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## Peminist Performance in/as Filipina Feminist Praxis: Collaging Stand-Up Comedy and the Narrative Points in Between

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Peminist Performance in/as Filipina Feminist Praxis:  
Collaging Stand-Up Comedy and the Narrative Points in Between

by

Christina-Marie A. Magalona

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation starts from my earliest memories of the small wooden kitchen table at home, split with the time spent at Mars Drive. My appreciation starts here. To my entire family: thank you for all the ways that you nurtured me so that I can write this today. A special note of thanks goes to my brother for being my first and constant confidante and support. To all those that know me as *Ateh*, this is for you, that you might build upon the pieces I have collected along the way.

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## ABSTRACT

This project documents the interdependent effort between performers, authors, and texts, through re/theorizing the role of the personal narrator in autoperformance as both an individual, and a part of a political collective. Through a scripted and staged performance, studied as the data, I critically engage with representations of first-generation women of color via comediennes (Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo) and their personal narratives, and dialogically consider moments of dis/identification as a Filipina American.

Rooted in performance in/and communication studies, the overarching method employed is conspicuous aesthetic performance, via a scripted and staged narrative performance. I join performance and other methods of criticism and qualitative inquiry, namely: collage, performative listening, and personal narrative; into one interdependent process. Conspicuous aesthetic performance ignites and enables the intentional selection of texts, theory and narrative comedy performed in order to make claims on the politics of identity, cultural criticism, and representation.

Ultimately, the project contributes to the diversification of experience and topics in performance studies, communication studies and cultural studies, in the ways in which it responds to key intercultural urgencies in addressing the crisis of representation and theorizing identity. My questions and findings attend not only to “what is?” being Filipina American, but also considers “how is?” a Filipina American identity working within culture as a liminal identity influenced by colonization, immigration, and visual racial markers. The staged performance models the aesthetic of what I explicate as critical Kapwa performance pedagogy. *Kapwa*, a

precolonial Filipino value, situates the self among Others. By collaging comedic narratives in my performance, critical Kapwa performance pedagogy activates a solidarity of shared experience between Filipina Americans among other first-generation American women of color while maintaining the uniqueness of the personal narrative. These findings encourage us to consider the multiplicity of ways that ethnic identity is seen, read, embodied, and performed within different contexts.



## CHAPTER 1

### The Set-Up: Introduction

*Pinay 'ko'*<sup>1</sup>, first generation Filipina American, born and raised in Southern California, the state with the largest population of Filipinos outside of the Philippine Islands, now residing in Florida as I finish up my Ph.D. program. Thus, I begin this project rooted in personal narrative without yet explicitly staking an “I.” From this, we might immediately recognize that an alternative way of speaking about the “I” is possible (and exists) if we learn from, or speak with, subjects with underrepresented discourses. I begin here. Writing, performing, theorizing, and doing from what has gotten me to this page – the lifelong act of translating, embodying learning and knowledge, performing, and surviving – culminates into this project that seeks to highlight marginalized, specialized, and embodied knowledge through personal narrative performance.

In this dissertation, I theorize from a personal narrative performance collaged with the stand-up comedy narratives of women of color, Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo, to provide an experiential framework. As a woman of color in the academy, *performing with* comediennees of color as we stake a claim to our identities and theorize experience through personal narrative performance, made sense. We are “acting out,” “women as truth” and “women as untruth,” in the “phallogocentric space” of both academia and the comedy stage (Hart & Phelan, 1993, p. 7). I collage these stories because they highlight women of color striving and surviving in settings where we are outnumbered. Our stories and presence critically interrogate, reinvents, and

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: “I am Filipina.”

In resistance of immediately reifying the phallic (Langellier, 1999), imperialist (Conquergood, 1991), narrative “I,” I begin with specialized knowledge (Madison, 1993) exemplifying an alternative way to begin an account of the political self.

intervenes in the cultures and the spaces where we participate. While also recognizing the ways in which we are constrained and empowered by culture, ideologies, and expectations of the places we occupy.

Standing up to the phallogocentric space means frustrating (critical) norms (Goltz, 2011). Taken with a comedic frame, stand-up comedy becomes not only the genre of personal narrative that I am interested in as a, “productive tool for ethically guiding dialogic engagement with ‘one’s’ claimed experience,” but stand-up comedy also becomes the principal metaphor for the structure of my performance and dissertation (Goltz, 2011, p. 386). Aptly so when “rhetoric and performance, argument and enactment [are] ideally entwined” (Roof, 2018, p. 4). As such, I understand stand-up comedy for this project as a type of “personal experience story” where the comic as storyteller, and storyteller as theorist is, “as much about imbalance of knowledge,” knowing, explaining, and revealing for an audience (Bauman, 1986, p. 33; Roof, 2018, p. 9). Storytelling in stand-up comedy, and as a rhetorical device, is a structured way of arguing towards a punchline through storied “bits” or “jokes that must bring forward something that is concealed or hidden,” through unexpected “cuts” to an idea that was always there but never actualized until the end (Roof, 2018, p. 14). Given the comedic frame as, “the sudden unpacking of the complexities of a metaphor, a falling apart of a figural cohesion,” a comedic lens just might be the necessary approach to learning from fragments collaged (Roof, 2018, p. 15). Afterall, the “cracking up” of ideas and *at* ideas might also be revealing of arguments, evocative stories, and identities that were missed as the stories got told.

Structured like the set-up of a stand-up comedy routine, in this chapter, I introduce the larger narrative “bits” that set-up the significance of considering the implications of the entanglement between cultural stories, performing identity, and mediated

recognition/representation through personal experience stories. I also present the aims of my project and research questions, and I conclude with an overview of the chapters of the dissertation to follow.

### **Bit 1: Cultural Stories**

“I want to go outside,” I would whine while twisting on the sofa and scratching at the screen door of my grandmother’s house. “No. It’s too late and getting dark,” one of my aunts, uncles, or my grandmother told me on one of the numerous occasions they would babysit me while my parents were away at work, “the *Wakwak* is out there and she will take you.” I was bored and antsy. Most of my homework was done, and there were no more “kid shows” airing on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for the day. I did not argue, instead, I would collapse with restless energy and exasperation. Sprawled on the sofa, I would watch the sunset changing colors of the sky over my grandmother’s backyard on the other side of the sliding glass door. The backyard was mostly asphalt; one corner held a large cage of exotic birds; a pathway was paved around a pool surrounded by fruit trees bearing guavas, plums, and calamansi that would occasionally drop overripe fruits that were too high to harvest. I watched until the sky would become dark and I could no longer see what was outside and the darkness behind the glass door reflected the glow of the television screen inside. The *Wakwak* was definitely out there now in the darkness of the night.

Reignited again by boredom and restlessness, I would run upstairs to find a toy. This time it was a recorder that I brought back to the living room where family was watching *Wheel of Fortune*. I blew into the recorder creating more noise than music.

“Don’t whistle at night! *Hala, naay Wakwak!*”<sup>2</sup> I was warned.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: “Oh no! There is a *Wakwak!*”

“There is no *Wakwak*” I would insist.

“The *Wakwak* will think that sound is a little kid calling for her. She’s going to hear you and kidnap you. Look! There’s fingerprints on the window now.”

My eyes would widen as I noticed a set of fingerprints on the glass window where I had been looking out that afternoon. The fingerprints most likely came as a result of my clawing to go outside. Nonetheless, I stopped, sinking onto the floor with a sigh to watch *Wheel of Fortune* with everyone else.

*Ang Wakwak* of traditional Filipino folklore is a woman-witch that transforms into a vampiric-bird whose body separates from the trunk toward the head, while the rest of her body and legs remain on the ground. The well-known figure of *Wakwak* targets pregnant women for their prey, feeding on the fetus, and was named after the sound of her evil bird-like call that made a sound similar to, “waak! waak!” (Ogdoc-Gascon, 2015). However, my family’s version of the *Wakwak* was the umbrella name for mystical monsters in Filipino folklore used to scare me into obedience. Whether it was the story of the *Wakwak* as the weeping woman that emerged from the depths of bodies of water searching for her lost children, the *Wakwak* as the flying bird-witch whose talons would snatch misbehaving children at night, or the *Wakwak* as the lady of enchantment, the stories that my family told me as a child were meant to discipline me. Today, stories in many forms saturate my everyday experience. Like the story of the *Wakwak*, the stories continue to discipline me, my body, my actions, perceptions, my being, and becoming.

But the story I have shared is *not* just the story of the *Wakwak*. Instead, the story I shared is the narrative of how *I* experienced the story of the *Wakwak*, and the way that the story of the *Wakwak* would change me. Storytelling, as a verbal performance, is consequential to the way that identities are embodied and performed (Bauman, 1986). *Ang Wakwak* enabled and

constrained my behaviors, actions, and decisions as a child. As a potential victim of the *Wakwak*, the story situated me as a vulnerable target in society due to my age and size, situating me among “Others” who might be more or less vulnerable or powerful – the *Wakwak* would not prey on you unless you were a small child or a pregnant woman. Later, my storied experience of hearing the story of the *Wakwak* would reflect the unique, story-based disciplinary warnings of being the child of Filipino immigrants. I would hear one of my schoolmates who lived across the street from my grandmother playing in the street past dusk. It was clear that *his* family had not warned *him* about the *Wakwak*.

In doing the research for this dissertation, the stories and narratives that I am interested in are: (1) media narratives and stories through the form of stand-up comedy on Netflix that inform my identity, (2) the resulting stories of the influence of comedy on my personal experience, and (3) the ways these two forms of stories weave and blur between fiction and reality to create a new story and performance of identity. Under these criteria, my theorizations will emerge from the Netflix stand-up comedy specials by Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo collaged with narrative performance bits of my personal experience narrative. Given the reality of a mainstream U.S. American society imbued by a matrix of domination: a predominantly white-cis-able-bodied-heteropatriarchy, I imagine a collective story of survival to transpire, a story of resistance, a story of identity formation, and the possibility to break the boundaries of expectation (Collins, 1990). After all, “stories are counterfactual or fictional, not because they aspire to mirror reality and fail, nor because they offer escapes from reality, but because they aid and abet our need to believe that *we* may discern and determine the meaning of *our* journey through life: where we came from and where we are going. In making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable” (Jackson, 2013, p. 36). Using these stories, “the ‘I’ seeks to give an account of

itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist” (Butler, 2005, p. 8).

## **Bit 2: Performing Identity**

There's a lot of Filipinos in here, right now, that are nurses [...] But you know there are some nurses out there that didn't follow their dreams. There are some nurses working at the hospital that wish they were a Jabbawoogie. (Koy, 2017)

It is Christmas-time and we are gathered at my grandmother's house this year.

“*Hala! Ka dako ni mo!*”<sup>3</sup> I hear a family member saying to my younger brother in the living room, “I hope you can wear the present I got you! What size are you, *na*? “H”! *Por Husky!*” I feel for my poor brother and the comments about his growth spurt, and I hear the jovial laughter at the reference to the stand-up comedy of Filipino American comedian, Rex Navarette. Some years later, I would feel again for my younger cousin, who would be the target of references to lines of another Filipino American comedian, Jo Koy's stand-up comedy. “*Josep,*” they would say with a caricatured Filipino accent, quoting Jo Koy, “who told you, you were *punny?*” My family was well-versed in Filipino American stand-up comedy. Mainstream Filipino American representation was rare, moreover, Filipino American representation that they could *relate* to seemed to be even more uncommon. But often, the lines from the stand-up routines of Rex and Jo seemed to flow seamlessly into familial conversation and playful banter.

The doorbell rings and somewhere in the house someone yells to open the door.

“Hi Nelms!” my aunties and so-called-aunties would exclaim in shrill voices upon my mom opening the door.

“Hi *tita!*”<sup>4</sup> I would say popping up behind my mom and hugging them as they came in.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation: “Wow! You're grown!”

<sup>4</sup> Translation: “Auntie”

“Oh my goodness, Nelms! *Ang dalaga mo?*<sup>5</sup>” they would say turning to me to mark my cheeks with their lipstick. “You’re so grown now! How old are you? Are you in college? What are you taking?”

“Yeah, I’m 20 now, auntie. I’m at Cal State Long Beach...” I would say smiling apprehensively. I was routinely taken aback by all the sudden questions.

“She’s pre-pharmacy,” my dad would say coming to the door to greet them, saving me an answer, and giving me the tiniest hint of a nod. Dad was proud of that particular answer.

“Wow! Don’t you have to be a *Doctor of Pharmacy*? Do you like it? That’s so much school. What about nursing?”

“Yeah, auntie...” I trailed off, “I considered nursing. I’m interning at St. Mary’s Medical Center, but I don’t think I want to be a nurse though.”

“Well, that’s fine. Nursing is hard. You will have to wipe a lot of butts... ‘*Inday!*’” and with that my aunt was off to greet her sister-in-law.

I am 29 now as I write this from a place of abandon to become the kind of doctor that is expected of my gendered racialized self. I write this proposal for a dissertation to complete my PhD in a *liberal art*, not nursing, nor to be a Doctor of Medicine, nor pharmacy. Still, the narrative of my vocational-becoming sticks to me as I reminisce the bits of my personal statements to get here: “in my fourth year out of five years spent in undergraduate courses, I switched my major from biochemistry to communication studies, earned my master’s degree in the same field, and am dedicated to being piled higher and deeper in cultural studies and communication.” Lest I receive a head tilt and a raised brow, I feel obligated to explain why I

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<sup>5</sup> Translation: “Is this your bachelorette-aged daughter?”

create/d and live a narrative that challenges the cultural narrative of what a first-generation Filipina American is *expected* to pursue.

“There's a lot of Filipinos in here, right now, that are nurses” Jo Koy says on stage during a Netflix stand-up comedy performance, “but you know there are some nurses out there that didn't follow their dreams. There are some nurses working at the hospital that wish they were a Jabbawoogie” (Koy, 2017). The crowd explodes with laughter on screen, and as I watch, I cannot contain my own chuckle. Humor theorists attribute the way that jokes can stick because of the referential pattern of comedy to culture, and the way that “the existence of cultural frames is acknowledged” in comedy bits (Yus, 2016, p. 120). Hearing the laughter from the screen and hearing my own laughter is also important. From a biological perspective, laughter has been noted as a “social signal” that communicates “agreement or disagreement” (Provine, 1996). Thus, as an audience, and cultural participants, we recognize and adhere to expectations (or stereotypes) in Jo Koy’s stand-up comedy bit that vocational options are limited to (1) Filipinxs becoming nurses, (2) Filipinxs will become nurses despite dreaming of pursuing other paths, (3) the alternative path, and “authentic” dream is still predictable for Filipinxs: to be a hip-hop dancer.

The question of, “what do you do?” is inextricable from the question of “who I am” based on my racialized-gender-sexuality-embodied identity as a first-generation, Asian American, Filipina American, cis-hetero-woman. For this project, I am interested specifically in the intersectional identity and performance of identity related to race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, gender, and body (size and ability). It is from here that I begin to interrogate broader questions of identity formation and the performance of identity. Surely, my lived experiences in the past, present, and future are specific and individualized truths about what I; a brown, first-



generation, Asian American, Filipina, woman might live. However, I find that my story is both enabled and constrained by pervasive cultural narratives, specifically, media narratives like the aforementioned Netflix stand-up comedy of Koy, and as I write, the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo. In this section, I use a cultural studies perspective to contend that the social reality of our present intersectional identities is influenced by narrative representation. In other words, using myself as an example, media has a profound function in forming my sense of self and identity as a daughter of Filipino immigrants, an American citizen, and a brown cis-hetero-able-bodied Asian American woman, and the way others expect me to perform this intersectional identity, and how media might impress upon my intercultural social interactions among others.

Recognizing that there are disciplinary implications to my listening-viewing experience to stand-up comedy, I turn to O'Donnell's (2005) definition of *culture* to mean "the actual practices and customs, languages, beliefs, forms of representation, and system of formal and informal rules that tell people how to behave most of the time," with Hall's (1992) connections that he makes between culture and media (p. 523). Like Hall (1992), the ethic of cultural studies has, "helped me to understand [that media plays] a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things they reflect" (p. 14). Stated in a way that challenges the visual-centrism of media cultural studies, I extend the definition of Hall's (1992) assertion that media does more than *reflect*, to include the sounded ways that stories re/sound to create cultural systems that, "tell people how to behave most of the time" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 523). When I watch the Netflix specials of Wong and Alonzo, I do not just see bodied representations of brown and/or Asian performances that reflect back; I hear tidbits of my own storied experiences. Therefore, moreso than recognizing a reflective imagery in representation through visual culture, I also experience what I might contend as *echoes* of shared experience, or *resonances* between narratives.

When I listen to the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo, some comedic bits resonate, their storied jokes make me, “react emotionally or positively,” a response that is “sympathetic or corresponding,” because in their stories, I hear mine too (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Stemming from the Latin word, *resonare*, “resonance” is a term in the natural sciences that can refer to oscillating influences in (electromagnetic) particles, energy transfers, gravitational influence, and the delocalization of atoms (Erlmann, 2015, p. 175). I recall the lesson in foundational chemistry courses during my undergraduate journey on resonance structures. Simply stated, resonance structures are the different ways that an ionic structure can be configured. Thus, it is a rich metaphor for understanding both similarity *and* difference that occurs simultaneously, not in opposition, but together. Similar ion, different configurations. Similar experience, different individuals. The resonances in stories is perhaps an act of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1993). As an example, I think of Wong’s (2018) bit as she stands before her audience, mic to mouth, pregnant stomach protruding, as she says:

A lot of people also often ask me, “Ali, what on Earth do your parents think about your stand-up comedy?” Now that’s a very racially-charged question, right? Like, what they’re really asking is, “what do your oppressive Asian parents who beat you with the SAT book until your fingers bled from playing the cello think about your butthole-licking jokes?”

The line resonates with my own story with a similar but different performance of personal narrative: what my parents think of how much detail I talk about my lived experiences, the recognition of racialized gender stereotypes, and the way that abject topics and taboo boundaries are pushed. Wong’s representation of self in popular media, stemming from personal experience, has a political effect in re/shaping a cultural understanding of her/my/our racialized gender

identity. To this end, Wong's story is her story, it is also an entry to my story, and an understanding that these cultural stories and narratives shape *us*. This example of Wong's and my own performative identities as Asian American women, and our experiences with performing personal narrative (through academic and comedic mediums) resonate. It is a vocal performance and embodied performance that simultaneously recognizes the entrapment of racial expectations that disciplines, but also reconfigures and resists what Asian American women can be.

