced attitudes within communities of colour.[2]

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Literature Review

Theories of Assimilation

Sociologists' interest in the experiences of immigrants and their children began in the early twentieth century with the arrival of turn-of-the-century immigrants from Europe. Chicago-school sociologist Robert E. Park once assumed assimilation to be an inevitable stage in the immigrant adaptation process (Park 1950). Milton Gordon (1964) later developed more precise measures of assimilation (e.g. identity, cultural and civic) and argued that structural barriers influenced the degree to which immigrant groups assimilated. Ultimately, however, the role of the immigrant family was underplayed in these early assimilation frameworks, and the effect of sexual identity (and even gender) was overlooked completely.

Recent reconfigurations of the assimilation model question the unidirectional nature of previous frameworks and have elaborated extensively on the key role of the immigrant family in second-generation incorporation. Children of immigrants can follow multiple assimilation pathways, some of which are associated with achieving middle-class status, others of which are linked to downward mobility—a concept known as 'segmented assimilation' (Portes and Zhou 1993). They argue that immigrant families greatly influence these trajectories, as they provide important forms of social, economic and institutional support that can facilitate mobility and buffer the negative effects of racial discrimination, financial hardships or negative influences such as gangs and drugs (Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, like earlier models, the segmented assimilation approach does not consider whether sexual identity affects access to such familial resources in the case of gay children of immigrants. I turn to the broader insights that exist on gay racial minorities and immigrants to help address this gap.

Gay Minority Experiences with Family and Community

Many canonical narratives about gay life, including the idea of 'coming out', have been based on the experiences of middle-class white men (Brekus 2003; Seidman 2009). Though these studies show how gay individuals navigate sexual identity within their social worlds, they overlook how gay men might negotiate sexuality with their other competing identities. However, a number of factors related to race mean that gay children of immigrants navigate their gender presentation, sexual identity and

coming out differently from white gays, including the former's historical exclusion from gay social movements, stronger ties to their racial communities, socio-economic disadvantages and ideological beliefs towards sexuality stemming from parents' home society (Cantú, Naples, and Vidal-Ortiz 2009; Hom 2007; Manalansan 2003).

Research by Mignon Moore (2011) on black gay communities provides important insights for understanding the relationship of gender presentation and familial and co-ethnic relationships. Black gay men and lesbians often feel more allegiance to their racial communities, more than the larger gay community (Moore 2011). This is in part because they are socially and geographically embedded in black communities and organisations (such as the black church) rather than gay enclaves, which throughout the USA tend to be predominantly white and upper middle class (Moore 2010). In addition, because blacks have historically felt excluded from white gay circles, they have developed forms of cultural expression and gender presentation that are distinct from white gays. For example, Moore (2011) notes that white lesbians promoted gender androgyny as a strategy for deconstructing gender binaries. However, because black lesbians have historically lacked access to white lesbian communities—due to race and class differences—their gender ideologies more closely mirror those of the black community.

Echoing Moore's findings on African-Americans, research shows that children of immigrants feel a stronger burden to maintain harmonious relationships with both their families and co-ethnic communities as compared to their white peers (Fuligni 2001; Fuligni and Pedersen 2002). Several factors amplify this sense of reliance of gay children of immigrants. First, gay children of immigrants may feel less inclined to come out for fear of losing socio-economic or social support from family and co-ethnic networks. While the potential of being cut off from one's family or community is traumatising for all gay individuals, middle-class white gays can maintain their economic stability and more easily find support from mainstream gay spaces and organisations (Cantú, Naples, and Vidal-Ortiz 2009). Second, gay children of immigrants may be concerned about how their gender presentation and sexual identity may adversely affect the status and the reputation of their family within the larger immigrant community (Hom 2007). These studies show that the navigation of both gender presentation and sexual identity disclosure becomes a key strategy for maintaining familial and co-ethnic relationships.

Third, given the focus of this article on second-generation Filipino and Latino gay men, the effect of masculinity must be considered. These men navigate these identities vis-à-vis the cultural norms of the USA, their ethnic community and their parents' sending society. Studies by Almaguer (2007) and Rodríguez (2006) show that the boundaries of masculinity, desirability of partners and cultural aesthetics are shaped simultaneously by the gender ideologies of these different contexts and each affect how well-integrated gay men are with the immigrant family and community. These previous studies demonstrate the need to examine the family as a local 'context of reception' (Portes and Rumbaut 2001) for second-generation gay men.

