

I worked with professors and therapists, Adrian Rigor and Caryl Boncodin, from Ateneo de Manila in order to examine how Filipino Americans use humor within psychotherapy sessions, as well as the larger connection of humor within Filipino culture as a whole. Adrian Rigor has previously done research on this topic among Filipinos in the Philippines, so it was especially interesting to explore how the intersectionality of the American identity may have affected this dynamic. While we are still in the stage of data collection, I was able to contribute in meaningful ways by conducting literature reviews, drafting the beginning of our paper, and meeting with them on campus to learn more about the distinctions of psychotherapy in the Philippines compared to practices in the United States. I also gained insight into humor as a cultural process and how it operates across settings. Beyond that, I began reaching out to people in the United States to recruit participants, building new connections, and learning more about Filipino psychology. These conversations also expanded into discussions about the future of our work together, including projects involving overseas workers, interventions, and ideas to promote both Filipino psychology and Filipino American psychology more broadly.

Being immersed in the Philippines allowed me to understand humor first-hand, whether through experiences with my family there or simply observing the culture in general. Filipino culture is often joyful, playful, and communal, and humor serves as a powerful way of conveying truths. It was fascinating to see how this translated into the intimate setting of a therapy session. I began to understand more deeply why Filipinos are known for their jovial spirit, their culture of care, and the strong sense of resilience embedded within these communities. Humor is not only a coping mechanism but also a tool for connection, one that reflects broader values of solidarity and compassion.

I learned a great deal about myself through this experience. As someone who is half Filipino American, it can sometimes be difficult to know how much of my identity is still influenced by culture. Humor is one of the clearest markers I have noticed that ties me to my heritage. From my cousins to the Filipino Association at Cornell, I have observed that joking, teasing, and a lighthearted spirit are things we all share. This makes sense when I consider how many Filipinos go into caregiving fields such as nursing, as humor becomes an essential way to support others and ease stress in difficult environments.

At the same time, I also learned that language can create barriers. Not speaking Tagalog made it harder to fully connect, and this reminded me of what I read in Rigor's earlier work. In his paper, Filipino psychiatrists were less likely to use humor with patients who did not share the same cultural background, because the humor might not translate or resonate. I experienced this myself, realizing how much easier it is to connect when culture and language align.

Another key realization was about my own career trajectory. Even though I ultimately decided to pivot from becoming a therapist to pursuing a career as a psychiatric physician assistant, I discovered that I am still passionate about therapeutic spaces and interventions. This project showed me that humor can be a bridge, and I want to carry that into my future practice. In fact, I already find myself using humor in my current experiences, such as volunteering in the emergency room. In those moments, being able to put patients at ease, lighten the mood, or make someone smile feels like a small but meaningful contribution. It revealed to me that this innate connection between resilience and humor is something I want to embody in my work.

Looking ahead, I see myself as a leader who can continue to have cross-cultural influence. I hope to make change by embracing nuance, humor, and empathy, and by connecting with others in ways that inspire them. I want to encourage people in the United States to notice

how their culture shapes their interpersonal relationships, job choices, and behaviors, while also continually traveling and learning more about my own heritage. I am fascinated by the similarities and differences I notice when comparing Filipino culture with others, and humor always seems to emerge as a beautiful thread of resilience.

If I do end up as a future therapist, I know I will return to this research as a guide for understanding how humor functions in clinical spaces. Even if I remain on the PA path, this project has given me an important perspective on human connection that I can carry into any role. I look forward to seeing the results of our data collection, as they will further illuminate how humor functions and provide more insight into Filipino American psychology. This experience not only shaped my academic and professional outlook but also helped me better understand myself and the values that I want to bring into my career.