It is from here that I question the centrality of my story as mine alone and the political and cultural implications that other stories have had on my own identity formation. While, "I might begin with a narrative account of my life [this] narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone" (Butler, 2005, p. 37). The visual representations of bodies matter, but so do the voices, and experiences, and stories in popular media. As Hall (1992) writes, "it is not that there is a world outside, 'out there,' which exists free of discourses of representation. What is 'out there' is, in part, constituted by how it is represented," both visually and aurally (p. 14).

### **Bit 3: Mediated Recognition/Representation**

I'm talking about that Whole Foods mango. That \$10-a-box Whole Foods mango that was sliced by white people. That's the kind of income bracket I'm striving for. That's when you know you've made it, when you're eating mango that was sliced by a dude named Noah. I want Noah mango...Rebecca kiwi, Danielle pineapple. (Wong, 2016)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines resonances to be "to cause (a sound) to be prolonged, echoed, or modified by resonances." Sound studies differentiate between the concepts of resonance and echo. Smith (2015) writes that an "echo" is historical and "to varying degrees, it is a faded facsimile of an original sound, a reflection of time passed" (p. 55).

A sale at Whole Foods. Six bucks for a pint of strawberries. Because they're organic. Six bucks. I was like, 'Ho-ho-ho-ho! That's a lot of money. I'm sorry. For that much, you'd better show me a photo of white people picking the fruit. What the fuck is that?' Forget Jose and Maria, man. I want Becky and Brian out in the field picking that. (Alonzo, 2017)

In this, I hear a story resonate, but a joke echo. The premise that is echoed: non-white people do the *cheap* labor of growing, picking, and preparing plant-foods. As I hear Alonzo's stand-up comedy a year after Wong's bit in *Baby Cobra*, I still resound in a chuckle that signals my agreement of this cultural conclusion.

I am on a health kick and I was convinced, or fooled, that "superfoods" would give me superpowers, or at least undo some academic-semester damage done to my body through my diet of frozen chicken nuggets, frozen fries, and too much coffee. I am home for summer break making a smoothie at my parents' home. The blender whirs loudly.

"Good morning, *Tin*," my mom walks into the kitchen in her pajamas and flip flops. I know she is passing through the kitchen to begin her morning routine: inspecting her flowers in the backyard and watering the lawn. "What're you making?" she asks as she reaches to a small packet of powdered superfood stuff on the counter. It is next to a small ceramic bowl that I had made for her, and where she had kept stems of what she says is a "miracle herb."

"Smoothie, want some?"

"Did you buy this?" she asks looking at the packet. "Wait, moringa? This is *malunggay*! Why did you buy this? We have some in the backyard."

I sighed, because I did buy the small, overpriced packet of moringa from a health-food store to treat myself to something "healthy" during my time off from school, and of course my mother managed to grow her own crop of it. My mother has a green thumb, and has a thing for

planting, growing, and using herbs, vegetables, and flowers that remind her of “being home in the Philippines.”

“Look!” she beckoned me to come with her to the yard, and we step across the dewy grass. “See, *malunggay*.” My mom points to delicate stems of a plant with many, almost-round green leaves. “And look! Oh my gosh, *Tin!*” my mom exclaims redirecting my attention, “we have to harvest this, it’s growing so much. You know what this is? *Alugbati*. Let’s cut this, we can cook it...”

The idea echoes. Mom, a Filipina immigrant who came to the United States when she was 26 years old grows moringa, and hers is cheaper than purchasing the powdered variety from the Whole Foods-like health stores situated in and around the affluent beach cities of Orange County, California. I share the story here, and on stage, in a way that echoes Wong and Alonzo because there is a historicity to their telling despite being contemporary performances. There is a temporality to be taken into consideration with comedy. Simply stated by Roof (2018), comedy, the performance of comedy, and the theorizing of comedy comes when, “it’s too late, too after the fact” (p. 1). Whether the comedian uses strategic and timely delays in delivery, or how we understand comedy as retrospective commentary, and as cultural allusion; timing, is particular of comic events. Notions of reflexivity within comedy through self-consciousness and performative self-reference are also temporally situated as occurring *after*. The characteristic comedic dynamics of multiplying and expanding implications of comedy is also explained as “never singular, but always an iteration that keeps on iterating, reverberating, resonating, jittering through discourses, events, associations long after its telling performance is past” (Roof, 2018, p. 32). This not only describes the “processual” and “dynamic” characteristics of performances, but also alludes to the ways that echoes from the performance can occur (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007).

Smith (2015) recognizes, “that cultures establish their identities aurally as well as visually,” a notion that invites anthropological and historical ways of recreating, understanding, and recording sounded experiences through the study of echoes as historical (p. 55). Historians that study echoes are interested in “re-creating sounds” and finding ways for “print [capabilities] of recording sound” (Smith, 2015, p. 56). Thus, echoes are treated as objects of study – observed, recorded, and explained by historians and physicists who absorb (and arguably, consume) the sounds, but do not have the capability to repeat the sound back. What happens when sound reflects off an imperfect surface? What happens when the surfaces that echoes reflect-off warps the sound? And how can those surfaces – the context, the material, and the actors that allow echoes to resound – be taken into consideration in the study of what has happened?

The idea echoes. Non-white people do the *cheap* labor of growing, picking, and preparing plant-foods. The bit in the performance where I perform Wong, then Alonzo, then me echoes because I am part of the context, the culture, and the performance where stories echo. I am a part of the blur between subject-object that does not just absorb the sound and idea for historical, anthropological, or scientific study; rather, I am an agent in making and allowing the story to echo. However, the echo is not a facsimile. I am also an imperfect surface for sound to reflect. I am, after all, an imperfect, failed reflection of Wong and Alonzo. The way that I echo their stories warps the sound, the facets of my surface—my body and the way it looks, is, and moves—affects the echoes. I am not them; they are not me. By considering comediennes’ representations as mediated objects, Hall’s (1997) constructionist approach would suggest that “there is no relation of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence between signifying practices and the real world,” rather, “we *construct* meaning, using representational systems” (Brooker, 2002, p. 223; Hall, 1997, p. 25). This is not to negate the very real consequences of

media representation on identity formation. Yet understanding that, “representation matters,” I desire to see my reflection on screen, and to hear my own echoes as confirmation that I have not been “symbolically annihilated” or forgotten in the cultural landscape (Tuchman, 1978). This desire is connected to Hegel’s connection of *desire* with *recognition*, whereby “the desire to be, the desire to persist in one’s own being [...] is fulfilled only through the desire *to be recognized*” (Butler, 2005, p. 43). Therefore, I argue that while I am a failed reflection and echo of Wong and Alonzo; the aforementioned comediennes’ mediated performances also fail to be a reflection of my own embodied identity, stories, and experiences, and I continue in a quest for recognition.

### **An Aside<sup>6</sup>: Research Aims and Questions**

My earliest memory of recognizing my absence in mainstream media and popular culture came to me while on the playground. I was in first grade, sitting on the bars during recess with two of my best friends: Hanna and Blair<sup>7</sup>. While I do not recall the context of our game or imagined situation, I remember Blair’s sudden suggestion to select a popular mainstream artist to “play pretend.”

“Okay,” Blair announced, “pick a singer that you can be.”

With no hesitation, Hanna staked her artist, “I want to be Shania Twain!” I could see immediately how Hanna identified with Shania. I knew Shania Twain was a country singer, she probably had a horse, and Hanna *loved* horses. “She has hazel eyes like me, and brown hair,” Hanna added to justify her choice. Blair approved. I understood.

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<sup>6</sup> An “aside” is part of the structure of stand-up comedy as a comic event. They are “complex insertions that simultaneously appear to break one layer of performance by introducing a different address, while they make visible the theatrical apparatus itself as an apparatus” (Roof, 2018, p. 11). The dots are still comedic bits, “although they seem to come from some metaphorical ‘outside,’ they actually emerge from an ‘inside’ understood as spontaneous and irrepressible” (Roof, 2018, p. 11). Given the explanation, it seems that now the joke is ruined. Take the rest of the chapter seriously.

<sup>7</sup> Note: all names used throughout narratives are pseudonyms.

“What about you?” I asked Blair in an effort to buy myself time as I thought hard about my selection.

“Um, I’ll be Britney Spears,” she responded. I nodded in understanding. By applying Hanna’s rationale for her selection, it made sense. Blair was blonde and one of the popular kids at school – Britney Spears was also blonde and popular in American culture.

“Ok your turn,” one of them chimed. I remember thinking how much easier it was when we pretended to be the Powerpuff Girls. There were three cartoon girls, three of us, and each of us had the right corresponding hair color to pretend to be Buttercup, Blossom, and Bubbles. I was 6-years-old when I was first asked to identify with a well-known artist and my mind was drawing a blank.

“I’ll be Brandy?” I tried, referring to the popular R&B artist. “Who?” They asked.

It is now 2021 and I have a better understanding of a vocabulary and of theories to make sense of my perceived racialized gender identity. It is now 2021 and I also have an expanded understanding of what it means to be an “artist.” Aside from Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo, I think of all of the other women of color creating and making art, theory, stories, performances, poetry, media, and more – re/shaping their/our worlds by transgressing disciplines, boundaries, and expectations. They are “going Gaga,” embodying their artistic, creative, and performative monstrosities through “creative anarchy” through mediums other than just popular song and dance (Halberstam, 2012, p. 141). By this, I mean artists who are, “unpredictable in a world of highly structured systems of meaning,” an aesthetic and ethic that “does not sacrifice the whole for the part, the group for the individual, the multitude for the singular” (Halberstam, 2012, p. 141). The Gaga feminism *referenced* here already existed, though not by the same name, in different forms by different people. The *gaga* feminism *I refer* to here, is related to the Gaga



feminism referenced, but is also the translational wordplay of my understanding of *gaga* informed by my particular Filipino dialect. For me<sup>8</sup>, *gaga* or *gago* meant foolish transgression. Filipinx were already embracing *gaga* or *gago* acts of playful dottiness, silliness, and experimentation. It is a kind of monstrosity reclaimed since, “women of color already embody monstrosity,” that they/we make do with our intersectional identity ascribed (Calafell, 2015, p. 12).

It is now 2021, and I am hearing, seeing, and experiencing the “shifting, changing, morphing, extemporizing” art of women of color and Asian American women like myself that marks “the coming insurrection” of “surrealism, avant-garde, pop, [and] foolishness” (Halberstam, 2012, p. 29). When asked, “who is your favorite artist?” I have an answer of someone who creates immersive art through tactile mediums and that I can relate to on the basis of my racialized identity as an Asian woman. Today, if asked if there is an artist that I would want to “pretend to be,” I have a list of names of artists that look and relate to me.

I stand immersed in Yayoi Kusama’s *LOVE IS CALLING* exhibit at the Tampa Museum of Art – the exhibit wholly exemplifying *Gaga* feminism – a feminism associated with what I want to reclaim as a form of monstrous femininity. I stand in my third infinity room experience by Kusama. The room is completely mirrored with tentacle-like sculptures hanging from the mirrored ceilings and positioned on the floor. I imagine the tentacles being of some large mythical creature that was reinterpreted into art. I experience the monstrosity of the tentacles as I do the monstrosity of the *Wakwak*, and I write it here to narrate a pedagogical moment in learning from the ascribed monstrosity of some women. The monstrous tentacles glow with changing colors and feature Kusama’s signature polka dots. The motif repeats on and on, into an

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<sup>8</sup> A multilingual speaker of English and *Binisaya*, a dialect from the Philippines.

infinity of mirrored images. The dots beguile me. I experience the black dots as a quirky metaphor for the creative and intellectual goals for my project. Kusama's polka dots can be understood as; (1) *holes*, absences and failures in representation, media, and literature of which I have the necessary (comedic) bits and storied experiences to fill; (2) *dots*, that are related to being "dotty" and engaging with "chaos as praxis" that attends to pauses and moments happening now (Kilgard, 2011); (3) *circles*, an encompassing shape of in-/ex-clusion that shapes the scholarly conversations I enter into, and embraces opportunity to engage in the scholarship and intellectual and aesthetic projects of other women of color; and (4) *spots*; the creating of a spot in academia for my story, my body, and my experiences (and those like mine) as valuable, important, and worthy.

First, the black polka dots as dark round shapes among the glowing hues remind me of holes – holes as gaps, and holes as failures. Here, the holes are missing points, missing pieces, absent stories, absent arguments, silenced experiences, and missing theorizations of intersectional identities. The holes are also failures – failures of representation, failures of recognition, failures to be seen, and failures to be heard. To this end, I begin to find the (comedic) bits that I might use to fill some of the infinite holes in academic literature through the doing of this project: in researching and arguing the ways that sounds and stories constitute identity, to reveal everyday stories and experiences that have not yet been recognized, to narratize a new way of understanding my intersectional identity as a first-generation Filipina American that has been rendered absent. Regarding the ways that stories, cultural narratives, and scripts related to identity discipline bodies, failures also reward with an escape of "the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" thus "[preserving] some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries" between binaries and

provides the opportunity “to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 3). The filling of gaps in literature, and the puncturing of holes in positivism adds to the endless and infinite span of our social and cultural creation – “small acts of repair” coupled with small acts of agitation in a performance of survival (Bottoms & Goulis, 2007). In making the holes, we do more than “consume culture, we must produce it. It is not enough to enjoy art, we must ourselves become artists. It is not enough to produce ideas, it is necessary to translate them into concrete and continuous social action” (Fritz, 2014, p. 169).

Second, Kusama’s polka dots are associated with her own “dottiness,” a playfulness and foolishness alike that characterizes the similar but particular “unruliness” of Wong and Alonzo as comediennes of color. The unruly woman in gender and comedy studies has been theorized as “woman as rule-breaker, joke-maker, and public, bodily spectacle,” that “[*return*] the male gaze, exposing and making a spectacle of the gazer, claiming the pleasure and power of making spectacles of ourselves, and beginning to negate our own invisibility in the public sphere” (Rowe, 1995, p. 12). Like Kusama’s dots, the unruly woman is a kind of chaos that is, “unpredictable but patterned” (Kilgard, 2011, p. 223). Moreover, dots like those above an “i” (perhaps, a lowercase narrative “i,” that does not take itself as seriously as the narrative “I”) are made as a quick, momentary point. Points on a line indicate moments or pauses between where a line comes from, and where it continues to. Points are attuned to the present moment and demands mindful attention to what is happening now. Mindful attention to my presence brings my awareness to my body and its present performance. Thus, I need performance theory, methods, and scholarship. But I also take into consideration the way that media also stops and makes points. Considering media in Asian American studies, Davé (2015) writes how, “the term ‘media’ first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, but the word takes its roots from the Greek

language, where it is related to aspects of performance and literally means ‘voiced stop’ (*OED*)” (p. 149). Thus, my project encompasses the staged, aesthetic performances of Netflix mediated stand-up comedy as a “stop,” and considers the current being of my body’s everyday performances.

Third, a closer perspective to the polka dots reveals how the marks are circles. Circles represent an encompassing shape of in-/ex-clusion that shapes the scholarly and non-scholarly conversations I enter into – with whom I speak and embraces opportunities to engage in the scholarship and intellectual projects of other women of color. Conversations and dialogue, via “being with” in dialogic performative, whereby ‘body-to-body presence with Others makes the present realizably present’ (Madison, 2006, p. 323). As I stand before the audience and stage my personal narrative, I recall that stand-up comedy is to make “politicized auto/ethnography” funny (Goltz, 2017). Goltz (2017) summarizes that “politicized auto/ethnography ‘does not act alone’ (Holman Jones 763), for any critical deployment of ‘I’ is a dialogic process. My personal account is never accurate, True, complete or my own (Butler; Langellier “Voiceless”)” (p. 387). Therefore, I use *performing with* as an embodied act of solidarity and a way to hold a conversation with other scholars and comedienne of color through a collaged piece that mimics conversations “as assemblages of strategic and tactical micropractices [that] are dialogical as well as dialectical – intimately political” (Hawes, 1998, p. 274). Solidarity in/through conversation emerges in two ways. First, using performance and performing with as a method, I run the same corporeal risks as the comedienne/narratives I perform with, just as I had first encountered them—on a stage, before a live audience. The performative turn that I take in this project resists becoming a bodiless voice (e.g. unreflexive engagement with the creator’s non/privileged identities/experiences) or a voiceless body (e.g. via nonconsensual

surveillance/voyeurism, disciplining marginalized bodies, silencing, etc.), instead moving to “identity’s body,” my voice with body on stage (Conquergood, 1991; Langellier, 1999).

Second, *performing with* implores empathy through the qualitative process of sharing feelings, or feeling with (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007). Feelings, theorized as “bodily energies” and “points of entry” transgress bodily borders conditioned by “the forces of history, culture, and social hierarchies,” and are crucial in “critically apprehending [my] Filipino experience” (Ahmed, 2013; Manalansan, 2016, p. 3). Positive feelings undergird my perceptions as a viewer to these particular Netflix specials, and cohere to the method of selecting media sites for this project (Swink, 2017, p. 25). In my act of listening with, I hear the selected comedienness’ feelings as a part of the difficult and liberating process of performing as the “doing or making politics, the struggle for survival, claims of citizenship and of imagining and longing for a world that is not here yet” (Manalansan, 2016, p. 4).

Finally, Kusama’s polka dots are spots. Kusama made these polka dots through creation, imagination, and making. Spots refer to the creating of a spot in academia for my story, my body, and my experiences (and those like mine) as valuable, important, and worthy. As Hamera (2002) writes, “we don’t just perform or study or teach in bodies. We do so *in* bodies” (p. 121). Making a spot means embodied intellectual and spatial recognition – being recognized and seen in a space, and experiencing the presence in a space as well. In academic terms, this idea might also extend to acknowledging the researcher as “an integral part of the communicative and cultural context of that life” (Hamera, 2006, p. 19). As such, my dissertation creates spots in scholarship through the process of creation and performance through (1) a staged performance to be used as a method of inquiry, and critical in(ter)vention, (2) performative writing as a method of deciphering knowledge, meanings and experiences “filtered and colored through sensations of

the body—that is, through body knowledge and an embodied voice” (Madison, 2013, n.p.), and (3) theorizing/generating a form of performance where personal narrative is recognized as an unquestionably political performance of identity. As such, I pose the following overarching research question:

What is the story, space, and theory that I create for myself (and others) by recovering/reclaiming lived knowledge through storying a past, embodying my present, and performing possibilities for transformation, resistance, and transgression of cultural identity expectations?