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Methodology

This article draws from 40 in-depth interviews with second-generation Filipino and Latino (mostly Mexican American) gay men from the greater Los Angeles area. With a population of over nine million residents, Los Angeles is an ideal setting to study gay children of immigrants for a number of reasons. First, Los Angeles has historically been a primary destination city for Filipino, Mexican, and other Latino immigrants, meaning there are ample opportunities to recruit second-generation respondents. Filipinos and Mexicans are the two largest immigrant groups in the state, and the majority of them have settled in Los Angeles (US Census Bureau 2010). There are over 320,000 Filipinos (about 25% of the Asian population) and 4.6 million Latinos (over three-fourths of whom are Mexican) in the Los Angeles area. Second, Los Angeles houses a plethora of ethnic-specific and multiethnic gay public spaces and organisations from which to recruit. The mainstream and public visibility of gay children of immigrants are important, given that sexualities researchers have traditionally had difficulties accessing and building rapport with gay communities of colour (Moore 2011; Ocampo 2012).

Comparing Filipinos and Latinos also provides analytical leverage for researching the familial incorporation of second-generation gay men. Filipinos and Latinos have a shared history of Spanish colonialism, which has heavily shaped their ethnic culture in comparable ways, particularly through Catholicism (Ocampo 2013). Filipino and Latinos also report similarly high levels of family obligation, as compared to Asians and whites (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002). At the same time, they differ with respect to migration history and socio-economic status. Filipino migrants are generally college-educated and enter middle-class professions upon coming to the USA, whereas Latino migrants arrive with comparatively lower levels of education on average and work in more low-skilled occupations (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). These factors allowed me to compare gay men's experiences across similar cultural and religious contexts while accounting for the potential effect of class differences.

Respondents were either born in the USA or migrated before the age of 11. Their ages ranged from 18 to 33 years old. Eighteen identified as Mexican, 16 as Filipino and the remaining 6 as Central or South American.[3] The educational background of the men varied. About one-third of the men held at least a bachelor's degree, one-third were currently in college, and the remainder pursued some higher education but left before earning their degree. Filipino respondents' parents were generally college educated and had professional occupations, whereas Latinos' parents often had less than a high school education and held working-class jobs. Interestingly however, Filipinos and Latinos were not as bifurcated in terms of their socio-economic status. In both groups, respondents were split between middle and working class. Among the respondents who were out of school, most reported having stable employment.

Respondents were recruited from gay social events (mainstream and ethnic-specific), social networking sites, campus organisations and referrals from original respondents. Due to the nature of recruitment sites, nearly all of the men considered

themselves to be gay identified, and not questioning, though they did vary in their level of openness with friends, family, school and work. I also recruited respondents with varying gender presentation (e.g. masculine, feminine and gender-blending). Gender presentation is a variable overlooked by frameworks of assimilation but has been shown to shape relationship dynamics between gay children and their immigrant families (Ocampo 2012).

Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and addressed a number of themes. Some themes were not related directly to sexual identity, such as neighborhood and school experiences. Others were tied closely to gay identity, such as coming-out experiences, gay friendship and romantic relationships and interactions with the gay community. Ultimately, it was most common for respondents to seamlessly weave their experiences of being gay when they spoke about themes related to family, religion and ethnic identity.

While there are similarities in the experiences of gay men and women, I chose to focus on the former because of the unique socialisation of that second-generation men and women experience within the immigrant family. As such, the data are not fully generalisable to children of immigrants who are lesbian. The experiences of second-generation gay men might differ in a number of respects. First, immigrant parents give sons more latitude and freedom than daughters (Espiritu 2003; Zhou and Bankston 1998), meaning gay men's opportunities to explore sexual identity beyond the home setting is different from women's. Immigrant parents also more strongly police the sexual morality of their daughters, who are often expected to maintain a level of respectability in both the family and ethnic community (Espin 1999). On the other hand, gay men have significantly less latitude to engage in gender play without sanction. In other words, it is more socially acceptable for women to engage in traditionally masculine behaviors (e.g. attire, grooming and activities) than men are permitted to engage in feminine behaviors and activities (Schilt 2011). As such, the parameters for gender presentation for second-generation gay men are more constrained than those of women. Finally, gay men and women have different levels of access to gay spaces within Los Angeles, which in turn affect the way they negotiate their relative involvement with their ethnic community and family (Moore 2011). Gay enclaves and night-time social events overwhelmingly cater to male clientele, reserving only a few select evenings for 'ladies nights' (Moore 2010). Nonetheless, a focus on second-generation gay men yields insights for understanding how immigrant families deal with gay relatives and issues.