### **Chapter Overviews**

I have organized the dissertation as follows: In chapter two, I provide a literature review that accounts the conditions of arrival to this dissertation project and the comediennes and scholarship that I speak with in my doing. In this chapter, I also describe conspicuous aesthetic performance as a methodology that activates other performance methods of inquiry: collage, performative listening, and performative writing. In chapter 3, I document the bits of my performance that depict the characteristics of a Filipina American experience. These narrative bits bridge larger pieces of narrative from Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo’s stand-up comedy specials and are unique to my racialized gender identity. Chapter 3 claims my Filipina American identity from narrative and reclaims the power of the particular *Wakwak* monstrosity symbolic of my fractured gendered ethnic identity. In chapter 4, I analyze the resonant jokes in the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo, not only with one another, but as it informs my Filipina American identity. Thus, I explicate how my gendered ethnic identity fits between and among other women of color’s experiences showing the, “interdependent and collaborative effort evidenced between [multiple] autobiographical performances,” that emerges as a form of cultural critique

(Alexander, 2000, p. 97). Finally, I conclude with chapter five where I synthesize the research for this project, take a self-reflexive turn as a researcher, and discuss the implications and directions of future research.

## CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I present the conditions of my arrival to the stand-up comedy of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo and establish the premise for performing *with* them and their accounts of self in my performance. To do this, I begin with a literature review of women in comedy, and Asian Americans in media and comedy. In tracing this lineage, I propose that the sociopolitical kairos for this project is *now*, or perhaps in the retelling, it is already too late (Roof, 2018, p. 2). I argue for the deliberate selection of comediennes that I engage with in performance as my data. Finally, I overview conspicuous aesthetic performance as the primary method that activates collage, performative listening, and narrative performance as methods of qualitative inquiry in my project.

### **That's What S/he Said: Review of Literature**

Who do you think you are? I am often asked this question. I ask myself this question whenever I sit down to try to create something out of nothing (Cho, 2008, p. 3).

That's what Margaret Cho said opening her book, *I Have Chosen to Stay and Fight*. "There *is* something though," I want to remind Asian American comedienne Margaret Cho while reading. The things she writes and performs in her stand-up is built of(f) something: sometimes a response to dominant discourse, sometimes it is rooted from personal experience, or sometimes it is to share snippets of an imagined future. Women of color, the survivors, we are making do. A decade later, I hear Wong's (2018) stand-up comedy sharing how she made do, telling her audience, "I literally spat on my toilet paper two days ago, to try to make a MacGyver baby wipe, to moisten it." Together, I hear a conversation emerging among performers, writers, and



creators that is coherent and topical on survival and making do of a cultural situation where women of color are at the margins. It is a conversation developing and being done that is, “overlooked/overheard and not attended to, not only because they are so densely pervasive, but also because they are assumed to be inconsequential, the small change of everyday life” (Hawes, 1998, p. 274).

My performance and dissertation are largely conversational – in the way that I enter scholarly conversations and circles via citation, or in the ways that I speak with other comediennes of color and share my/our stories on the stage and page. Citing the voices of comediennes and scholars, I acknowledge that, “citation is always already an operation of power. To pretend otherwise is to proclaim a false innocence” (Hart & Phelan, 1993, p. 23). Therefore, citations as conversations, or “as assemblages of strategic and tactical micropractices, are dialogical as well as dialectical—intimately political” (1998, 2006, p. 24). The politics of conversation echoes the politics of identity formation latent throughout the overall project. Politics referring to, “of, belonging to, or concerned with the form, organization, and administration of a state, and with the regulation of its relations with other states;” thereby referring to group formations, strategic inclusions and exclusions, and in recognizing difference and similarity (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Thus, to consider conversation as a metaphor for the scholarly additions, extensions, questions, and responses that emerge from my project, I consider how actors in conversation are “simultaneously, subject *and* object,” and “divisions and oscillations are coded” and “performed by means of exchanges—taking and giving of turns,” that again, refers to the liminal spaces of performing “in a highly charged in-between space-time, a liminal space-time,” between “not me,” and the “not not me” (Hawes, 1998, p. 276; Schechner, 2013, p. 72). The conversation,

publications, and citations that articulate the role and place of Asian American media, representation, and scholarship is ongoing, evolving, advancing, retracing, and (re)turning. In this section, I retrace literature of what has been done, said, theorized and performed that lends to the kairos of a performance and sense-making project and performance of my intersectional identity formation. In jest, I will overview “what s/he said” about feminist performances, women’s stand-up comedy, women in stand-up comedy, Asian American media representations, and the comedic genre. I do this overview recognizing that, “we don’t just perform or study or teach bodies. We do so *in* bodies,” and take into consideration the specific conversations and citations that lead to the kairos, timeliness, and importance of researching and creating this project of engaging with a performance of my storied intersectional identity as a first-generation Filipina American (Hamera, 2002, p. 121). Following the overview, I argue that I find entry, opportunity, and a *turn* to speak in the ongoing conversation of women of color’s representation and performance through the cue of cultural laughter in a present moment that is beginning to recognize Asian American presence on screen and in the every day. Whereas laughter is the typical and expected *subsequent* response to a comedy performance, the laughter that I hear is *antecedent* to the creation, theorization, of what I am about to say...

### **Women in Comedy**

Life is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think (Cho, 2008, p. 20)

Comedy is a genre – especially when performed by unexpected actors like women – that is as dotty and playful as Kusama’s *LOVE IS CALLING* exhibit. A point made about comedy characterizes it as an event and a genre of self-conscious performance comprised of “a set of circumstances arranged (or that arrange themselves) to gather to a ‘cut,’ a moment of perception, to a conscious or even unconscious recognition of something, or to something that maybe even

sneaks up and produces an effect—a grin, laughter, a knowing shake of the head—without anyone exactly knowing the cause” (Roof, 2018, p. 2). Another point suggests, “that what we call comedy is really humor, a specific tone operating free from generic restraints” (Stott, 2013, p. 2). Yet another point regarding comedy suggests that, “comedy begins as a simple song for a lone voice gradually accumulating protagonists and interlocutors as each authorial generation presents additions to the form” (Stott, 2014, p. 3). Then, even more pointedly, comedy might be understood simultaneously and categorically as: a theory, an industry, and an academic discipline (Marx & Sienkiewicz, 2018). But with an interest in poststructuralism, I am “drawn to [comedy’s] apparent indefiniteness and resistance to definition,” its unruliness to both make its own rules about what constitutes itself as comedy, and then to break those conventions (Stott, 2013, p. 7). The point I make is to recognize that comedy is a performance of possibility in the sense that performance makes the imagined *possible*, but also that there is possibility in what might *be* comedy (Madison, 1999, p. 276).

Feminist post-structuralism fittingly imagines and enacts unruly, messiness, potential, and possibility for genre, categories, identity, and performance as it “troubles the binary categories male and female, making visible the constitutive force of linguistic practices, and dismantling their apparent inevitability” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 312). While some of the most influential thinking about comedy “comes from philosophy, psychology, and cultural studies,” through the work of Sigmund Freud, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Henri Bergson, “feminist theorists have found Bakhtin the most useful because he acknowledges how comedy can work as a subversive force, and he discusses the ‘messiness’ of the lower female body as part of his theory of the carnivalesque” (Mizejewski & Sturtevant, 2017, p. 11). Mizejewski & Sturtevant (2017) succinctly provide in the recent anthology, *Hysterical! Women in American Comedy*, “a

brief overview of these feminist critical models” that describe women’s participation in American comedy and the ways that it has been theorized. Continuing in this section, I will overview some of the theories that are pertinent to preliminary understandings of women’s narratives in comedy, women performing in the specific genre of stand-up comedy, and other scholarship that allows for understanding the intersection of other embodied identities, and the ways that comedy subverts and resists power, dominant narratives, and structural power.

I begin with a brief summary of second-wave feminist theories of comedy by Little (1983), Walker (1988), and Barreca (1991), who “understands women as a unified category through which political bonding and activism can occur” (Mizejewski & Sturtevant, 2017, p. 15). Little (1983) and Walker (1988) discuss the subversive potential of comedy that points to inequality through feminine humor. Barreca (1991) then extended the germinal theory to “feminine comedy” that is characterized by being “innately subversive and aligned with the oppressed,” and arguing that “feminine comedy doesn’t attack the powerless; it makes fun of the powerful.”

The next major theorizations on women in comedy came from Gilbert (2004) who focused on women’s participation in stand-up comedy. Gilbert’s (2004) focuses on the “performance of marginality,” of comediennes like Roseanne Barr who utilize tactics of performing a marginality that could empower the performer through chosen taxonomy – reclaiming her/their marginal position at will. In particular, Gilbert (2004) was skeptical of the idea of “feminist humor,” especially since comedy was theorized by her as a form of “anti-rhetoric,” that disarms its political and subversive potential by being “just a joke.” Rowe (1995) then theorized the concept of the “unruly woman” in narrative comedy as opposed to stand-up comedy. However, Rowe’s (1995) idea of the unruly woman has been extended in analyzing

many kinds of female comedy performances. For Rowe (1995), the unruly woman is the “prototype of woman as subject” that “lays claim to her own desire,” and provides a “feminist critique of Bakhtin’s theory of the female grotesque” (Mizejewski & Sturtevant, 2017, p. 17). Mizejewski’s (2014) “pretty/funny” or “pretty versus funny” engages with the bias of binaries where, “women comics no matter what they look like, have been located in opposition to ‘pretty,’ enabling them to engage in transgressive comedy grounded in the female body—its looks its race and sexuality, and its relationship to idea versions of femininity” (Mizejewski, 2014). And finally, Krefting (2014) develops the concept of “charged humor” that describes stand-up comedy with a social justice imperative and humor that “springs from a social and political consciousness” with the aim of “creating cultural citizenship” (p. 25).

These germinal publications theorizing women in comedy and the implications of their mediated performances continues as they pertain to more recent performances. Specific theorizations and analysis on very specific performances and performers have continued to be published in women’s and gender studies, the humanities, American studies, theatre studies, media studies, cultural studies, and performance studies. For example, Swink (2017) writes about the perceived post-feminist society as influenced by women-led television comedies. Lauzen (2014) extends the concepts of female versus feminist humor through the more recent performances of comedienne, Tina Fey. Silva & Mendes (2010) led a special edition of the journal *Feminist Media Studies* that attends to recent comedy of comedienues like Tina Fey, Kristen Wiig, Amy Poehler that attends to their performances on a still, male-dominated comedy stage.

And now, we reach a point in American culture where with each passing publication and new theorization begins by marking a moment where, “women comedians have achieved an

unprecedented level of visibility as performers, writers, and producers” (Karlyn, 2017, p. ix).

Indeed, the increase in visibility is an accomplishment to be celebrated cautiously as we, “laugh at the absurdities of life” – all of the absurdities as folly, foolishness, and un/fairness – that come with being at the margins (Karlyn, 2017, p. ix).

### **Asian American Representations**

In short, don’t call me about your script. I know it’s going to be one of those parts, and I don’t have time to be reminded once again that my story is never going to be told by anyone but me. All these characters are not who I am. They don’t speak for me. They don’t speak for all Asian Americans. Perhaps they speak for some, but I don’t give a shit. If you have a story, tell it. But don’t expect me to tell it for you. What you think I am is not who I am. (Cho, 2005, p. 47)

As an Asian American woman, I celebrate visibility with caution. Asian American media studies scholars, in particular, “have long demonstrated, mere visibility does not necessarily lead to empowerment, and the renewed propagation of injurious representations is certainly not a desirable outcome” (Lopez, 2016, p. 7). For Asian Americans, it is clear how “representation raises questions of inclusion and exclusion,” not just in media, but the culture that produces/consumes the media, and the way that media and culture intertwine (Booker, 2012, p. 271). Thus, “cultural citizenship is, then, intimately connected to media practices and images” and in order for groups and individuals to feel included within a national culture, it is vital for their specific communities and identities to be represented within the media (Lopez, 2016, p. 13). The particular injustice of representation that Asian Americans experience has traditionally been through erasure and symbolic annihilation. The lack of images and voices has silenced and erased Asian Americans as participants and citizens in American culture where “the number of

roles rarely reflects the actual percentage of Asian Americans in the United States” (Lopez, 2016, p. 6). What is left are limited roles for Asian American actors that have typically and “repeatedly embod[ied] tired and offensive stereotypes” and “relegated to the role of a sidekick or background character” (Lopez, 2016, p. 6). As follows, I will briefly summarize some of the theories and scholarship germane to recognizing the ways that Asian Americans have been represented in American media, and overview Asian American representation specifically in comedy.

Due to Hollywood’s interracial casting restrictions some of the earliest depictions of Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream American media were played by white or other non-Asian actors in “yellow face” or “brownface” (Davé, 2015). For what roles are left for Asian Americans are commonly problematic narratives and characters that repeatedly depict “Asians as a foreign and alien (and sometimes threatening) race, model minorities who assimilate into American culture, and transnational and global citizens associated with trade and world economics” (Davé, 2015, p. 150). Hamamoto (1994) takes to task providing a comprehensive survey of the racist depictions of Asian Americans in popular and mainstream TV and later newspaper comics, songs, stories, dramatic productions, and movies. Ono & Pham (2009) updates the work critiquing Asian American representation to include the way in which Asian American producers intervene through film festivals and self-directed content. Finally, scholarship by Marchetti (1994) and Shimizu (2007; 2012) include theories that nuance how gender and sexuality “are inflected within representations of Asian America” (Lopez, 2016, p. 6).

Asian American representations are constantly shifting, developing, and repeating. Representations undoubtedly reflect the dominant discourse and national/cultural attitude toward

Asian bodies. “My story is never going to be told by anyone but me,” states Cho (2005) resolutely (p. 47). Akin to the timeliness of representation of women in comedy’s “unprecedented level of visibility as performers, writers, and producers,” stated by Karlyn (2017), the current moment in American mainstream media should be celebrated (again, cautiously) particularly for Asian American directed and produced media that tells the stories of Asian American experienced, written, produced, and performed by Asian American actors. In addition to *Crazy Rich Asians*, *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before*, and *Kim’s Convenience*, recent stand-out mainstream media includes: *Master of None* (2015-2017), *Fresh off the Boat* (2015-), *Dr. Ken* (2015-2017), *Always Be My Maybe* (2019). Repeatedly, the dominant genre has been comedy influenced: in the form of romantic-comedy, dramatic-comedy, or sitcom.

### **Asian American representation in comedy**

I think back to a required university diversity presentation in spring 2017. A specific question was asked of us by the presenter: “what are some stereotypes associated with these groups?” When the category of “Asians” came to be described by social and cultural stereotypes, a graduate student colleague responded, “they’re weird!” The response was not shocking, I am frequently reminded and cognizant of what is expected of my racial/ethnic identity, “weirdness” being one of them, yet I recall this moment vividly. On one end, my identity as an Asian American felt implicated. But also, I was more struck by the laughter that followed. “Why is that funny?” someone in the audience asked with a tone of annoyance. An already racially charged and uncomfortable moment became doubly uncomfortable. Representations on the screen rarely leave the screen, rather, they seep into the everyday. Stuart Hall (1992) states that “the media plays a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things they reflect” (p. 14). Media makes



Asian Americans perceivably “weird” and a group to be laughed at -- all which became embodied and real in the moment of the “diversity” presentation.

The “weirdness” attributed to the stereotype of the comic Asian is not unfamiliar. These are representations that are highly legible. In thinking about a present moment of Asian American comedienne, like Awkwafina, Constance Wu, and Ali Wong, they repeat the “awkwardness,” a racialized and political tool theorized through the online comedic performances of Issa Rae, “for black women to both identify and work through the social-cultural discomfort surrounding their bodies” (Bradley, 2015, p. 149). This awkwardness is a performance that is, “unlike ‘quirky’, a term used to identify white women in comedy” (Bradley, 2015, p. 149) are perhaps oppositional, to “the model minority image,” but may possibly be, “delimiting the range of expressive possibilities available to performers of color” (Diffrient, 2011, p. 41). These “awkward” Asian American comedienne and actors seep into other genres of comedy as Constance Wu plays a main character on the sitcom, *Fresh Off the Boat*; and Awkwafina plays a major role in the romantic comedy, *Crazy Rich Asians*. Additionally, Asian American media studies have more widely interrogated shows like *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Dr. Ken*, *Mindy*, and *Master of None* that “are specific enough that racial minorities will find them authentic, but they are relatable enough that they are universal” and moreover, can be categorized with the comedy/sitcom genre (Feng, 2017, p. 126).

Even in independently produced Asian American media, comedy dominates. Feng (2017) cites Kent A. Ono’s 2011 *New York Times* article “about the success of Asian American YouTube celebrities, [where] studies have found that as many as 87 percent of Asian Americans consume media online and via broadband, which may explain the remarkable success of Asian American-produced content online in contrast to its virtual absence from multiplexes and

broadcast television” (p. 128). YouTube appeals to both Asian American consumers and content producers who are seeking the means to be “a producer, capable of engineering his or her own destiny” (Lopez, 2016, p. 14). Later, I argue that the “tools,” “methods,” and imaginary to “engineer” a future is not yet here. Currently, Asian American media producers rely on a “do-it-yourself” (DIY) and “do-it-with-others” (DIWO) technique of media citizenship. Lopez (2016) quotes Hartley’s (2012) articulation that, “DIY/DIWO citizenship is more individuated and privatized than previous types, because it is driven by voluntarist choices and affiliations, but at the same time it has an activist and communitarian ethic, where ‘knowledge shared is knowledge gained’ (144).” (Lopez, 2016, p. 14). Specifically, regarding Asian American stand-up comedy there is, “high-density-low representation phenomenon, in part, to the recent acceptance of comedy by Asian Americans as a performance art” (Fujioka, 1991, n.p.). This is to say that individual activism, through innovations of critical media productions, are political in the way that they become collective acts for cultural citizenship in ways that further imply that “representation matters.” The “DIWO” ethic also emerges at a literal level where Asian American media often gets produced *with* other well-known Asian Americans. Crossovers from sports (such as NBA athlete, Jeremy Lin) into YouTube content (with KevJumba), and YouTube celebrities (like Awkwafina) cross into mainstream media (like *Crazy Rich Asians*), and vice versa.