Context of Moral Reception: Gay Identity in the Ethnic and Religious Community

While scholars argue that countries such as Mexico and the Philippines should not be characterised as uniquely homophobic (Carrillo 2004; Manalansan 2003), respondents described their parents' home societies as particularly morally conservative, heavily *machismo* and overwhelmingly Catholic, all of which were antithetical to gay identity in their eyes. Many recall hearing their parents characterise gay people as

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'abnormal, wrong, and disgusting.' Nick, a 26-year-old military employee, said, '*Bakla* [literally translated as half man, half woman in Tagalog] is a term used perjoratively for gay people in the Philippines, and I was always afraid of that being used on me.' Latinos noted their families using terms like *maricón* and *joto* in similar ways to describe gay men in Latin America. Latinos and Filipinos also noted that gay men in the homeland, who they have seen either first-hand or on ethnic media such as *Univisión* or *The Filipino Channel*, had hyperbolised displays of femininity. Gay identity was equated with 'being a crossdresser' in both Latin America and the Philippines. Paolo, a 19-year-old college student, pointed out, 'Gays can be characters on a television show, but no one ever takes them seriously'. As a child, he remembered watching *novelas* (Spanish soap operas) with his grandma and inquiring about the gay characters on the shows. 'She would tell me in Spanish, "They have demons inside of them"', Paolo recalled. Such remarks instilled a sense of fear, from a very early age on, that their families would reject them for being gay. In addition, the act of devaluing gay identity by associating it with effeminate and gender-transgressing behaviors further crystallised patriarchal, homophobic attitudes that remain prominent in both the Philippines and Latin America (Carrillo 2001; Parreñas 2001).

The close association between religion and ethnicity also led some respondents to feel unsafe in their family environment growing up. The majority of respondents were raised Catholic, but among them only two admit they are still practicing. While religious attrition is not unusual among the second generation, many noted that the Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality pushed them away from their religion. This was particularly true for those whose parents were especially devout. Jason, a 20-year-old college student, recalled his frustrations about religion:

> It was really hard coming from a predominantly Catholic family. I was really struggling with my religion, and that put a big strain on my relationship with my dad. When I went to church, it just seemed that they would always tell us all the reasons we would go to hell. I really hated it. I hated going. I hated being Catholic. But at the time, my dad and mom really relied on religion as a crutch for them. 'Let's just pray and everything will be fine', they'd say. In my mind, I thought, God hates me. I'm going to hell because I'm gay.

Jason's remarks demonstrate the contrasting roles of religion in his and his parents' lives. For Jason's immigrant parents, religion was a safe space to ask God for guidance in building a life in the USA. Moreover, religion provided opportunities for them to build relationships with the co-ethnic community through fund-raisers, rosary groups and casual interactions after mass. However, Jason viewed the church as unaccepting of gay people, particularly when the parish publicly voiced their opposition to marriage equality and same-sex adoption. Religion caused a rift between him and his religious family members. During high school, Jason recalled wanting to come out to his older sister, but resisted: 'She was becoming more and

more religious because of her boyfriend. Religion pushed me away from coming out to my sister.'

Most respondents did not describe their household as overtly homophobic but noted the strong gender socialisation within Filipino and Latino families as a source of stress, particularly among those who considered themselves to have a more feminine gender presentation. Mark, an 18-year-old college student, remembered getting into trouble for how he acted as a child: 'When I was really little, I had this really loud laugh, and my grandmother would say, "Don't sound like that, you're gonna sound like a gay!" She would legitimately get mad at me.' Paolo noted that his father would reprimand him and his brothers if they were overly expressive with their emotions:

> If I cried, my dad would say, 'You don't want to be a girl, do you?' and refer to anything that had to do with emotion as being a *joto* and *maricón*. Even showing affection to me and my brother was something he considered gay. Like hugging, that to him was very gay.

Given the negative connotations of gay identity within the moral context of immigrant families, many respondents chose to distance themselves personally and emotionally from their relatives. Several deliberately avoided discussing their personal life. For example, if their parents ever inquired about their dating lives, many would immediately shut down the conversation by changing the subject or saying they 'were too busy with school'. In addition, the fear of feeling interrogated about their personal life led some to avoid family gatherings altogether. Danny, a 34-year-old publications distributor, said he lived a double life and kept his personal life very separate for fear that they would find out he was gay. 'Everything was about my social life and having a boyfriend.. I didn't value my family at that time', Danny said. One Christmas, Danny recalled: 'Being around my family, I just remember being very distant from them … I remember being in the restroom crying and thinking, "Why did I come? I should have just stayed with my friends"'. This emotional distance from family was evident with Dario, a 31-year-old social worker, who was very depressed in his teens due to having to hide his sexuality:

> I come from a Mexican, Catholic background where being gay was a sin. I was very depressed from age 12 to age 14, and I remember that being a very dark time in my life because I kept it to myself for a very long time. I was just very passive. I didn't express any emotions. So if my siblings or parents would pick at me or call me names, I would just not really react.

Dario's fear even overrode attempts from family members who reached out to him. Dario said that his twin brothers had tried to confront him about his depression, but for years, he didn't really indicate the real reasons for what was going on. Many respondents said they eventually became accustomed to maintaining very compartmentalised relationships in which they limited the degree to which their parents and

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siblings had access to their personal lives. Alvaro, a 26-year-old community director said, 'In high school, I had my family, my school friends, and my gay friends, and I always kept them separate, no matter what. I even made sure all my gay friends all lived across town just in case'. Ultimately, gay men would brace themselves for the possibility that they would always have to live a double life. Nick's noted that his mother had spent the last few months helping his sister prepare for her upcoming wedding, and he commented, 'I want to get married too. It scares me because I don't know if my mom would even attend my wedding.' Nick's remark exemplified how gay children of immigrants assumed that parents would not be part of life's important milestones and, thus, would prepare themselves mentally if such a disappointment were to occur.

Given their location in Los Angeles, some of the men sought alternative sources of social support through gay organisations within their local area or their school. However, there was an interesting generational gap. Older respondents (over 25 years old) noted that they avoided joining gay organisations for fear that they might be outted. Kevin, a 33-year-old public relations representative, recalled being harassed after his father found a flyer from a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) organisation in his college. '"Are you gay?" He kept asking me in such an aggressive tone', Kevin remembered, 'I just denied it like crazy'. Gay men of Kevin's age cohort also noted that gay organisations on campus were predominantly white and unwelcoming. In contrast, younger respondents seemed more likely to be part of gay-straight alliances in high school and LGBT organisations in college. They cited increasing public acceptance, normalisation, and visibility of gay people in America as the main reasons for feeling more comfortable than their older peers, who came of age during the time when gay men were most commonly associated with the AIDS epidemic. Regardless of their involvement in gay organisations, however, nearly all the men agreed that these spaces could not replace the emotional bonds they had with their families.

Setting the Stage for Coming Out: Complicating Gay Identities

While previous studies suggest that children of immigrants might opt to keep their sexual identity tacit (Decena 2008), every respondent said they were either openly gay or intending to come out to their parents and family in the near future. Rather than telling their parents outright, many said they 'eased them into it' by slowly complicating their perception of gay men. EJ, a 27-year-old personal banker, said he used the television sitcom *Will and Grace* to help his mother and siblings see gay people as 'more than just crossdressers':

> EJ: I had my mom watch *Will and Grace* and there was a point when it became a tradition for the whole family to watch it.
>
> Author: Why did you do that?
>
> EJ: Because obviously the characters are gay, but you give them two perspectives of gay. There's Will and then you have Jack.

For EJ, Will Truman and Jack McFarland, both openly gay men, represented the heterogeneity within the gay community. Will, the show's protagonist, carries himself in a gender normative fashion, is an accomplished attorney and is in constant pursuit of long-term relationship. In contrast, Will's best friend Jack is a struggling artist who is unapologetically flamboyant, unable to hold secure employment and is often bragging about his sexual conquests. Jack fit his mother's stereotype of 'being gay in the Philippines, where basically it means, you're a girl'. After months of watching the show as a family, EJ mustered up the courage to test the waters:

> They loved the show. And so I came to the point where I was comfortable, and I asked my mom, 'What if I was like Will?' She looked at me and said she didn't know what I was talking about. Then I asked, 'What if I were like Jack?' She said, 'Oh my God, I would slap you'.

EJ's inquiry revealed to him the different response his mother might have depending on which type of gay guy she saw him as. While respondents acknowledged that it was not their parents dream to have a gay child, EJ's remarks demonstrated the sentiments of most parents: that their sons would violate gender norms for men by acting feminine. EJ said he wanted his mother and family to know that being gay was more than 'just glitter and unicorns and fairies'.