### **Passing the Mic: Kairos in/of Performance**

Choosing to stay and fight for ourselves is the only way we can survive (Cho, 2005, p. 237).

That’s what Margaret Cho said – as she ends her book, *I Have Chosen to Stay and Fight*. Margaret Cho is not the central focus of my research. Yet when mentioning that my project

exists at the intersecting cusps of performance studies, comedy studies, women's studies, cultural studies, and Asian American studies; as a project that interrogates and makes sense of the stories of comediennes of color with intersecting racialized-gender identities, literature on Margaret Cho is ubiquitous. Cho is the token Asian American figure in anthologies of comedy literature, the only performance by an Asian American woman analyzed in collections of performance literature, and antithetical to what she wants, when she says, "all these characters are not who I am. They don't speak for me. They don't speak for all Asian Americans. Perhaps they speak for some, but I don't give a shit. If you have a story, tell it. But don't expect me to tell it for you" (Cho, 2005, p. 47). She is, however, the way that I play with what has been said, done, and performed on topics pertinent to my project. At this moment, there is the cultural applause, the laughter, and some heckling that ensues -- responses that cues a necessary *turn*-taking in the conversation that Cho had started.

The laughter that ensues in response to Cho, and to the moment of a surge in mainstream Asian American-centered comedy signifies recognition of a multitude of differing and intertwining phenomena. Bergson (1911) wrote extensively on laughter as social complicity, "a group recognition and criticism of something perceived as wrong, out of place, or unexpected" (Mizejewski & Sturtevant, 2017, p. 12). Here laughter as a corrective is a response to incongruity and absurdity – the absurdity of the unexpected Asian comedienne's body on stage, or perhaps the absurdity of the context of the narrative woven into the stand-up. Laughter also has a social function that is associated with "bonding, agreement, affection and emotional regulation," a laughing *with* that indicates a sharing (Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014, p. 618). Regardless, the laughter points to a cultural readiness for understanding of the particular narratives created/performed by Asian American artists, an understanding and comprehension of

the cultural context that the comedy endures in, and a tacit agreement with the arguments that arise in the comic bits. The contagion of laughter demands *more*. The comedic landscape, thus, has added more Asian American visibility and presence in response to the laughter. Most recently, Bowen Yang, the son of Chinese immigrants and a *Saturday Night Live* writer, has been cast as one of three new members for the 45th season.

However, the current soundscape of comedy is not all laughter and giggles. Heckling at comedy shows “violates the norms of the situation,” and as contradictory to laughter, suggests disagreement and friction (Gimbel, 2015, p. 78). Within the same casting season that Bowen Yang was selected as a cast member of *SNL*, Shane Gillis was both cast *and* quickly fired from *SNL* for making racist remarks towards Asian people uncovered in a 2018 episode of his podcast, “Matt and Shane's Secret Podcast.” Additionally, in 2016, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was pressured into an apology for offensive jokes about Asians during the awards ceremony made by comedian, Chris Rock. Together, the heckling and laughter cue the end of an act, and the start of another. The acts to follow continue to incite the laughter and conversation initiated by Margaret Cho and Asian Americans present in comedy and oust the intolerable anti-Asian racism that warrants heckling. It might be said that the “we” that I perform with are always fighting for survival – throwing punches. If one of the “points” that we are to make is via a “punchline”—kairos, as timing, is crucial in/of the performance.

### **Set 1: Data Set**

Ali Wong takes a turn in the conversation in a moment successional to the peak of Margaret Cho’s stand-up comedy career. I, like Wong (and Wong, like I), have a particular audience. Wong knows her audiences, addresses her audience, and then implicates her audience.

Her opening lines to her most recent Netflix stand-up comedy special, Wong welcomed listeners with:

Oh, my goodness! I heard a rumor that all of the Asians in this city have congregated in this theater tonight. Yeah. Thank you for coming with your white boyfriends (Wong, 2018).

That opening felt personal -- she was talking to *me*. While, not in the theater (naming my social location rather than identity), the identities that she named were specific to me: Asian, and the current partner of, as Wong would say, a “white dude.” I laughed and cringed, thankful I was not actually in San Francisco where it would feel too face-to-face personal to my embodied and present relational identity. I experience the stand-up of Wong and Alonzo through my own particular body that responds via laughter. My laughter, as a response, is an embodied dynamic of, “response-ability, literally the possibilities and pragmatics of response” (Hamera, 2006, p. 14).

Wong’s opening bit is a “call, drawing people together, and a calling, drawing them individually along their chosen or fated paths” (Roach, 2013, p. 329). Wong’s opening bit awakens the response-ability of *my* intersectional voice, “in several meanings of that word,” where, “voice is cognate to *invocation*, *evocation*, and most urgently, *vocation*” (Roach, 2013, p. 329). My current *vocation* is the Kusama-inspired, spot-making objective of performance/self-making of my intersectional identity as a Filipina American and daughter of Filipinx immigrant parents, *in/evoked* through engagement with the specific points in the stand-up comedy performances of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo that relate to race/ethnicity, the body, sexuality, gender, and citizenship. The bits create a composite of my intersectional identity as a Filipina American, the daughter of Filipinx immigrant parents, and raised on the west coast of the United

States; and the foundation for recognition and understanding of this intersectional identity. My performance continues the circuit and circle of conversation among women of color, thus I enter the conversation by *turn* taking, where “the possibility of response is built into dialogue” (Hamera, 2006, p. 14).

When Wong addresses her “Asian” audience, I am compelled to respond as part of her intended audience. I *am* Asian American. The history of “the term *Asian American* did not even exist until the late 1960s, when Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino activists coined the identity as an ideological strategy to advocate for their civil rights” (Ocampo, 2016, p. 3). Filipino/ American participation helped make possible the strategic formation of a unified identity of Asian Americans. Yet, my Filipino American-ness often felt differently aligned with American constructions of racial/ethnic categories as I recognize that, “Spanish and American colonialism in the Philippines have influenced the economic, cultural, and social experiences of Filipinos in the United States – all of which in turn shape the way that Filipinos experience race in this country” (Ocampo, 2016, p. 16).

I was born, raised, and lived most of my life with one foot in Orange County, California; the other in Los Angeles, California. On the weekdays, I commuted to school on the public school bus as part of what was locally known as the “*Ana-crime*” Public School District. The name was a play on the name of the city of Anaheim, California where I spent 25 years of my life. Despite being the destination city for Disneyland-tourism, locals recognized the unsettling reality of Anaheim’s racial tensions. The Anaheim Riots peaked in 2012 where the brown community protested the police brutality/abuse targeting brown, Mexican/American bodies. Here, my brown, Asian body inherited from my parents, would become conflated with other brown, Hispanicized bodies – we were mistaken by the sound of Spanish “sounding” last names

(e.g. Santos, Alvar, Sanchez, etc.), and/or through the perceived darkness of our skin. I recall the tension in my father's face and body as he was profiled by a police officer in his tan, run-down, work pick-up truck while I rode home with him after he picked me up from school.

Alternatively, on the weekends, my mother insisted that I take serious piano lessons in Los Angeles, California in the city of Cerritos – a city best known for its pockets of specific Asian ethnic/cultural neighborhoods, and an Asian population of over 60 percent. The fringes of Los Angeles and Orange County were home. My social location, as well as my identity as a Filipino American lends itself to a certain understanding of my racial/ethnic experience in the United States. Ocampo (2016) writes that “in Los Angeles, for instance, Latinos and Asian Americans now make up a collective majority,” and that, “Filipinos understand their identity vis-à-vis these two fast-growing communities” (p. 4). As a result, what I might experience as a Filipino American can be described through, “panethnic moments, or those times when Filipinos have felt a sense of collective identity with Latinos or other Asians” (Ocampo, 2016, p. 4). This panethnic experience is likely why the influential and affirming representations that Wong provides for me as an Asian American, still feels insufficient. Therefore, I include the stand-up comedy of Cristela Alonzo as part of the comedic bits that I derive my collaged performance and construction of self from.

Both Wong and Alonzo are American stand-up comedienne, authors, writers, and actors in their own respects. Alonzo self-identifies as Mexican American, and actively advocates for social justice among marginalized groups and communities, protesting deportation, media advocacy, and working with the Special Olympics. Wong's performances, meanwhile, have proliferated since the critical acclaim of her Netflix special, *Baby Cobra*. She became the first artist to sell out 8 shows at the San Francisco Masonic Theater, voices the co-lead character

alongside Tiffany Haddish in Netflix's *Tuca and Bertie*, and has recently starred in a Netflix movie alongside, Asian American actor, Randall Park. Neither Wong nor Alonzo are the central site for analysis. However, their racialized gendered, representational legibility in mainstream culture provides the necessary opening for making sense of the particularities of my own identity, and locating *my* position *among* other women of color like them.

In this section, I have briefly overviewed the comediennes in the stand-up comedy specials I engage with, and I articulate a focus on the narrative fragments where I hear resonances of my forming a particular racial/ethnic, gender, sexual, national identity. The composite of these fragmented narratives forms a performance activating and inspiring the possibility of theory, understanding, conversation, and engagement.

## **Set 2: A Set of Methods**

While I am interested and write from everyday life performances (ELP), and the way in which aesthetic performances like Netflix comedy specials influence ELP; what emerges from this research project comes from performance as a methodology, or conspicuous aesthetic performance, defined as, “a distinct, rehearsed, and staged performance, marked as art through stylistic choices and set apart from everyday life by meta-communicative frames” (Shaffer, 2016/2020). As I later say in my performance in chapter 3, “*performance makes me nervous because it is hard work*,” reiterates the point made by Madison (1999) that, “performance is hard work,” and by Pelias & Shaffer (2007) that, “creativity flows not just from inspiration or innate talent, but, much more, from hard work” (Madison, 1999, p. 108; Pelias & Shaffer, 2007, p. 70). The hard work of this embodied performance includes the effort of “scholar/artists from producing performance work *and* written publication,” and in the case of critical methods of performance, performing *with* as an act of solidarity as a scholar/artist/activist (Shaffer, 2020, p.



2). For this particular project, the hard work of performance also stems from the way that scripted, staged, and rehearsed performance *activates* collage, performative listening, and generative autobiography – it is “*through* the act of performance” that “we come to understand the value of the metaphor” outlined as follows (Shaffer, 2020, p. 2).

### **Collage as a Method of Qualitative Inquiry**

I begin from where I am: seated at the table and typing this response, “it is from *here* that the world unfolds” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 545). I am sitting at the unfinished-wooden kitchen table where my roommates and I sometimes sit to write in a communal setting. We eat here, we write here. It is my/our writing space. It has been twenty-two years since I first began my formal education in kindergarten. My first writing table, then, was also a kitchen table. The writing table of my childhood was also a light-colored wooden table, but with white legs, and pushed against a wall to uncomfortably seat two adults and two small children at the other, three, exposed edges. At that table, my mom taught me how to write the lowercase letter “a” with a hook above it that my elementary school classmates never quite understood, she taught me to draw stick-figure-girls with triangle dresses, and “m”-shaped birds in crayon-illustrations. My mom also helped me with my homework and school assignments in between chopping vegetables and sautéing garlic and onions as she made dinner. On one occasion, she glanced at me pulling out crumpled pieces of colored-in paper shapes and magazine cuttings as I groped around the bottom of my messy backpack for other loose pieces. The assignment was a book report in the form of a collage. “What are you looking for? Why didn’t you glue this together at Grandma’s before your dad picked you up?” my mom asked me as I spread more paper clippings on the small table. It was a mess. “Grandma doesn’t have glue at her house,” I informed her, “and I can see the tape if I use that.” She sighed, “you know, my mama and papa couldn’t afford to get us school supplies when

we were little. We had to make do with what we had. We would use leftover rice to stick paper together,” she showed me pressing flat a few warmed grains of rice between her fingers, pressing it onto the back of a magazine cutting and onto the assignment paper. “But we have glue somewhere!” I said while dashing to my room for a glue stick. I finished the assignment with a glue stick to paste around the few cut-outs attached with the rice. When I was finished, the magazine cuttings stuck to the page with glue lay relatively flat but rippling a little as a reaction to the sticky substance. The pieces stuck on the paper with rice, however, were slightly mounted and they casted a slight shadow on the paper below it. It was textured, felt, embossed, heightened, emphasized, and dimensional.

I stopped asking my mom for help with my homework when I was about ten years old. That is when “math” started to be called, “beginning algebra,” and my mom shied away from it. I started asking my mother, who in her own right, “is also a writer, a poet, and a philosopher,” for help with my homework again in 2017, during my second year of my PhD program as I began to seek responses to questions of existentiality, identity, and survival (Ahmed, 2006, p. 547). The kitchen table, the story of cooked rice, and my mother’s continuous help in accomplishing my schoolwork lay the conditions of arrival to my dissertation performance and research, where a return to the kitchen table is a return to the making and art of collage, and I “go from there” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 549; Madison, 2005, p. 20).

The “there” I seek is an arrival to “being a part of an interpretive community” (Madison, 2005, p. 19). The spontaneous and ideological, interpretive, community or *communitas* emerges through a performed conversation between theory/theorists/performance/performers in “a moment of utopian unity, in which human differences and hierarchies seem to fade into perfect cohesion” (Turner, 1982; Madison, 2005, p. 159). High theory in the form of scholarship, and

low theory in the form of popular media culture, intermingle in conversation on the stage. My performance is a collage, “to mean the practice of creating work from some combination of sources/texts/movements/bits,” an assemblage of pieces of Netflix performances and academic literature into a compiled script (Kilgard, 2009, p. 11). The method/s used in scripting the performance are also a collaged creation, “a gathering of materials from different worlds into a single composition,” that “requires that readers,” and audiences, “attend to multiple worlds” (Kilgard, 2009, p. 3).

The rice as a way of sticking paper together was an early lesson in *making do* with what is at hand and available. The story of rice becomes a lesson in my youth that came before encountering the scholarly method of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Kilgard’s (2009) use of “collage” shares certain traits with artists’ use of Lévi-Strauss’ “bricolage” (p. 6). Additionally, linguist, Gérard Genette (1982) proposes a distinction between the “bricoleur” and the “engineer.” This distinction between the bricoleur and engineer is summarized as such: “while the engineer uses the appropriate tools and designated parts for the job, the bricoleur ‘makes do’, putting together the left-over extracted and borrowed pieces at hand so as to compose a new whole” (Brooker, 2003, p. 22). My performance method is not an engineered design method where appropriate tools and designated parts can blueprint a way of scripting and staging my performance. Rather, discrete components specifically from McRae (2015), Pineau (1992), and Langellier (1999), inform a collaged performance method that responds to the four performance interventions of Conquergood as summarized by Madison (2005). These components are placed in conversation with one another as a collage, and “resonate with each other and the new whole” (Kilgard, 2009, p. 3). I acknowledge the “pieces” of the pre-existing methods of inquiry:

performative listening, performance, and writing. I will outline the expectations and guidelines of these methodological bits before I acknowledge the collaged methodological outcome.

### **Performative Listening as a Method of Qualitative Inquiry**

Mom had rice. I listen to her tell me about how she used rice as glue differently today than I did in my elementary school years. My younger self heard the words: “you know, my mama and papa couldn’t afford to get us school supplies when we were little,” instead as: “I did not have glue when I was younger.” My reply to my mother, “but we have glue somewhere!” was a response that communicated, “ok, but we are here *now* mom, and I have glue in my room that you got me, so I am going to use it!” Today, I hear also, my mom’s sigh before telling me about growing up and making do with the materials at hand. In some ways I envy my younger self’s hyper-commitment to presence, “we have glue *today* though,” because hearing my mother’s sigh now, evokes the necessary act of reflection on more than the spoken words, but her exasperation, her tiredness, and perhaps her recognition of difference between my childhood circumstances and her own. Her recognition of difference communicated through her sigh evokes my reflexivity. Is an issue of not having glue an “American-first-world-problem?”

Listening to my mother and the story of rice is an act of “performative listening as an embodied practice of critically and reflexively engaging *with* and learning *from* others” (McRae, 2015, p. 28). The story of rice is but an example of an early instance of my performative listening. However, the “habits of listening take shape and take hold in the body,” and I feel attuned and ready through lived, every day, rehearsals in listening to further engage in the act of performative listening in formal qualitative research (McRae, 2015, p. 16).

I select the comediennes’ storied jokes to *perform with* through a process of selecting made possible through my performative listening. This listening is, “motivated by a desire for

joy and the creation of connections” via dialogue, resonances, and dis/identifications in story, theory, and method (McRae, 2015, p. 28). I begin my performance project, categorized as “qualitative research from this pleasure-centered approach” (McRae, 2015, p. 28). I select stand-up comedy that creates pleasure through resonances that enter my body and make me feel compelled to perform on a stage via “movement, connection, and vibration” (McRae, 2015, p. 28). The method of collage amplifies these resonances that I hear in my story and the comic storied bits of the comediennes that I choose to *perform with* (Kilgard, 2014, p. 98). Furthermore, I hear resonances in the methods that I collage to make the performance possible. My performance is an embodied practice of performing *with* Wong and Alonzo, an embodied practice of dialoguing. I continue to hear ways of dialoguing academic methods through this embodied practice of collective conversation. “*With...*” the preposition resonates in academic literature and invites a dialogue. I am called and *compelled* to respond in the relational act of dialogue.

McRae (2015) states that, “the conceptual consequences of listening are also relational and prepositional” (p. 20). Specifically, four prepositional ways of listening: “listening to, listening for, listening with, and listening from,” orient me as a listener to the transformative potential for relationships constituted between performer and audience (McRae, 2015, p. 20). I give particular attention to the preposition of listening *with* and the questions that generate from this orientation. When I listen *with* Wong and Alonzo, “I hear my story working alongside [theirs,] I am listening and learning to take in as much as possible from the lessons presented to me in [their stories]” (McRae, 2015, p. 24). I hear a lesson about survival, *making do* with the circumstances, expectations, and opportunities that come with being performers, American

women of color, children of immigrants, and more. It is “a story that is matched by my own attempts at learning from” Othered bodies -- like theirs’, like mine (McRae, 2015, p. 24).

The act of listening is relational (as is dialogue, as is identity formation, as is communication). As such, performative listening is not sufficient enough of an engineered method for my performance. Instead, performative listening is a “method or mode of listening that might modify or complement a variety of existing qualitative methods” that I hear in conversation in the methodological conception of my performance (McRae, 2015, p. 31). I take the role of “researcher as listener” through a collaged method of “engaging others in qualitative research that is experiential, embodied, and critical” (McRae, 2015, p. 31). My performance is experiential through the narrative expression of my lived experiences (Madison, 2005, p. 26); embodied through listening and performing; and engaged critically from a body, method, and ideology that ruptures and disturbs academically normative ways of doing/being.

McRae’s (2015) four commitments in/through performative listening ask for: “a commitment to listening with curiosity, a commitment to listening with and to the body, a commitment to listening for context and location, and a commitment to listening with accountability” (McRae, 2015, p. 32). Despite both the critical potential and *fallibility* of the comic form, I listen with curiosity for what I might learn from stand-up comedy performances that risk racial/ethnic/gender essentialism, stereotyping, and “irony” (Goltz, 2011). “Nothing is all good or all bad” I recall Dr. Rachel Griffin exclaiming in the performance lab -- that space of heightened excess (2018). I listen with curiosity for moments of validation but with a curiosity for potential harms. A scripted and staged performance commits me to listen with and to my body, acknowledge my laughter that filters the lines that make it into my script, to learn through embodiment, and to acknowledge my embodied knowledge that emerges from living with my

embodied identities. I listen to the context and location of the performances. Finally, I listen with accountability and self-reflexivity to acknowledge the harms I might injure by “fusing” my stories and experiences with theirs. Is the story mine? Is it their own? Is it ours?

A collage of performances, performative moments, theories, and methods deliberately makes whole a slew of disparate parts. It is metaphor for making a conversation happen without risking each individual voice from sounding as if it is coming from the same talking head. It is a conversation where voices come together in dialogue that sounds like musical harmony rather than synchrony.

### **Narrative Performance as Method of Qualitative Inquiry**

I am the rice. As I began drafting my performance script and playing with how my body might perform the comic narrative bits, I recall my directed reading professor giving me feedback on the text I was composing -- quotes after quotes from Netflix specials, since it is often easier to perform the Other than the self (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007). “My favorite parts are the parts about you! That line when you’re performing your dad singing...” she had said to me. What was encouragement to *make do* with my lived experience, was just as well received by present-me as did younger-me being told to use rice as glue. My past response of, “but we have glue somewhere!” was my internal response to putting more of my story into my script, “but Wong has other jokes in her other Netflix special that apply to me! I’ll get those!” Instead, I have come to realize that my performance has borrowed bits of autobiographical performance, explained by Pineau (1992) as a performance method:

Whereby the performer presents herself as a living text, the embodied presence absent from the literary experience. She speaks from within the text rather than about it, working actively to blur her identities as author and subject. By

collapsing the distinction between her textual and lived identities, she offers both as simultaneously present in her performing body. Whatever masking or unmasking occurs in performance serves to create continuity between these identities rather than distinctions. Most importantly, the autobiographical performer frames her text as a continual process, thereby inviting her audience to participate in its ongoing enactment. This collective performance positions the audience to affirm the authenticity of the central persona and her experiences (p. 99).

“I am a critical performance studies student, and a critical studies student which means I...” I say and write into an early draft of my script. My performance makes possible these scripted lines about who I am performatively as “a performance studies student” through the doing on stage. I become a performance studies student by performing one for an audience. I imagine myself as this student, this voice, this person... and so the stage lets me become who I imagine, effectively “collapsing the distinction between my textual and lived identities” (Pineau, 1992, p. 99).

I understand my script and the performances of Wong and Alonzo to be “crafts of self-construction” and a way of reimagining representations of women of color through critical performances that make right assumptions of our class, first generation statuses, race/ethnicity, genders, sexualities, and more (Pineau, 1992, p. 100). This method of performance offers “the most powerful reassurance that the imagined life [is] possible because it [gives] living proof that the imagined self [is] real” (Pineau, 1992, p. 101). Through performance, I/we take author-ity, authorship, and ownership over the representation of our performances and performative bodies and make possible tangible proof that a liberated body can exist.



I am the rice because my storied-self is the very thing I am afraid of putting on the paper. What would all the kids at school say if they knew I had glued my assignment together with rice? What would you say if you knew it was me under there all along? Afterall, performance takes vulnerability (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007). I am the rice because as I lay under the collaged pieces of Wong and Alonzo's stories that might be perceived as masks for my storied self. However, I effectively put *on* a mask that doubly can come *off* through the realization that those pieces are there *because* I have selected them to be there as representations/resonances of me and my storied self (Pineau, 1992, p. 98). Masks are dangerous in regard to deception or covering over, but the rice in my story is always acknowledged as there, adding an always present and tangible dimension as it sticks in a way that is "textured, felt, embossed, heightened, emphasized, and dimensional." I too, through my performance, guarantee that my embodiment will be felt, heightened, emphasized, and dimensional. There will be "little ambiguity about [my] physical presence" (Pineau, 1992, p. 102). I am the rice because of the way Pineau (1992) writes about the removal of the mask as a move to blur the performative and performance selves through autobiographical performance. I am the rice because there is no mask. Methodologically, I am not a piece in the collage and the pieces cannot become me. I am rice, always. I am always potentially food-stuff and glue-stuff, and I am simultaneously both until I become used in a certain way that defines my being *there* in that moment. I am my performative and performance self, always, until I become used or do something that defines my being *there* on the stage or in my everyday.

Another method that I take bits to collage together comes from the work of Langellier (1999) on personal narrative performance. She ends her piece asking, "what place does community have in the contact zone of performance?" (p.139). While recognizing both the

heterogeneity and homogeneity of experience, the narrative crafted is political such that, “all narratives have a political function,” and the politics of this performance is one of identity (Langellier, 1999, p. 128). Performing personal narratives “takes the social relations of power as seriously as it does individual reflexivity, and which therefore examines the cultural production and reproduction of identities and experiences” (Langellier, 1999, p. 128). The Combahee River Collective’s (1970) Black Feminist Statement, articulated their identities by which “politics emerging out of a group’s distinctive experiences and expressed the needs it saw as following from those experiences” (Nicholson, 2008, p. 2). Identity politics, then, connects the self to the collective, it recognizes itself as a part of a whole system, it is a means to articulate both similarities and differences at the same time.

In listening to the stand-up of Wong and Alonzo, I hear stories of lessons learned from their mothers and being their mother’s daughters. These narratives teach them, and teach me, and I speak *with* them when I share my stories of lessons learned from my mother. As such, “personal narrative is a way of knowing carved out of experience, experience as it is inflected by particular cultural, geopolitical, and material circumstances” (Langellier, 1999, p. 137). Our shared circumstances as women of color, first generation Americans, and the privilege of staging our stories and bodies are nodal in my performance. In the stories I tell, “the enhancement of experience and the constitution of identity in personal narrative depend upon our bodies as our access to and means of expression” (Langellier, 1999, p. 139). We exist with the privileged access to a stage (my academic “stage” however sounds and looks differently than theirs). I am compelled to make do with this opportunity not always granted to bodies like mine, considering that “personal narrative is a privileged form of expressing embodiment” (Langellier, 1999, p. 139).

## Conspicuous Aesthetic Performance as *the* Method of Qualitative Inquiry

I played with the stickiness of the rice, reinventing its role as food to glue, and resituating it from the kitchen to the worktable. So do the methods become “re-cited” and “re-sited” on stage (Hamera, 2013). Hamera’s (2013) use of the, “slippery homophony of changing location (‘re-site), acknowledging previous turns (‘re-cite’), and expression (‘recite’)” encourages, “performance as critical practice and part of a repertoire,” or, “the labor of *again*” (p. 202). The set of methods enlisted: collage, performative listening, and narrative performance (broadly); become realized and “re-c(s)ited” on stage through *conspicuous aesthetic performance*. Shaffer (2014) originally defines conspicuous aesthetic performance as, “a distinct, rehearsed and staged performance, marked as art through stylistic choices and set apart from everyday life my meta-communicative frames” (p. 1). Through scripted, staged, and rehearsed performance, “we come to understand the value of the metaphor *through* the act of performance” (Shaffer, 2020, p. 2). Through the conspicuous aesthetic performance does the set of methods aforementioned become enacted and re-sited from page to stage.

Thus, it is through conspicuous aesthetic performance – the practice – that the scholar-performer, “joins performance and other methods of criticism into one interdependent process” (Shaffer, 2014, p. 103; Espinola, 1977, p. 92). Conspicuous aesthetic performance ignites and enables the intentional selection and bits of text. In executing a largely self-directed and self-performed script I, “create a performance comprised of multiple texts about that subject,” and, “consider the relationships among disparate texts” resulting in a “combination of texts [that] creates a larger rhetorical argument” (Shaffer, 2014, p. 103). It is through “critical engagement in the process” of scripting, staging, and performing that “creates new knowledge” (Shaffer, 2014,

p. 103). Re-c(s)iting *bits* of comedy and narrative into scholarship, theory into performance, and script to theory that ultimately shapes an intertextual and interdisciplinary project.

### **Circles: Conclusions and Continuity**

Because I'm a Asian woman, and therefore, guaranteed to live until I'm a billion. I'm guaranteed, like a turtle from the Galapagos, OK? We all know the phrase "black don't crack." Well, Asian don't die. We don't die. Especially the women, we live forever. And you know why we're such bad drivers? Because we're trying to die. We're like, "Yeah! Let me see how invincible I really am!" "Imma make this left-hand turn signal and ignore this red light completely." "I'm gonna make a right turn– I changed my mind, it's a U-turn!" "I changed my mind again. It's a O-turn!" (Wong, 2016)

In this chapter, I made several turns to the conditions of my arrival to the stand-up comedy of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo. I began with a review of literature of the lineage of comediennes and Asian American representation that turned into a point on the timeliness of studying the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo. I took another turn to outline the set of methods activated through conspicuous aesthetic performance that I employ in this dissertation, thus arriving at an O-turn – a circle has formed. This unbroken shape sets into motion the circumstances for *continuity*. Entering the circle of comediennes and scholars, my script and writing about the performance generates a performance, "presentational of a specific exploration of self and representational of a methodological strategy of exploring the self" (Alexander, 2000, p. 99). In the next chapter, I continue the comedic and academic conversation, presenting a script of "the resultant performance that seeks to answer questions asked of self as generated from [the]

autobiographical performance[s]” of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo (Alexander, 2000, p. 101).

### CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I return to the story of the *Wakwak* of Filipino folklore whose monstrous, fragmented, embodiment presents a way to consider the characteristically fragmented and collaged performance-aesthetic of what may be considered *peminist performance*. Integrated throughout, I use the bits of my performance as an example from which *peminist performance* theory unfolds.

#### Callback<sup>9</sup>: *Wakwak*

The story of the *Wakwak*<sup>10</sup> frightened me into obedience as a child, and yet I still think about the story of the flying, dismembered woman, shrieking into the night. I find her inexplicable dismemberment at the waist perturbing, and the image stirs an anxiety in my adulthood. Her severed body reminds me darkly, rather than comically, of *cuts* that render the *Wakwak's* being to bits. I imagine being approached by half of a woman, and wonder which half would frighten me more? Go (1979) notes the prevalence of the *Wakwak* depicted as a “woman,” a feminine monstrosity, in Filipinx folklore. In fact, the *Wakwak*, also known as “the *aswang* is a normal woman of considerable beauty by day. However, at night she is able to transform herself into a horrible flying ‘half-bodied’ female monster which takes flight” (Nadeau, 2011, p. 256).

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<sup>9</sup> A callback is a strategy of “comedy’s scenic re-layerings” that “seem potentially infinite (to the point of producing a *mise en abyme*), especially if they consist of the perpetual retelling of jokes and their variations” (Roof, 2018, p. 24). Joke ruined again. Take it seriously.

<sup>10</sup> The *Wakwak* is used synonymously with *Aswang* or *Asuang*. *Wakwak* was the name most commonly used in my family’s region. It is documented that, “in the Philippines, different ethnic groups have different names for creatures like the *aswang*. The word *aswang* is a general category that everyone seems to understand, even when they use a different term to describe their type of creature” (Nadeau, 2011, p. 256).

What characterizes the *Wakwak* as a monster versus a (human) woman is her lack of embodied wholeness. Her monstrosity is determined by the separation of halves invariably in collage, “their collision—or more appropriately their constant acts of colliding but never quite crushing each other or subsuming each other or erasing each other or perhaps even meeting each other—that is at issue” (Kilgard, 2009, p. 13).

In adulthood, I fear that the *Wakwak*'s feminine monstrosity might be a reflection of the American cultural propensity towards, “the monstrous construction of women of color” (Calafell, 2012, p. 113). I fear that the *Wakwak* is a reflection of *my* perceived monstrous femininity, in particular, a monstrous femininity associated with being Filipina American. But, I (re)claim the role of the monster that women of color already embody (Calafell, 2012, p. 12).

My dissertation which entails methods of performance and/from comedy, accentuates my monstrosity in a number of ways. First, as a feminist performer of any genre, staging and embodying “feminist identities embrace[s] the monstrous possibilities of acting out” (Hart, 2012, p. 2). Then, through the “reperformance” of Wong and Alonzo’s stand-up comedy bits, I become a monstrous “shapeshifter” as I move through the role of self, of Other, of self as Other, and then as a reclaimed subject – all the while oscillating to, from, and in between the intellectual world and creative world through the performance (Taylor, 2016, p. 190; Calafell, 2012). In the role of these stand-up comedy personas, I become comedically unruly, but monstrously so. The unruly monstrosity of women of color noticeably overlaps with the unruly woman of comedy.

Comediennes have been written as “the unruly woman,” as “excess” in her performance, and her body “leaking” and “grotesque” (Calafell, 2012; Rowe, 1995; Mizejewski, 2014). Finally, through the pedagogy of performance, inevitably, “I have ‘infected’ [audience members] with critical theories of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Calafell, 2012, p. 112). To echo Calafell’s

(2012) clause: “I do not seek to further Otherize or reify the image of the animalistic or monstrous woman of color; however, as someone who has been constructed through this trope I seek to interrogate, problematize, and disidentify with it,” *and* to wield my monstrosity on my own terms through performance. The messy, unruly, fragmented, and collaged nature of comedy, cuts, bits, my Asian racialization, and brownness *characterizes* a Filipina American experience. My unruly monstrosity is to become “subject, rather than objectified; one who expresses her own desires, makes a spectacle of herself, claims the power that comes from visibility in the public realm” (Rowe, 1995; Padva, 2006, p. 25).

I write this chapter (re)claiming my identity theorized through performance, and in search of explanations to the question of: what is the story, space, and theory that I create for myself (and Others) by recovering/reclaiming lived knowledge through storying a past, embodying my present, and performing possibilities for transformation, resistance, and transgression of cultural identity expectations? To do so, I call upon the *Wakwak* as one of the, “myths that serve to guide a community. Anzaldúa shared that myths are ‘usually what oppressed people use to express their experiences. They do it because they don’t have the avenues of openly talking about their experiences’ (Workshop Talk and *Llorna*, 7 March 1991)” (Calafell, 2015, p 56).

In this chapter, I document the bits of my performance that illuminate a Filipina American experience, theorizing the narrative points *in between* Wong and Alonzo’s comedy collaged as *unruly* showcases of my particular monstrosity. The point of *unruly* monstrosity refers to (1) comediennes as unruly women, and (2) in “citing cultural theories of liminality and dirt as well as theories of narrative,” Rowe (2017) “demonstrates how women are traditionally ‘emplotted’ in stories and how the unruly woman *disrupts* those plots” (p. 17). I consider the disruptions of my personal narrative among the performance as moments that “cut” through the



lines from Wong and Alonzo's stand-up comedy that make the collage of my performance and particular ethnic experience possible. Ultimately, I introduce the notion of *peminist performance* as a compositional strategy for auto/performance that enlivens the aims and goals of peminism, or Filipina feminism. Thus, peminist performance functions both *in* and *as* peminist praxis. I make this point by exploring an operational definition of peminist performance by noting four peminist principles that inspires the aesthetic form. Intertwined through my argument, I offer the bits of my script from which the theory of peminist performance unfolds. I then provide the script to the conspicuous aesthetic performance from which my theorizations emerge. The script "is both intertextual" (with the narratized theories in this chapter that triggered it and were triggered by it) and, "metatextual as a standalone piece" (Alexander, 2000, p. 105). Finally, I conclude by noting implications of introducing peminism to communication studies through the monstrosity of the *Wakwak*.

### **Towards an Operational Definition of Peminist Performance**

Melinda De Jesús (2005) best documents *peminism*, as a term "to describe a specific form of feminist theory rooted in the *Filipina American* experience—an experience very different from the implicit (and thus explicit) subject of white liberal feminism" (p. 4). De Jesús (2005) continues to concisely define *peminism*, stating:

*Peminism* describes Filipina American consciousness, theory, and culture, with the *p* signifying specifically *Pinay* or *Pilipina*, terms used in referring to ourselves as American-born Filipinas. It demarcates the space for Filipina American struggles against the cultural nationalist, patriarchal narratives that seek to squash our collective voice in the name of "ethnic solidarity." (p. 5)

Peminism and its synonymous forms,

describes Filipina American struggles against racism, sexism, imperialism, and homophobia and struggles for decolonization, consciousness, and liberation. *Peminism* thereby signifies the assertion of a specifically Filipina American subjectivity, one that radically repudiates white feminist hegemony as it incorporates the Filipino American oppositional politics inscribed by choosing the term *Pilipino* over *Filipino*. (De Jesús, 2005, p. 5)

Finally, and “most important, peminism is about loving ourselves and other Pinays, loving our families and communities [...] peminism is an inextricable part of our decolonization as a people: far from being a slighting of Filipino American men or Filipino American culture in general, attention to Pinay voices and perspectives demonstrates our commitment to the liberation of *all* Filipinos” (p. 5).

From De Jesús (2005) description of peminism and conceiving of “pinay power,” I discern four undergirding components of peminism. First, is that peminism is rooted specifically in the *Filipina American* experience. Secondly, as reflected in choosing *Pilipinx* over *Filipinx*, peminism aims for narrative autonomy in representation. Third, peminism is driven by love for self, family, and community. Fourth, what especially distinguishes peminism from its similarities with feminisms of color and Asian American feminisms, is peminism’s “gendered analysis of imperial trauma—the Philippines’ dual colonizations by Spain and the United States—and the articulation of Pinay resistance to imperialism’s lingering effects: colonial mentality, deracination, and self-alienation” (De Jesús, 2005, p. 5). While de Jesús is interested in peminism as a critical feminist theory, I resituate these four components on the stage to conceptualize how peminism might be aesthetically performed and operationalized as peminist performance.