Respondents also said they were strategic in which friends they would bring home to meet their family. Joshua, a 27-year-old aspiring business owner, said he would 'make sure they weren't too gay or too feminine and still appear like boys'. Even though he had friends that whose gender presentation ranged from very feminine to hyper-masculine, Joshua said he needed to 'test the waters to see if [his parents] could get along with [his] gay friends'. Respondents noted that friends who violated masculine gender norms would cause their parents to question their own sexuality and potentially be outted. In contrast, they could use their more masculine friends to further complicate their parents' stereotypes of gay men. EJ described most of his friends as having an 'urban swag' to them. Most of his gay male friends were Latino or Filipino, bald, wore baggy clothes and 'straight-acting'. When he came out to his mother, his friends became part of orienting his mother to the gay aspects of his personal life:

> EJ: I told my mom, "You know Jay, Javi, and Peter?" She was like, "Oh, did you tell them [that you are gay] too?" I then told her that they were all gay, and she was shocked.
>
> She was like, "Really?" All she knew of gay people were white gay guys, drugs, parties, and AIDS.
>
> Author: Where did she get that impression?
> EJ: Media, obviously.

For both Joshua and EJ, their friendship network helped them break their family's narrow view that gay identity was synonymous with whiteness, femininity and

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deviance. At the same time, the strategy of painting a more masculine image of gay identity did not necessarily uproot parents' underlying prejudices about gay people as a group—though in many cases, it provided the first window of opportunity to *start* breaking down such stereotypes.

The Aftermath of Coming Out A Collision of Moral Values

Several factors prompted Filipino and Latino men to come out to their parents and family. Nearly all said they had realised they were 'different' or 'not attracted to girls' by the time they hit adolescence, but said they willingly hid their sexuality due to feelings of shame, fear of rejection or belief that they were either bisexual or in a phase. By the time they decided to be openly gay, most have put in many years of work into dispelling their own internalised homophobia and have resignified their sexuality as a positive identity. This included reading gay literature, exposing themselves to older gay role models and meeting openly gay men who mentored them about the benefits of living their lives outside of the closet. In rare instances, some men had parents who were highly accepting of them when they came out. Darren, a 24-year-old law student, said, 'My parents were just waiting for me to tell them—for me to be comfortable enough on my own'. However, in most cases, the coming out process entailed a collision of moral values, as most parents had not put in serious time contemplating the concrete reality of having a son that was not heterosexual. As such, most parents' initial responses ranged from conditional acceptance to explicit rejection.

Coming out was a very emotional experience, and respondents recounted the details 'as if it were yesterday', even if this conversation occurred many years in the past. Some even became emotional during the interview, as the retelling of the story brought back memories of parental denial, disappointment and even rejection of their sexuality. Others characterised their experience as extremely awkward, as demonstrated by Noah's story:

> My parents asked me if I had ever had sex with a woman. When I said no, they said, 'Maybe you should try it'. I was so grossed out because they had never ever brought up sex as a conversation in my entire life, and here they were pushing me to have sex with a woman.

Michael, a 19-year-old college student, said, 'My dad told me that he honestly would prefer that I wasn't, but he's still love me no matter what. My mom was definitely not overjoyed, but she also wasn't condemning me'. While respondents said their parents reiterated their love for them, many also said that their parents discouraged them from telling people outside the family. One respondent noted, 'My parents didn't want other people to know because I think it would make them look bad or look like bad parents. They didn't want people gossiping about our family.' Another said that his mother explicitly ordered him to not tell his grandmother because 'it would ruin

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you in her eyes'. David, a 21-year-old working student, said that his brother typified this conditional acceptance:

> Right now, I live with my brother and his wife, and they said they don't have a problem with me being gay. But the fact is they said they didn't want their kids to be exposed to *that* right now because they want them to grow up "normal" and know what normal is. So they don't want to hear, see, or talk about anything that's gay.

While David perceived his family as accepting, his story demonstrated how immigrant families would set parameters on how public respondents could be beyond the immediate family—parameters that did not exist for heterosexual members of the family.

As such, many noted that they could not be themselves around family, even if they had disclosed their sexuality to their parents. To do so might risk a negative reaction from the larger family. Jennifer, a 24-year-old sales associate, recounted the story of her gay cousin:

> My cousin Ronnie, he's gay. And he's the first one to come out in the family. In high school, he came out and kind of disappeared for a while. His brother said he ran away, but turns out he was kicked out of his house by his dad. I was just sad he wasn't around and hurt that he felt he couldn't be open…. He's back now and going to college, but when he's home, he still has to stay quiet about it. But recently, he brought his partner to a family wedding. My uncle [Ronnie's dad] left, and it was such big drama. But when he came in with his boyfriend, my mom and my aunts were really nice to [his partner], really welcoming, and treated him like it was normal. The uncles talked *to* him, but they don't talk about *it* [his sexuality]. The second generation people didn't care. I guess we're like a team. But it still matters. Ronnie always says, "I just grew up differently from you guys."