## **Peminist Performance is Rooted in the Filipina American Experience**

*“I learned to perform with others at home. Family parties. My parents had no shame in trying to get me to perform with them. It was encouraged.”*

Karaoke parties, or karaoke at every gathering, are a typical and common experience for Filipino Americans. Singing with others is an indefinite characteristic of the Filipino American experience, but one that is frequently documented as part of our cultural practice. Balance (2016) summarizes participation in karaoke as, “performance art and social activity at house parties—to foreground its ability to generate alternative spaces of socialization and vocal pedagogy” (De Dios, p. 381). In karaoke, “voice and gesture,” as well as, “album covers and song titles [...] are borrowed from its former colonizers, both Spanish and American” (Balance, 2016, p. 60). Thus, “the Filipino voice,” enacts a, “brilliance at reproducing [its former] master’s voice,” metaphorically as, “musical mannequins—objects animated by always already outside forces, hollow reproductions derived from an American original” (Balance, 2016, p. 60). Such playful performances provoke serious consideration as “fantasy-productions.” Related to karaoke as rehearsal for grander vocal and embodied performances of American music, “the prevalence of Filipino American contestants on U.S. television singing competitions, such as *American Idol* and *The Voice*,” only strengthens the fantasy of cultural recognition on a national stage and equivocally so in American film, television, and online screen(s).

A plenitude of scholarship at the cross of Asian American studies, cultural studies, and communication notes how mediated performances are, “critical in the formation of national identities and cultural notions of citizenship” (Lopez, 2016, p. 7). The Philippines, especially, holds a saying summarizing its history with Spanish colonialism and American imperialism: “the Philippines spent over 300 years in a Spanish convent and 50 years in Hollywood.” American

imperialism on the Philippines, thus influencing Filipinos in America, is entangled in performance as media culture. As such, performance/s perhaps ought to be considered *in* the Filipinx American experience as a phenomenological orientation that we Pinays, “come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 543). The trajectory of Asian American media studies takes off with critiquing dominant discourses and ideological content; to analyzing Asian American driven contemporary independent alternative media; then, Asian American media studies in communication takes pause after discussing the ways in which “Asian Americans have mobilized to challenge mainstream imagery,” and is seemingly limited in *imagining* (media as) performance in the vein of media activism towards cultural citizenship (Ono & Pham, 2009).

An interdisciplinary approach reveals bits to imagining the future of Asian American studies, and Asian American media activism, at the intersection of communication studies. Shimizu (2016) writes of the theory in/of practice in Filipina American feminist filmmaking. In her piece, Shimizu (2016) similarly defines, “Filipina American filmmaking practice as an aesthetic of expression that emerges from concrete bodily experience,” that is needed, “in order to diversify how we understand what constitutes being American as well as what means to speak as a marginalized subject” (Shimizu, 2016, p. 271). Therefore, “as a subject, being a Filipina American can illuminate what it means to be included and excluded in the national narratives of American culture industries today” (Shimizu, 2016, p. 271). In the aspect of creation from experience, Shimizu (2016) delineates her, “coming into the work of film as expression formed by [her] experience as a Filipina American” (p. 271). First, her personal relationship with artistic mediums and poetry. Next, her education from University of California-Berkley that “gave [her] a context in which to become more sure-footed as a brown woman in the United States”

(Shimizu, 2016, p. 272). Finally, her “expression as a speaking subject [coming] to be shaped in American fantasy life,” lead her to re/claim the role behind the camera (Shimizu, 2016, p. 272). “My experience shapes my expression,” Shimizu (2016) concludes in articulating experience as the essence of Filipina American Feminist filmmaking. In the manner which filmmaking is a performance, Shimizu’s (2016) articulations suggest applicable ways in which peminist performance ought to also honor and take root in the Filipina American experience.

This, however, risks the limitations of the creative act of filmmaking which eventually becomes usurped as a cultural artifact and *object* of analysis. The story and the expression of *lived* experience risks objectification. Broadening the scope of filmmaking to the theories and methodologies of what performance studies has to offer is a way that peminism and peminist Performance challenges the reduction of experience and livelihood as something that can be understood concretely and objectively. Studying a particular Filipina (racialized gender) identity through, “performance, we might argue, poses different challenges than studying a supposedly ‘fixed’ text or a film. Even though we understand that texts change over time (different editions, folios, or translations can radically alter texts), and that the editing process can significantly reshape a film, the prevailing notion is that these cultural artifacts are stable and that performance is not” (Taylor, 2016, n.p.) As such, a Filipina identity in its performance, “changes constantly, depending on actors, context, and audience” (Taylor, 2016, n.p.). Performance makes possible for the dynamic, plural, mis/understandings of identity. More than a representation as a “map,” conspicuous performance poses opportunity for the person and their experience as “territory” to be acknowledged (Hawes, 1998). Moreover, “performance troubles the conceptual boundary that punctuates lived experience this way,” insisting that the audience not only hear the story (as an object of analysis) but also see and consider the subject and person (Gingrich-

Philbrook, 2006, p. 254). The bits and pieces stuck together from performance methods of conspicuous auto/performance, performance autoethnography, autobiographical performance, and personal narrative collaged requires noticing the performance as an object; the performer as subject; and the possibility of an interpretive, partial, understanding of an identity-contextualized in the present, and as a product of histories. Where peminism calls for scholarship and knowledge rooted in the Filipina experience, “experience is not scholarship,” rather, “performance links experience, theory, and the work of close critique in ways that make precise analytical claims about cultural production and consumption and expose how both culture and our claims are themselves constructed things, products of hearts and souls, minds and hands” (Hamera, 2006, p. 241).

Rooted in my Filipina American experience, I share my performance at NCA 2019 – a performance tracing a trajectory and orientation of an experience fated to the stage. By my doing and being, I embody the monstrosity particular to the Filipina body: mis/understood, new, chaotic, fractured, split. A new monstrosity performs in the form of the *Wakwak*, a monster uniquely leaky, grotesque, messy, broken, and dismembered. But peminist performance takes the risk of being misunderstood and new *because* the Filipina experience is to be misunderstood, unrecognized, messy, collaged, and made up by bits and moments influenced by colonialism and imperialism passing and passed. In regard to the decolonial ethos of peminism, Strobel (2005) articulates that, “decolonization is the ability to tell one’s story in a manner that makes sense and makes meaning out of all the experiences of the past. To locate one’s personal history within the history of the community is to find the relationship between the self, the nation, and narration [...] To tell one’s story is to allow the fragments of consciousness to be sutured and healed so that the [story] can be told its wholeness” (p. 32). I am the rice—the glue—the points in between

Alonzo and Wong that “sutures” and “heals” the fracturing and cuts of the *Wakwak* that are symbolic of a Filipina body and embodiment that make whole the monster into the form of a human: a subject.

### **Peminist Performance Aims for Narrative Autonomy in Representation**

*On screen, video and audio of a karaoke rendition of “Killing Me Softly” performed by The Fugees begins. I sing the first line:*

*“I heard he sang a good song, I heard he had a style.*

*And so I came to see him, to listen for a while”*

*I take a seat on a chair centerstage, embodying taking a seat as an audience to a speaker: a man. I continue singing along:*

*“And there he was, this young boy, a stranger to my eyes”*

*I stand up where the speaker would have been before me. I become him, and I continue singing:*

*“Strumming my pain with his fingers (one time, one time)*

*Singing my life with his words (two times, two times)”*

*In the role of the speaker, I begin to realize that he is not me, but that he has been telling my story. The audio begins to fade to away as I continue singing acapella, returning to the seat as audience:*

*“Killing me softly with his song*

*Killing me softly with his song*

*Telling my whole life with his words*

*Killing me softly with his song”*

*I become who I was at the start of the performance, toying with the microphone I repeat:*

*“Performance makes me nervous because it’s hard work, but my story is never going to be told by anyone but me”*

Gripping the prop microphone in rehearsal and during the performance, I embody the immediate truths of the performance’s opening line: “Performance makes me nervous because it’s hard work.” The difficulty of “work” with performance alludes to Madison’s (1999) assertion that, “performance is hard work,” especially, “in the ways when I enter into [performance], when it calls me forward shamelessly, across those hard-edged maps into spaces where I must go. Terrains that are foreign, scary, uninhabitable, but necessary” (p. 108). The stage, as the place of representation, a map – becomes inadequate for the entrance I make into the terrains of the self. “I must go to them to know myself more, to know you, more,” Madison (1998) continues (p. 109). It is exploration of that terrain that makes me nervous. I would rather perform someone else because I have the map for that. I know from witnessing the ease of assuming invisibility, the “success” of performing the role of more legible or recognizable ethnic/racial identities. In the 90’s it was Lea Salonga, a Filipina American performer who earned Tony Award winning role in *Miss Saigon* that would lead her to voice Disney Princess Jasmine and Mulan. In the 2000’s, the map was reinforced with Disney casting mixed-race Filipina American actors such as Vanessa Hudgens and LaLaine in roles suggesting Latinx American backgrounds, backgrounds that neither one claims. Such an issue, circles to Shimizu’s (2016) insistence for a Filipina American film making practice that casts Pinays in Pinay roles. Lest, Filipina American bodies/experiences become re-cast as a present absence, peminist performance may be the means to reckon with the exigency by giving, “testimony to absences—even as they manifest presence” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 20).



Park-Fuller's (2000) piece, "Performing Absence: The Staged Personal Narrative as Testimony" contains considerations about "1) speaking one's 'self,' 2) speaking the 'truth,' 3) speaking 'for' others, and 4) speaking 'with' others" in performed personal narrative as a testimonial act "to render the absent present and the present absent" (p. 23). These considerations are generative in thinking about feminist performance and the theorizing the performance of Filipina American identity/feminism from the praxis of testimony. Park-Fuller's (2000) use of the term "testimony" refers to, "a declaration of personal experience in the absence of that experience." (p. 22). Much like the characteristic cuts (spaces) between the fragments of the *Wakwak's* body; the bits in between Wong and Alonzo's media clips that present a typically absent representation of Filipina experience; testimony attends to presences missing. In such a way, testimony reaffirms Pilipina Performance's potential for resistance towards subjectivity and humanity through personal experience, for "in the process of telling, the performer's 'self' is reconstituted as a resisting, rather than a docile body," with "(relatively) unmediated" narrative authority (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26; Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 31). Given the assumption that personal experience is staging a personal "truth," aligned with testimony, I aim to use feminist performance to extend Park-Fuller's (2000) notions in the way narrative as testimony speaks the "truth," speaks "for" others, and speaks "with" others by theorizing from my performance.

First, I poke at the idea of truth. When I give testimony to my experience, it is truthful: I learned to perform at home, performance *does* make me nervous, and this *is* my story. I compose this performance with intention, drawing from mediated bits of Wong and Alonzo's stand-up comedies knowing that the genre will incite laughter, if not, it will evoke a response. After all, punchlines make a point, I hope to at least make a pedagogical point. In this way, I am integrating within my research the intentional act of using comedy, *anticipating* that the audience

might laugh even though, I also expect that conversely, “the audience member participates (or chooses not to participate) in the creation of those truths in subtler, less intrusive ways (by attending or not attending, silently assenting, [...])” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 27). The video bits of Wong and Alonzo in my performance incite laughter and I hear the chuckles from the audience as I embody bashfully declining my father’s invitation to sing with him. I am, “the writer who composes with a performance in mind composes for a listener/audience, and that intended audience (even if it’s only one’s self-reflection in an audience/critic’s role) impacts one’s discovery of truth and influences what and how it is told” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 27). Despite comedic intentionality, I recall the sound during my performance: laughter during an uncalled-for moment. Not inappropriate, but also misunderstood. It was during the bit that I sang a karaoke line from *Killing Me Softly*. I ask myself: “why?”

The audience has a role in my understanding of truths of myself and my identity through conspicuous aesthetic performance, and how I might theorize thereafter. The performance gleaned extra laughter that I had not anticipated, reminding me the comedic frame that had dipped in and out along the way. In identifying numerous “crises” in this project -- crisis of representation, crisis of identity, crisis of cultural citizenship -- as tragedy, I lose the lightness of survival learned from “the collective consciousness of Filipinos” where “dislocation is assumed to be a natural state. We have learned not to take our identity crises seriously. We have learned instead to laugh, and sing, and dance, for it seems that these are the only permissible ways of asserting an identity” (Strobel, 2005, p. 21).

Where peminist performance and peminism aims for criticality and non-neutrality, in its formation and operationalization, peminism and peminist performance ought to frustrate the critical, narrative, “I” – the “I” that gives an account of itself, the “I” that asserts its truth – and to

be (and remain) open to the “an ethical framework of fallibility and musement, mistakenness and possibility,” especially in its formative phase into emerging into recognition (Goltz, 2011, p. 398). “In comedy, the foolish grow wiser and experience is used in dialectic for the betterment of all” (Goltz, 2011, p. 398). Therefore, I poke at the idea of truth, not to rupture it nor to poke holes in it, but to tickle it, in hopes of a laugh, in hopes of highlighting moments for interrogation and a reflexivity.

Second, Park-Fuller (2000) writes of speaking *for* and *with* others in narrative as testimony. Speaking *for* others, Park-Fuller (2000) address the shortcomings of representation through presenting the absence of groups not on the stage. Meanwhile, in speaking *with* others, Park-Fuller (2000) recognizes “the audience as a participant in the personal narrative process reveal[ing] the interactive potential of the performance genre” (p. 38). I assert that feminist performance considers similar notions to Park-Fuller (2000), but differentiates itself from its focus, that can extend itself into the specific context of the Filipina experience and thus feminist performance.

I am self-conscious of the dottiness, the uniquely split, and fragmented experience and culture of the Filipino community. A “wild heterogeneity” that is often “at odds with the deraced coalitional politics of Asian American studies, which has its own brand of color blindness to the detriment of racially heterogeneous Asian American communities like Filipino America with its explicit in-group vocabulary and coding for race mixture” (See, 2009, p. 31). I draw a bit from everywhere to fill the gaps in Asian American theory that cannot describe my feminism. I find myself almost able to echo De Jesus’ (2005) statement that:

As an American-born Pinay trained as an Asian American and feminist scholar, I was very aware of the limited number of Filipina American resources I might draw upon in

my own research and teaching. My voracious reading of creative and theoretical work by US women of color—for example, Gloria Anzaldua, Barbara Christian, bell hooks, Maxine Hong Kingston, Chela Sandoval, Merle Woo, and Mitsuye Yamada – led me to conclude that Filipina American theorizing would exhibit similar themes and concerns. (p. 5)

Regardless, these feminist scholars, writers, and creators whose philosophies evolve from experience, were unknowingly speaking *for* other US women of color, like me, that were once/still absent from scholarly and creative circles. Experiencing this, as a developing feminist performance scholar, I am constantly sensitive of what claiming “narrative authority” may implicate, what I might unknowingly represent, what absences my presence bestows, what groups and individuals I might inadvertently be speaking *for*.

To cope with the consequences of speaking *for* others, “many performers have developed strategies to dialogue with absent groups within the structure of their presentations” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 33). I modestly mark the presence of other people (e.g. family) whose experience and life I might be speaking for in operationalizing and theorizing feminist performance. This is exemplified in the performance where:

*The video starts with text that reads: “Bit 2: Performance as Survival.” The audio is “Dahil Sa’yo” by Inigo Pascual. The text fades as the music continues for a few seconds before slowly fading. Synchronous with the video, I run to open an imaginary door to greet my family entering. I embody greeting them as I would at home, with hugs and the traditional Filipino “mano po” gesture of bringing each elderly relatives’ top of their hand to my forehead. I beckon them inside, inviting them in, and inviting them to sit, to eat...To the audience, I say:*

*“I learned to perform with others at home.”*

My family are *invited* in, to be representationally embodied on stage *with* me. The invitation into the home, and onto the stage, marks a turn from performing *for* others to (symbolically) performing *with* others. This differs from Park-Fuller’s (2000) articulations of performing *with* others where, because the performance is witnessed by an audience and gives visibility to a marginalized group, the visibility comes with engagement (p. 35). Rather, an invitation for others to perform *with* me, broadens the stage for a conversational and dialogical circle of scholarship and experience.

In my research and citations, I realize the ways in which my Filipina American experience clearly overlaps with themes from Asian American studies and Latinx studies, but *also* in Black feminist thought, in Indigenous knowledge, even queer studies. History reveals similar but not synonymous rhetorical mistreatment, and oppressions of Filipinx Americans to Indigenous Americans and enslaved Black Americans. Espiritu (2003) notes the ways white Americans “employ[ed] words like ‘wild and ignorant,’ ‘savages,’ ‘Apaches,’ and ‘Sioux’ to refer to the Filipino people. In the same way, white American soldiers in the Philippines used many of the same epithets to describe Filipinos as they used to describe African Americans, including ‘n\*ggers,’ ‘black devils,’ and ‘gugus’” Thus, Espiritu (2003) argues, “if we positioned Filipino/American history within the traditional immigration paradigm, we would miss the ethnic and racial intersections between Filipinos and Native Americans and African Americans as groups similarly affected by the forces of Manifest Destiny” (pp. 52-53). This history noted, I can recognize that Black feminist thought, as a product of this past may not have been written for me; nor was Alonzo’s stand-up comedy for me either; nor queer theory; nor many else. However, peminist performance, to become the collaged experience, theory, and practice that it

is shaping to be, *requires* the amalgamation of ideas and thought. Peminist performance, in its existence, is to make do with pre-existing scholarship to make itself present from its absence. Peminist performance, in its existence, is *to* perform with who and what is already there. Additionally, peminist performance, in order to make sense of its complicated past, present, and future, necessitates finding its spot among the circles of preexisting work from other US women of color, even if the intention of the circle was not meant *for* Pilipinas. Peminist performance seeks an invitation into the circle.