Ronnie's story illustrated how being too public around the family can carry very public sanctions. Some internalised their parents' requests and framed the compartmentalisation of their gay identity as 'being respectful'. However, some of those not willing to hide their sexuality after coming out encountered pushback from their parents. Andrew, a 31-year-old teacher, said that whenever he brought up either his personal life or gay issues, his parents would immediately attempt to avoid the topic:

> My parents would tell me, 'I don't want to hear it', or say, 'Why do you have to bring it up all the time?' Here I am just trying to share a big part of who I am, and my parents constantly shut down my attempts or try to change the subject.

During the 2008 election, Andrew said his parents even voted yes on California Proposition 8, the law that would ban same-sex couples from getting married, despite his numerous attempts to rationalise why doing so would violate his own civil liberties.

Some respondents said their parents took more extreme measures when they came out of the closet. Because these young men grew up hiding their sexuality, many said

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they grew up using the Internet to cultivate many of their relationships with other gay men, an outlet that allowed them to explore gay identity discretely. However, some were unintentionally outted to their families by their photos and posts on Facebook, Instagram or other social networking sites. Manny, an 18-year-old college freshman, shared the negative repercussions of posting a photo of himself and his boyfriend during high school on Facebook:

> That shit went fucking viral. My dad got on Facebook and saw it, and my whole family just came storming into my room. My dad was like, 'We have to pull the sprout before it grows into a tree' (in reference to being gay). I told him that he couldn't change me. My mom wouldn't talk to me for like three months. It was like I had AIDS…. It got to the point where when we were eating, I would drink from my mom's cup, and she would throw away the cup. She thought I would give her AIDS or something. I laid on her bed, and she would change the sheets. It was emotionally devastating, like not welcome in my own home.

The rejection Manny felt from his family threw him into a deep depression for the next year. Having been at the top of his high school class and student body president, he stopped attending school and avoided staying at his parents' house, opting instead to stay with an older sibling in nearby Orange County. Angrily and near tears, Manny said he developed serious thoughts of ending his life. 'My parents just made it fucking hell for me. I thought, "If you keep doing this, I'm going to fucking kill myself". And I was serious too.'

A handful of men said their parents treated their coming out as a mental illness and tried sending them to therapy (though none were pushed into actual 'ex-gay' organisations or conversion therapists). This was particularly surprising because most said their families were sceptical of mental health professions, thus illustrating the degree of desperation some immigrant parents felt about having a gay son. Dario remembered his first day of therapy with vivid detail:

> The therapist asked my mom, 'Tell me why you're here today'. She basically told him, 'My son is gay, and I don't want him to be gay'. And I hated her. I didn't hate her, but I just really disliked what she said. And at that moment, I felt no love…. Afterward he conducted an MSE (mental status exam) and told my mom that I was quite normal. He said if this is how I feel, then they had to support that. I remember looking at my mom's face when he said that, and she was livid.

Dario's experience showed the emotional devastation that gay men felt when parents treated their sexual identity as a phase, or at worst, a disease needing to be cured. Despite the pain they felt, most men—even those whose parents reacted as extremely as Dario's—insisted wanting to work things out with their parents. As one young man put it, 'No matter how much resentment I have toward my dad and mom, they're still my blood, and they're still a part of me, even if it's good or bad'. For many, this desire to repair the relationship meant dancing delicately around the issue around family for the next few years. Dario himself

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noted, 'It would take about six or seven years for my mom to finally accept who I was'.

From Moral Collision to Moral Convergence: Relationship Repair between Immigrant Parents and Gay Children

Even with the heavy emotions involved with coming out, all respondents expressed a desire to maintain or cultivate a closer, stronger relationship with their parents. While coming out represented a clear moment of dissonance, over time, some gay men and their parents learned to find consensus. At times, this desire to repair the relationship was motivated by life-altering events. After years of missing Thanksgiving and Christmas, Joshua said things changed when his father had heart surgery. 'He had a pacemaker put in, and then that's when he became more open with me, getting more involved, asking me lots of questions—everything from my personal life to my work life'. Adam, a 22-year-old event planner, said his mother at one point tried to send him back to Mexico when she found out he was gay. For years, they fought intensely, but became closer when his brother died in an accident when Adam was 19. For both Joshua's and Adam's parents, staring death in the face seemed to diminish the importance of having a son who fit their heterosexual expectations.

Despite their desire for full acceptance, many gay men realised that this process would be incremental, and a major first step was to understand the coming out experience from the side of the immigrant parent. Dario did this by drawing parallels between his life as a gay man and his parents' experience as immigrants.