I imagine peminist performance to operate with the ethos and initiative of inviting others to speak with and perform with – an ethic that may be discouraged in other circles. My anxieties in looking for my spot among preexisting circles to speak with others awakens “a keen awareness of the smallness and specificity” of peminism “that necessarily and ironically accompanies this proliferation of difference, an order of particularity often illegible to outsiders or perceived as too narrow and hence valueless” (See, 2009, p. 32). At the same time, “the so-called specificity of Filipino America can become the powerful basis for an altogether other kind of worldliness,” that is far reaching into many circles (See, 2009, p. 32). Peminist performance has a potential for “worldly” understanding, given a spot, it is worthy of adding perspective to closed conversational circles. It is sensitive to claiming “narrative authority” in representing the circles it sits among, instead appealing for “narrative autonomy,” a responsibility for its voice and spot *among* the conversational circle it converses in.

### **Peminist Performance is Driven by Love for Self, Family, and Community**

*The performance closes with my last line:*

*“My story is never going to be told by anyone but me”*

*A beat passes, and I begin taking down performance props from the stage. Faintly in the background plays the audio of my mother singing an acoustic version of “I Started a Joke” by The BeeGees. The song is an outro. The lyrics:*

*“I started a joke which started the whole world crying*

*But I didn't see that the joke was on me oh no*

*I started to cry which started the whole world laughing*

*Oh, If I'd only seen that the joke was on me”*

I am at the kitchen table with my mom during a visit to my childhood home. Just as I had once sought her help with my book report collage, I explained to her my newest assignment: my dissertation. I explain how once again I was going to be collaging pieces of theory and story into a collage remake. I told her about the comedic slant I would be taking, the conspicuous performance I would be sharing, the pursuit of scholarly representation. My mom listened to me differently than when I told her about projects where I was analyzing and critiquing movies and television. She had a look of reservation. “Don’t make fun of your family,” she cautioned.

I knew her words of caution referenced accent. I am guilty of well-intentioned, but hurtful, over-correcting of my parents’ pronunciations. This, plus other experiences, has influenced my mom’s sensitivity to the way attitudes towards accents have been used against non-white groups in America. Unsurprisingly American media, especially in the comedic genre, has a history of othering via sonic difference. Further discussed in the following chapter, but simplified here: accent has the power to represent race and national origin beyond visual identification (Dave, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, the sonic and vocal difference, for certain groups, becomes the basis of the joke. To perform belonging, one must display the right “national affect,” the right “looks, feelings, demeanors, and sounds” (Muñoz, 2000, p. 69; McMahon,

2017, p. 204). Otherwise, groups might experience “affective difference,” referred by Muñoz as the ways that groups might “feel” exclusion and difference and “navigate the material world on a different emotional register” (Muñoz, 2000, p. 70). I come to the stage and this page with years of influence of an American (mis)education, recognizing that the affective difference that I feel is antithetical to the approach of peminism that says that, “most important, peminism is about loving ourselves and other Pinays, loving our families and communities” (De Jesus, 2005, p. 5). While the affective target is love, I am prompted to mark moments of negatively connoted feelings in the process of peminist performance and pedagogy and what it might glean for theory and practice.

I would love to embody the feeling of love – of self and community – just as I imagine that the *Wakwak*, in her moments of self-dissatisfaction, would rather embody the wholeness of a person. As a shapeshifter, she temporarily can, by putting herself together and covering the cuts that sever her body. Still, beneath what covers the fractures, she is the *Wakwak*. I would love to embody self-love and feel it too, but I find myself once again somewhere in between self-loathing and self-love – again, somewhere between whole states of being. Accents are integral to the Pilipina experience. Even in the naming of “peminism,” and claiming a “pinay” identity, is “a political and regional choice of self-naming [where] the *p* choice may appear to be pedantically semantic; [...] the renaming signifies the claiming of what is perceived to be the native *p* sound in resistance to the colonizer’s sound” (De Jesus, 2005, p. 13). It is said that “linguistically, the *f* sound derives from the Spanish colonizers that named the [Philippines], ‘Las Islas Filipinas’ (after Philip of Spain)” and that “the American takeover of the islands in 1898 reinforced the imposition of the *f* sound” (De Jesus, 2005, p. 13). I felt an internal disturbance on stage during



my performance, upon realizing that the audience's laughter could only be predicted to an extent, I felt the internal anticipation of a response to my family's accent.

*On screen are flashes of video clips at family parties: dancing, singing, cousins laughing.*

*"My parents had no shame in trying to get me to perform with them."*

*Video and audio of a karaoke version of "Feelings" by Morris Albert begins*

*"It was encouraged."*

*I embody my dad and mom gesturing at the chair to sing with them. Re-angling myself, I bashfully decline. I embody my dad with the karaoke mic and the way he lounges into the sofa using the chair. He sings with feigned sincerity along with lyrics. On screen is the color changing text of the song lyrics as I sing along with the deepened rasp of his voice and Filipino accent*

*"Feelings, nothing more than feelings,*

*Trying to forget my feelings of love."*

I continue speaking in a more pedagogical tone to the audience that the song and accent is, "the ballad that many older generations of Filipinos in the Philippines and its diaspora have sung for years in their showers and in karaoke parties. Feelings with a 'p,' as many Filipinos are prone to do when they pronounce the 'f' sound" (Manalansan, 2016, p. 2). The bit continues as I explain that:

*"When I perform or witness a performance, I can't help but feel. 'Feelings become 'peelings' [that allude to] the layers of affective and emotional matter and discourses that compose and shape Filipino experiences in the homeland and*

*in multiple migratory sites*<sup>11</sup> *My story, my family's story, the story of people at the margins – they're all stories of survival.*"

From the performance, I recognized that the affective and emotional matter that shaped my present experience was one of shame, not love...not yet. The anticipation of laughter, potential embarrassment, fear of exclusion, sonic difference, and the memories of over-correcting my parents pooled in shame. In rehearsal, the shame did not manifest. Only through conspicuous performance, where relationality with my audience was possible, did such affect arise. Conspicuous performance is a risk that stirs "the fear of exposure and judgment, withdrawal, the play of humility and authority, seeing and being seen (reddening and being read), self-mortification, self-exposure, self-questioning, penance, and abjection" (Werry & O'Gorman, 2007, p. 217). While love might be the goal and intention of feminist performance, renewed attention to affect through performance, in the *pursuit* of self-love, lends itself to thicker understandings of Filipina identity and a more robust understanding of the liminal feelings that undergird the process of being a feminist.

Regarding shame in performance pedagogy, Werry & O'Gorman (2007) write the following:

Shame, as feminist theorists have recently argued, flares up when interest, care, joy or a desired connection is inhibited or goes unreciprocated. As such, 'it reveals with precision our values, hopes, and aspirations ... reminds us about the promises we keep to ourselves' (Probyn x). Shame, then – the 'negative affect associated with love and identification' (Tomkins 139) – because it is ultimately linked to a desire for reciprocity and about 'so basic a function as the ability to be

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<sup>11</sup> (Manalansan, 2016, p. 4)

interested in the world' (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 97), can be both self-evaluative and self-transforming: it can help us to 'rethink how we wish to live in proximity to others' (Probyn xiv). (p. 217)

I imagine the shared sense of shame that comes and goes for myself and other Filipinx Americans. The shame rests somewhere in between an apathy for addressing a Filipinx identity and wholly and confidently loving the histories and bodies that shape the present community. Shame – because our becoming and cultural makings are inextricable from the lingering effects of a history of imperialism and colonization. Peminism thrives and coincides in/with performance – the process of it – to contend with the peelings and feelings of affective layers to undo colonial legacies towards radical love of community and self. Peelings become feelings, and feelings become peelings as I/we come realize the possibility in what might be shameful accents. The duality of the possibility that misunderstanding *feelings* as *peelings*, is coupled with the possibility that hearing *both* “*feelings*” and “*peelings*” moves towards to a more complex understanding of the layers of affective and emotional matter that shape that Filipinx experience.

### **Peminist Performance Resists Imperialism's Lingerin Effects**

Inspired by José Rizal, a hero of the Philippines for inspiring the Philippine Revolution against colonial Spain: “Know history, know self. No history, no self” is the enduring mantra each October during Filipino American History month. Knowing the Philippines' colonial legacy is key for understanding what motivates that peminist movement to stitch bits together and to trend toward finding connection, belonging, a spot among circles of scholars and creators. The act of collaging and reassembling story/experience is to make whole a fragmented body/story influenced by colonization/imperialism. Nadeau (2011) summarizes that, “Herminia Meñez in her path-breaking *Explorations in Philippine Folklore* (1996) theorizes that the aswang, a self-

segmenting vampire-like monster, is a product of Spanish colonization. She suggests that the early Spanish friars slandered and maligned the Filipina priestesses and shamans in an effort to negate the power of these women and institute a religious conversion of the island population. The friars transposed the shamans into witches so as to discredit them locally” (p. 254). I am the *Wakwak*, the monstrous body of the Filipina subject, split. The splinters and pieces are the effects of the already heterogenous differences (due to region, language, etc.) among Filipinos exacerbated by the various “cultural characteristics passed down through miscegenation from the Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Muslims, Americans and other cultural groups” throughout history (Strobel, 2005, p. 22). Still, Filipinx Americans have maintained the “ability to maintain a both/and sense of belonging to a homeland and to an adopted culture is born out of the holistic sense of self that enables one to live on the border” (Strobel, 2005, p. 23). As the term, peminist performance suggests, the linguistic turn to *peminism* versus *feminism* is also a return to indigenous consciousness that is becoming pervasive in peminism as a whole. A return “to Filipino language(s) to define who we are on our own terms, it is now possible to reconstruct ethnic identity. Thus, the study of *loob* (the core of being), *kapwa* (the shared inner self), *diwa* (psyche), and other indigenous concepts has facilitated the articulation of Filipino values, displacing the colonizer’s definitions” of a Filipinx identity (Strobel, 2005, p. 22).

### **Peminist Performance in/as Filipina Feminist Praxis**

Noting the defining characteristics of peminism as a *particular* and specific feminism, I offer the script that generated (and is generated by) the methodological contribution of peminist performance. In form of Filipina feminist praxis, *both* the script to follow, *and* the dissertation models peminist performance. Independent of one another, the script exemplifies the conspicuous aesthetic performance of peminism—peminist performance on the stage.

Meanwhile, peminist performance on the page, is modeled through the storied performance writing throughout this dissertation. In selecting and curating the storied bits specific to my racialized gendered identity, the stories and theories are rooted specifically in my Filipina American experience. Claiming narrative authority while also claiming *a* Filipina experience versus *the* (all encompassing) Filipina experience, provides the space for my narrative autonomy while leaving room for future Filipina American's representation, creation, and thought. In this dissertation, writing, narrating, and performing using accent, language, and dialects that reflect a particular experience is driven by love for self, family, and community. And finally, in resistance to imperialism's lingering effects, I offer on the page, a shared-self by addressing cultural, communal stories to talk about my experience. Considered *together*, the dissertation writing (exclusive to the page) and the conspicuous aesthetic performance (best understood on stage) provides a more robust example of peminist performance. Peminist performance's potential sutures the divide between stage and page. Here, I provide a script to the performance from which these ideas generate.

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### **Performance Script Surviving the Cut: Bits of a Filipina American Identity**

#### **Bit 1: Limen**

*The stage is set with 3 empty chairs facing the audience. There is a projector, and a screen behind the chairs. The performer is "off stage" hidden behind whatever door serves as an entrance/exit to the performance space. The performance begins when the video/audio plays. On screen, text fades in with "Bit 1: Liminalities." The audio/visual recording that follows plays, and the text fades to black<sup>12</sup>:*

Performance makes me nervous because it's difficult work.

*The performer is standing outside of USF's performance lab, the rehearsal space, keys in hand.*

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<sup>12</sup> Note: Indentations denote video/audio descriptions.

The door of the performance lab at USF is heavy and demands an excessive push to open it.

It's a small, embodied, act of struggle that reminds me that: "creativity flows not just from inspiration or innate talent, but, much more, from *hard work*."<sup>13</sup>

*The door is pushed open.*

Getting into these academic spaces is hard work for all bodies, but it is excessively difficult for bodies at the margins that often enter alone.

*A silhouette of the performer at the door of the performance lab/rehearsal space fades out. The video ends.*

*In continuation, the performer opens the door of the performance space.*

The first object that I encounter is the door stop.

It's a small slab of broken concrete.

An unassuming corner piece of something once whole.

It's thick, gray, and emblazoned in stenciled, red paint that form the word: "LIMEN"

LIMEN: "literally a threshold or sill, an architectural feature linking one space to another – a passageway between places rather than a place in itself."<sup>14</sup>

The concrete slab keeps the door open for me to enter the performance space

Limen. A border. A margin. A transitional space. A site of negotiation and struggle.<sup>15</sup>

"Personal narrative is liminal."<sup>16</sup>

*Especially* the stories of women of color, the queer theorists, the feminist performers, everyone and every story that helps me in the hard work of keeping the door open...so that *I* can enter.

*A video collaged of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo's stand-up performance "walk-ins" plays on the screen. As the comediennes approach their positions on stage, the performer also enters the performance space to center stage with a prop microphone. The performer enters collaging the embodiment (waving, smiling, etc.) of Wong and Alonzo and her own. As the video fades to black, the performer reaches center stage, in front of the chairs.*

Just outside of personal narrative, and storytelling, and theory; somewhere in between high-performance and low-performance; I found the stand-up comedy of comediennes of color like Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo at the limen.

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<sup>13</sup> (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007)

<sup>14</sup> (Shechner, 2013, p. 67)

<sup>15</sup> (Langellier, 1999)

<sup>16</sup> (Langellier, 1990, p. 138.)

*The microphone is grasped in front of the performer and cheekily looks down at where the microphone is being held.*

On the margins of stand-up comedy – a space typically reserved for men<sup>17</sup>.

*The microphone is held as if giving a formal address.*

On the margins of scholarly spaces – a space typically reserved for men.

I enter. *We* enter.

Performance makes me nervous because it's difficult work.

*The last line of this bit is delivered with apprehension.*

## **Bit 2: Performance as Survival**

*The performer runs stage right, “opening a door” to let guests in, greeting them with hugs and “mano.”<sup>18</sup>*

*As the performer “greet guests,” the audio plays “Dahil Sa’yo” by Inigo Pascual, and text fades in reading, “Bit 2: Performance as Survival.” The text and audio both fade out.*

I learned to perform *with* others at home. Family parties.

*The performer gestures to empty space on stage and to chairs as if family were there, and watches amused.*

*A brief video plays the jumbled sound of a party, the sound of singing, karaoke, and laughter.*

My parents had no shame in trying to get me to perform with them. It was encouraged.

*The performer gestures “no” to being handed a microphone, but finally gives in. Using the prop microphone, a karaoke video/audio of “Feelings” by Morris Albert plays on screen.*

*The performer sings along with the karaoke song playing, performing in her father’s voice and embodiment.*

Feelings, nothing more than feelings,  
Trying to forget my feelings of love.

*The performer switches roles to herself and how she sings along with her father.*

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<sup>17</sup> (Karlyn, 2017)

<sup>18</sup> Translation: A Filipinx gesture of respect shown by touching the back of the hand of an elder to the younger person’s forehead.

Teardrops rolling down on my face,  
Trying to forget my feelings of love.

*The karaoke video/audio fades away.*

It's, "the ballad that many older generations of Filipinos in the Philippines and its diaspora have sung for years in their showers and in karaoke parties. Feelings with a 'p,' as many Filipinos are prone to do when they pronounce the 'f' sound"<sup>19</sup>

Like dad.

*The following line is sung imitating her father:*  
Feelings, for all my life I'll feel it.

When I perform or witness a performance, I can't help but feel. "Feelings become 'peelings' [that allude to] the layers of affective and emotional matter and discourses that compose and shape Filipino experiences in the homeland and in multiple migratory sites"<sup>20</sup>

*Lyrics are sung:*  
Feeling, talking about my feelings "with" my dad was a way of sharing and empathizing.

My story, my family's story, the story of people at the margins – I all stories of survival.

Mom—a survivor in her own ways—her go-to karaoke song was Gloria Gaynor's, "*I Will Survive*."

Survival often meant performing—assimilating—to the kind of people and performances that were already there.

*Here, the performer looks to the audience and around her. "Fixing" herself to stand up straight, to hold the microphone before her, to straighten her clothes.*

No space for new bodies. No space for new stories.  
No radical bodies. No radical stories.

I would find myself in spaces performing *some* version of whiteness. Masculinity. White masculinity. Performing in a way that was killing *me*.

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<sup>19</sup> (Manalansan, 2016)

<sup>20</sup> (Manalansan, 2016)



*The video/audio begins, a karaoke version of “Killing Me Softly” performed by The Fugees fades on.*

*The performer sings along with the karaoke, eyeing an imagined “man” center stage, and sitting down to embody being an audience member to him.*

I heard he sang a good song, I heard he had a style  
And so I came to see him, to listen for a while

*The audio fades out, but the karaoke screen continues. The performer continues to sing the lines.*

*The performer embodies listening to the imagined speaker, incredulous to his presentation.*

And there he was, this young boy, a stranger to my eyes  
Strumming my pain with his fingers (one time, one time)  
Singing my life with his words (two times, two times)  
Killing me softly with his song  
Killing me softly with his song  
Telling my whole life with his words  
Killing me softly with his song

*The screen fades to black.*

*The performer holds the microphone with hesitation at first, but then grips it confidently.*

Performance makes me nervous because it’s hard work.  
But if I don’t tell my story, then somebody else will, and  
“My story is never going to be told by anyone but me<sup>21</sup>”

*Transition audio plays: “Dahil Sa’yo” by Inigo Pascual*

### **Bit 3: Fractured Expectations**

*The performer stands center stage, holding a clipboard. The audience becomes the “high school class, and the performer is the substitute teacher.*

I’m your substitute today for Mr. Riley. Before we get started, I need to call roll. Say “here” when I call your name. Avila? Chang? Dunn? Fong? Ha? Hoang? Le? Lee? “L” “E” E”?

*Performer looks up expectedly and marks each student present.*

Magalona?

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<sup>21</sup> (Cho, 2005).

*Pause, without looking up...*

Is that Italian?

*As the substitute teacher, the performer looks up, embarrassed.*

Nevermind. Nguyen! Where's Nguyen?

*On screen, text fades in with "Bit 3: Expectations." The audio/visual recording that follows plays a clip from Wong's Hard Knock Wife:*

Those people who gather outside of Asian women's cars while we're parking... Are so helpful and so racist at the same time. I'm always like, "Thank you. Thank you, but fuck you... For assuming correctly about me! I could not have done this without you!"