> I think the battle that I have as a gay man is like the same battle immigrants go through in the United States. It's equivalent in the way you have to come out, deal with identity, deal with society, deal with yourself, finding yourself, and leaving your parents in some way. Being gay, like coming to the U.S., is something white or foreign. It's like there's this white thing, and I can't relate to it.

Dario's experience illustrated how immigrant parents generally had not had to think about the issue of sexuality until their son's coming out. As such, learning of their son's sexuality was often followed by thoughts of stereotypical images of white gay men, partying, drugs, excessive drinking and sexually transmitted disease. Before his employment in an LGBT media watchdog organisation, Brandon, a 25-year-old media strategist, said that he and other gay men of colour he knew held same stereotypes about the mainstream gay community—mostly white, mostly privileged and mostly about the partying.

As such, respondents realised their immigrant parents experienced their own unique coming out process. Paolo spoke about how his mother responded when he came out during high school:

> She took it in a mature way. She said, 'Just give me time to educate myself on the issues'. Then she decided to join PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and

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> Gays). But then I tried talking to her about my boyfriend and she would be like, '*No lo llames tu novio!* [Don't call him your boyfriend!]. Don't say that, it's weird'. At first I was mad, but then I realised it takes time for everybody. If it took me time to accept that I was queer, it's going to take her time to accept that she has a child that's queer.

As Paolo's story showed, repairing one's relationship with their parents often entailed a 'two-steps forward, two-steps back' approach. Immigrant parents had to reconstruct their own conceptions about gay men beyond caricatures in ways that included their children.

Gay Filipino and Latino men felt that their educational and socio-economic success could have the two-fold purpose of breaking gay stereotypes, while staying in line with the dreams their immigrant parents had when first settling in the USA. Dario, whose mother at one point brought him to therapy in an attempt to make him straight, said his relationship shifted towards the end of college. Having grown up in a low-income Latino immigrant neighborhood where many young men end up in gangs or drop out of school, Dario felt he 'beat the odds' by finishing college and eventually earning admission to graduate school. He said:

> I think my mom saw that I was gonna graduate and she thought, "Whoa, my son broke the stereotype. And he's actually striving." I broke that image of the typical gay guy who gets STDs, and it changed her perception of me. It allowed her to be more open about my sexuality. After that, I actually started talking about the guys I was dating.

Like Dario, Filipino and Latino gay men put in tremendous efforts into being star students, economically self-sufficient and accomplished in their careers because they felt this would help repair the dissonance between themselves and their parents. As one respondent said, 'I think I tried to accomplish everything I did in school and my job because I wanted my parents to accept me finally.' While such actions indeed helped complicate parents' perception of gay people, they, nonetheless, demonstrated how gay men felt uniquely burdened to prove their worthiness, as compared to their heterosexual siblings.

At the same time, siblings provided a crucial emotional buffer during the transition period after coming out. Manny said his sister would often intervene when discussions with his parents became heated:

> My mom was crying when I first told her I had a boyfriend. My dad yelled at me about who was gonna pass along our family name. My sister yelled at them to shut up, "I'll just hyphenate my last name if that makes you happy!"

For respondents, having emotional support from siblings helped mitigate the pain of not having parents' immediate full acceptance. For their parents, seeing their straight children serve as gay allies prompted them to question their own mischaracterisations of gay people. Eileen, a 28-year-old medical student, had two younger siblings who were gay. Throughout college, she said that she was the 'shoulder to cry on' for her gay brother and lesbian sister, as well as her immigrant parents, who for years could

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not understand their children's sexuality. While mediating between her siblings and parents was stressful, she felt it was worth it when she saw her parents finally become open not only to their gay children, but also their children's partners.

The Exception to the Rule: Supportive Immigrant Parents

While none of the men remembered being openly gay as children, three noted that their parents were extremely supportive of their being gay. While previous studies suggest that class privileges may buffer the coming-out decision and process, the narratives suggested that the moral management processes for both middle- and working-class respondents were similar. Age of parents' migration mattered more than socio-economic status. Parents who migrated as young adults or teens were generally more supportive of their son's sexuality as compared to those who arrived as older adults. Dennis, a 27-year-old diversity outreach coordinator, came out in college and said his parents approached the topic very gently with him. 'They said they already knew and they were just waiting for me to tell them.' After coming out, Dennis said his father, a police officer who came to the USA from Nicaragua in his teenage years, took it upon himself to seek advice about addressing his son's sexuality with a gay colleague in his police precinct. From that point, Dennis found little need to engage in moral management. He was always forthright about his dating life with his parents, who preferred that he be open about his sexuality, unlike other immigrant families who preferred their son's sexuality remain a secret, or at best, 'tacit' knowledge (Decena 2008).

Similar to Dennis, Joaquin's parents migrated during their teens. Joaquin noted that since his parents 'basically grew up in the United States,' his parents were exposed to openly gay people on a more consistent basis, and so it did not faze them when he came out in high school. 'My parents aren't like other Latinos. They're supportive', Joaquin said, demonstrating the implicit association that he and others felt existed between immigrant families and homophobic attitudes. 'They were way more concerned about me smoking weed and dropping out of school than anything else. Compared to drugs, who cares about the gay thing?' In their younger years, Joaquin's parents had even frequented a few gay clubs and had gay friends, which permitted them opportunities to see the gay community in a more multidimensional light. Nonetheless, respondents whose parents were supportive still noted that they had to deal with homophobic attitudes in their schools and workplaces, but they remained comforted by the fact that they could be themselves and feel supported within their own households.

Conclusion

Scholars in both immigration and sexualities studies have largely overlooked the experiences of gay children of immigrants. As the narratives of Filipino and Latino gay men demonstrated, sexual identity can impede on the ability to obtain social

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support and moral acceptance from immigrant parents, which in turn can adversely affect their lives outside the family context, such as educational achievement and co-ethnic belonging. Immigrant parents arrive in the USA and often do not consider the concrete impact of having a gay son. Their conceptions of sexual identity are shaped by caricatured images of gay people in media and their social encounters, as well as their Catholic religion, which for many is deeply embedded in the ethnic experience both in the homeland and the USA.

As such, coming out of the closet—a desirable outcome among all respondents—represented a moment of moral collision for immigrant parents and gay sons. Knowledgeable from a young age of the dissonance that sexuality would create, Filipino and Latino gay men begin a process of *moral management* long before coming out. Moral management strategies differ depending on the stage of one's coming out. Prior to coming out, they hide their sexual identity at all costs. As they start to come out, their tactics shift. They first expose their parents to positive and complex examples of gay individuals to break negative stigmas associated with gay people. Upon coming out, they initiate a stage of active repair with their parents, which may include educating them with gay literature and movies, or including them as advisers for their same-sex relationships. The success of moral management comes when these gay men feel their parents treat them 'exactly like their straight kids'.

For nearly all respondents, the coming-out experience was extremely emotional for both sides—parents were immediately forced to mitigate their stereotyped and largely negative views of gay people while sons dealt with long periods of familial rejection or mere conditional acceptance. Ultimately over time, many parents were able to shed discriminatory attitudes towards gay people, in part due to their gay sons' conscious efforts to resignify gay identity in more positive ways. In addition, supportive siblings also assisted with this process of relationship repair between immigrant parents and their gay sons. A major problem with this process, however, is that the strategies employed by gay men reinforce negative social stigmas associated with being gender non-conforming or being transgender. Future studies should consider empirical comparisons between the familial incorporation of children of immigrants who are gay identified versus those who are transgender.

While this study focuses on a unique population—gay children of immigrants—it, nonetheless, revealed the underlying dynamics of intergenerational conflicts. Gay as an openly embraced identity is a concept that immigrants associate with American society, despite the undeniable presence of gay people in the home society. In this respect, having an openly gay son forces them to reconsider deep-seated stereotypes and prejudices that they comfortably held on to, assuming it played no part in their lives. As a result, gay children of immigrants face obstacles in trying to find consensus between the way gay identity functions in their parents' home society (at best a 'tacitly' accepted identity) versus in the USA (Decena 2008). Despite the challenges, gay children of immigrants are often resilient in their desires to be openly gay even within the family context, as evidenced by the way they creatively test and re-test different strategies of shifting their immigrant parents' ideologies towards gay people.

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Ultimately, the narratives in this study demonstrated how the second generation plays a powerful role in shaping the opinions, attitudes, relationships and actions of their immigrant parents.

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Notes

[1] The names of respondents and organisations have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

[2] As this article does not compare homophobia within native-born whites versus immigrants, I do not want to imply that homophobia is a problem unique to the latter. Rather, this article highlights how second-generation gay men experience prejudice even within communities that themselves are socially marginalised, and ultimately utilise shared experiences of marginality to build consensus between themselves and members of their family who have trouble accepting homosexuality.

[3] While most respondents were Mexican American, I opt to maintain the use of Latino in the article to be inclusive of those of Central or South American descent. While Latino is not an 'ethnicity' in the same way as Filipinos, scholars have argued that Latinos are a racialised panethnic group, and thus carries meaning within most people's racial schemas (Barrera 2008).

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