*The performer says the final bit of the joke with the audio/video/embodiment of Ali Wong as it fades to black, continuing...*

Thank you. Thank you, but fuck you... For assuming correctly about me! I'm not...Italian. I *feel* like I have always identified as Asian American because I've repeatedly been reminded that I am.

Being here today hints at the role that education, learning, and schooling has played in my life, shaping my professional identity, and inextricably so, my racial/ethnic identity too.

*On screen, the audio/visual plays a clip from Wong's Hard Knock Wife:*

*A lot of people also often ask me, "Ali, what on Earth do your parents think about your stand-up comedy?"*

*Now that's a very racially charged question, right?*

*Like, what they're really asking is:*

*"what do your oppressive Asian parents who beat you with the SAT book until your fingers bled from playing the cello think about your butthole-licking jokes?"*

*The performer repeats a bit of Wong's joke amended:*

What do your oppressive Asian parents who beat you with the SAT book until your fingers bled from playing the cello think about *this*?

My parents did not beat me with an SAT book. No. Everybody *else* did.

I learned that I was Asian American at school, during my favorite subject: lunch.

*Performer begins unpacking from a lunch box, however, instead of food items, books are pulled out.*

Mom and Dad did what they could, out of awareness and out of convenience, to ensure that I could avoid a "lunchbox moment," a shared experience among many Asian Americans growing up in the U.S.

I brought chicken nuggets with banana ketchup, spaghetti with hot dogs, sandwiches with SPAM hidden by white sandwich bread – food that was Filipino but assimilated just enough that nobody would ever know.

Still, a comment came in elementary school. The earliest reminder that I am Asian American. She came up to me, freckles and strawberry blonde hair.

*Performer embodies the classmate.*

“My dad told me that you’re smart because Asians eat *fish brains!*” She’d crinkled her nose at the mention of fish brains. Disgusted.

A microaggression on the basis of shaming culture, survival, and food.

“A microaggression that occurs when a degree of intelligence is assigned to an Asian American based on his/her race.”<sup>22</sup>

And yet...

*The audio/visual cuts quickly to a clip from Cristela Alonzo’s Lower Classy:*

“... you’re flunking math. Why can’t you be like your cousin Peggy?”

I often felt that the expectation of Asian American academic achievement, of hyper visibility in higher education, missed me.

“For Filipino American students, being subsumed under the institutional category of ‘Asian American’ ignores their colonial linkages to the educational system and the differential experiences of Filipino Americans within the modern American racial landscape.”<sup>23</sup>

*Lines are performed while packing up books back into lunch box.*

“This omission is due not only to the homogenization of over 40 different ethnic groups under the aggregate category of Asian Americans but also the incongruence of Filipino Americans with stereotypes that categorize Asian Americans, both writ large and within an educational environment, as overachieving foreigners and passive, apolitical subjects.”<sup>24</sup>

“I am called the maid of the world and the world has made me dirty”

This line in Filipina poet, Irene Duller’s, piece “speaks about the Filipina domestic worker in Hong Kong, Italy, Spain, France, Los Angeles, New York. Name a country or large city. She’s there.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007, p. 76)

<sup>23</sup> (Hernandez, 2016, n.p.)

<sup>24</sup> (Hernandez, 2016, n.p.)

<sup>25</sup> (Strobel, 2003, p. 46)

“Dear young Filipina-American poet, you are my sister. The maid of the world is our sister, too. How are we going to establish the connection that we have to one another? I, an academic; you, a young poet; and the maid—what is our common story?”<sup>26</sup>

*The audio/visual plays a clip from Cristela Alonzo’s Lower Classy:*

No joke, you guys. This was the fantasy. Fourth grade. I was gonna be the maid on their tour bus. And I was gonna clean things so good... that they were gonna fall in love with me! In my head, I thought they were gonna get on the tour bus and be like, “Oh, my God. Who made that bed right there?” You know what I mean? “Oh, my God.” “This tour bus is so clean. Who made that bed right there? Who made that bed right there? Who made that bed right there?” You know? Like, yes. Yes. And then I would say, “I made that bed.” And they would be like, “We love you now.” And I’m like... That was it. I was in fourth grade. Then 20 years later, I thought about that story, I looked back and I was thinking, “Why the fuck was I a maid in my own fantasy?” Like, even in my fantasy, I can’t give Latinos better jobs? And then I started thinking about it, and you know why? It’s because a lot of the women I knew, that’s what they did for a living. They cooked at restaurants. They cleaned houses. They came here and had those jobs to get a better life so that their kids didn’t have to do those jobs. And when I understood that, I realized that as a woman, I wanted to break that glass ceiling, you know? Yeah. But as a Mexican, I wanna clean that shit, too.

*As the video plays, the performer cleans the area, and gets ready to attend a conference.*

*The performer repeats as Cristela Alonzo:*

I realized that as a woman, I wanted to break that glass ceiling, you know?

But when I come to NCA. I feel *brown*. It’s very different.

*Performer goes between stage left and stage right, “entering” the caucus meetings and leaving.*

NCA 2015 was my first time attending in Las Vegas. I squirmed uncomfortably during the AAPI caucus, snuck into La Raza caucus, and then snuck out and sunk into a bench in the hallway, exhausted from the performance.

*Performer sits in the chair on stage.*

A *manong* was cleaning, emptying the garbage cans. In my view to the casino, older *manangs* were dealing cards.

*Performer embodies the manong, and herself in the brief dialogue:*

“Marunong ka ba’ mag-Tagalog?”

“Sorry, po. My parents only spoke to me in Visaya.”

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<sup>26</sup> (Strobel, 2003, p. 46)

“Ah! So you *are* Pilipina! What are you doing here?”

“I’m attending a conference. I’ll be attending a program to get my Master’s in communication, next year.”

“You’re doing good,” he told me, “you keep doing good.”

Limen: a site of negotiation and struggle. Limen. A hallway. Limen a place between racial categories and expectations. I was among other Filipinos in that liminal space.

“Since then, I’ve been begging for guidance, for a clue here and there—at least a beginning line. What is the Filipino ‘grand story’ from which we can draw to understand our situation as people? What is the story that offers meaning to a [Filipina] trying to reconnect with her cultural roots, to the domestic worker in Rome, to the mail-order bride in Norway, to the caregiver in Los Angeles, and to me, an academic trying to understand through the lens of politics and history?”<sup>27</sup>

*Transition into the next bit, audio of Ruby Ibarra’s “Us” fades on.*

#### **Bit 4: Making Do & Collage**

*The performer sets up the scene during the video clip: a collage of bits from Wong’s Baby Cobra, and Hard Knock Wife, and Cristela Alonzo’s Lower Classy. The bits all mention stories of their mothers.*

*The final clip is from Cristela Alonzo’s Lower Classy, and cues the performer to finish setting up the chairs for the bit:*

I talk a lot about my mom because I feel like when we talk about immigrants... we never really give them a heart or a soul. And I wanted people to know the story of my mom and know that she was a real person and she was like that, and that she went through a lot so that I could be here tonight. That’s why I do it.

*The video/audio fades out.*

Mom taught me to collage.

*Performer embodies herself as a young girl in the bit.*

On one occasion, she watched me pulling out crumpled pieces of colored-in paper shapes and magazine cuttings as I groped around the bottom of my messy backpack for other loose pieces.

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<sup>27</sup> (Strobel, 2003, p. 46)

The assignment was a book report in the form of a collage.

“What are you looking for? Why didn’t you glue this together at Grandma’s before your dad picked you up?” my mom asked me as I spread more paper clippings on the small table. It was a mess.

“Grandma doesn’t have glue at her house,” I informed her, “and I can see the tape if I use that.”

*Performer takes on the role of her mother...*

She sighed, “you know, my mama and papa couldn’t afford to get us school supplies when we were little. We had to make do with what we had. We would use leftover rice to stick paper together,” she showed me pressing flat a few warmed grains of rice between her fingers, pressing it onto the back of a magazine cutting and onto the assignment paper.

*Performer performs her younger self...*

“But we have glue somewhere!” I said while dashing to my room for a glue stick. I finished the assignment with a glue stick to paste around the few cut-outs attached with the rice. When I was finished, the magazine cuttings stuck to the page with glue lay relatively flat but rippling a little as a reaction to the sticky substance. The pieces stuck on the paper with rice, however, were slightly mounted and they casted a slight shadow on the paper below it. It was textured, felt, embossed, heightened, emphasized, and dimensional.

I stopped asking my mom for help with my homework when I was about ten years old. I started asking my mother for help with my homework again in 2017, during my second year of my PhD program.

I would ask her about existentiality, identity, and survival.

Mom taught me to collage, how to make do with fractured pieces of my gendered, racial ethnic identity.

The kitchen table, the story of cooked rice, and my mother’s continuous help in accomplishing my schoolwork helped me to get here. My story is a return to the kitchen table, a return to the making and art of collage and where I go from here.

## Bit 5: Collage as Survival

*Transition between bits is audio of “Us” by Ruby Ibarra. The screen fades on the text, “Bit 5: Collage as Survival,” and both the audio and visual fade out.*

*The performer begins before the audio fully fades*

I’m here, from the limen, creating a piece, a space, and a spot I can wholly enter into.

Performance makes me nervous because it’s hard work.

Performance is survival, and survival is hard work.

My history, experience, and acts for survival is messy, fractured, and scavenged. Performing collage is “gradually healing ourselves, mitigating and eventually terminating the fractionalization and fragmentation that result from the divisive meanings applied to the economic, social, phenotypic, language, and nativity differences among us”<sup>28</sup>

*Collaged visual of Wong and Alonzo walking off stage begins to play on the screen in the background.*

*Faintly in the background plays the audio of my mother singing an acoustic version of “I Started a Joke” by The BeeGees. The song is an outro. The lyrics:*

*“I started a joke which started the whole world crying  
But I didn’t see that the joke was on me oh no  
I started to cry which started the whole world laughing  
Oh, If I’d only seen that the joke was on me”*

Collage. Collaboration. Knowing who I am, seeing who I am. Expanding the borders of family, collaging pieces larger, bits bigger, widening the circle of understanding, belonging...it is where we go from here. My story is never going to be told by anyone but me.

*As the final lines are said, the screen shows the performance lab door closing. The audio is “Dahil Sa’yo” by Inigo Pascual.*

*The performer walks off.*

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## Shapeshifting: Implications and Conclusion

This chapter has introduced to performance in communication studies, the operationalization and goals of what might be considered peminist performance. For peminist

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<sup>28</sup> (Root, 1997, p. xi)

performance to take form, the performance should ignite the goals and aims of feminism: (1) to be rooted in the Pilipina experience; (2) for Pilipinas to have narrative autonomy in representation; (3) to be driven towards love for self, family, and community; and (4) resisting imperialism's lingering effects. In articulating this form of feminist performance, I have also shared and outlined the points in between the media bits of stand-up comedy collaged during my performance. These points in between become the moments from which a Pilipina identity and feminist performance can be theorized from. The monstrosity of the Filipina monster, the *Wakwak*, was used as a callback and metaphor for what feminist performance enlivens on stage for the embodiment and bodily performance of a Pilipina. As a shapeshifter, the *Wakwak*, has the magical power to pass the form of a human -- a subject -- to walk among the people who imagined her threatening-form and difference. In this conclusion, I take the opportunity to shapeshift as the *Wakwak* to the end of considering the implications for performers and audience members of feminist performances, and Filipinas and non-Filipinas alike.

### **Implications of Feminist Performance for Non-Filipinxs**

Precarious is the power of the *Wakwak* to shapeshift into a human form. The human form here is akin to an orientation towards whiteness. Recalling the Philippines' history of colonization, the orientation towards whiteness unfolds from a world made white. I cite from Ahmed's (2007) work on the phenomenology of whiteness where,

The corporeal schema is of a 'body-at-home'. If the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness. As Fanon's work shows, after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world 'white', a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individual's arrival. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism



makes the world ‘white’, which is of course a world ‘ready’ for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. (pp. 153-154)

Where shapeshifting into a human form is within reach for the *Wakwak*, it can be argued that an orientation towards whiteness is also within reach for Filipina Americans as a learned performance through a history of colonization and years of an American white-centered education. This is performed on stage where I easily embody moments of presumed white masculinity. In these moments, I perform as the stand-up comedian with the phallic power of the microphone, and the academic researcher with the gaze of whiteness as the unacknowledged norm. As the *Wakwak*, I shapeshift into this form anticipating questions of applicability to white-non-Filipina creators, scholars, and performers. I have noted in another section of this chapter for both the specificity and worldliness of peminist performance that connect with experiences resonating among other groups, and I aim to suggest use beyond.

The late Dr. Dawn Mabalon of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) said that, "history is *tsismis*<sup>29</sup> with footnotes." With the FANHS' dedication to storied histories, Mabalon's quote aligns with the storied experience-basis of peminist performance. We all have significant stories to tell, and in sharing, we *tsismis* among other Filipinxs. As written in this chapter, collaging stories among other feminist scholars of color means gossiping among us too. From the perspective of a shape-shifting *Wakwak*, the comparison of shared experience and stories, to gossip, presents a pedagogical opportunity for white-non-Filipina audience members. If peminist performance in/advertently prompts *tsismis*, it works alongside Ratcliffe's (2005) redefinition of eavesdropping for white-non-Filipinas as a mode of rhetorical listening where its moves include: "choosing to stand outside...in an uncomfortable spot...on the border of

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<sup>29</sup> Translation: "gossip" similar in pronunciation and origin to the Spanish, "chismes"

knowing and not knowing...granting others the inside position...listening to learn” (p. 104-105). Ratcliffe (2005) continues to state that eavesdropping in this form “emerges not as a gendered busyboddiness but as a rhetorical tactic of purposely positioning oneself on the edge of one’s own knowing so as to overhear and learn from others and, I would add, from oneself” (p. 105). In tracing her arrival to this function of eavesdropping, Ratcliffe (2005) also notes the “common dictionary definition [of eavesdropping] is ‘to listen secretly to the private conversations of others’ (*Webster’s New World*)” (p. 104). *Tsismis*, here, is not necessarily private. There is an understated invitation for outsiders to the conversation to listen to peminist performance for its pedagogical potential, with the always-present recognition that a bit from the conversation may provide the openings for a spot among the circle.

### **Implications of Peminist Performance for Filipinxs**

Other than representation, recognition, and cultural citizenship, another implication *for* Filipinas of peminist performance and its renderings in this chapter, is to consider the risks in ability to shapeshift into a human form. Again, the human form here is a form with the power to construct Others in relation to itself as “monstrous.” Taking Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) postmodernist stance, “whiteness, then, in all of its manifestations, is embodied racial power” and “the visible uniform of the dominant racial group. Therefore, all actors socially regarded as ‘white’ [and] ‘near white’ – receive systemic privileges by virtue of wearing the white—or virtually white—outfit” (p. 271). He continues stating that “this explains [...] why ‘not-yet-white’ ethnic immigrants (Roediger 2002) historically strove to become white as well as why immigrants of color always attempt to distance themselves from dark identities (blackness) when they enter the United States’ racial polity (Bonilla-Silva 1997, Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1999)” (p. 272). Based on Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) theorizations on race and power, I caution peminist

performance practitioners and Filipinas of the power to deliberately shapeshift towards whiteness.

Bonilla-Silva (2003) concludes with forecasting the formation of a “new-racism” characterized by “color-blind racism” (p. 271). It is argued that the U.S. will develop a tri-racial system of categorical whites, honorary whites, and collective blacks upholding the dominance of whiteness via four frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Under Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) theorizations, Filipinxs are members of the “collective black” and that its members may “strive to position themselves higher on the racial totem pole based on degrees of proximity or closeness to whiteness” (p. 282). The *mestizaje* of Filipinxs, “a term used to describe the race mixture of Spanish and indigenous blood that is prevalent in Latin America and the Philippines,” is also “simultaneously a fortunate and unfortunate consequence of colonialism” that shapes present Filipinx identities (Otalvaro-Hormillosa, 2005, p. 285). Mestizaje Filipinxs, and the historically consequential miscegenation, subject Filipinxs to easy slippage in and out of racial/ethnic categories. Akin to Gaga Feminism’s “scavenger feminism that borrows promiscuously, [and] steals from everywhere,” peminism’s collaging risks creating an amalgamate that, if used uncritically and without care, flattens difference into sameness (Halberstam, 2012, n.p.). Care must be taken to showcase the bits that makes peminism what it is, to avoid becoming subsumed and used as a tool towards the colorblind logics that peminism critiques. Against colonial amnesia, peminist performance must undertake remembering the possibilities and limitations of its status as a “monster” similar to the *Wakwak* regardless of its desire for human-ness and a proximity to whiteness.

## Collective Implications of Peminist Performance

Used *with* critical care, peminist performance has its utility beyond performance studies and Filipinx American studies into critical inter/cultural studies and more. Beyond the aesthetic, peminist performance pedagogically introduces an understanding of Filipina identities that poses ways of embodying multiculturalism and the importance of learning self by learning from Others. Peminist performance highlights the points at which the collective meet. In line with the aforementioned goals and ethic of peminist performance from peminism as a critical cultural theory that emphasizes (1) roots in the Filipina experience; (2) narrative autonomy in representation; (3) love for self, family, and community; and (4) resisting imperialism's lingering effects, the next chapter introduces critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy. *Kapwa*, is a precolonial Filipino value, that situates the self among Others, and elaborates on collaboration, collectivism, and solidarity. By collaging comedic bits in peminist performance, critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy activates a solidarity of shared experience between Filipina Americans among other first-generation American women of color while maintaining the uniqueness of the personal narrative. These findings encourage us to consider the multiplicity of ways that ethnic identity is seen, read, embodied, and performed within different contexts that is asserted through knowledges challenging the lingering effects of imperialism and colonialism.

## CHAPTER 4

In continuation from the ideas developing from Peminist Performance, I introduce critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy. Connected to the aims of peminism and peminist performance, *kapwa* is introduced as an enduring precolonial virtue/worldview held by Filipinxs that refers to one's connection and unity with others. Joining *kapwa* to critical performance pedagogy provokes questions of the larger pieces collaged to form a Pilipina identity through peminist performance. Critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy solicits a way for peminists to listen to the issues, topics, and experiences of other women of color, and for the points of entry for collaboration, solidarity, and accountability.

### **Inside Jokes from The Outside**

*I don't do as many jokes about my pussy anymore because my pussy...is gone. It's gone. Physically it's quite intact because I had the C-section, but emotionally and spiritually...Ghost in the Shell. Ghost in the Shell, it's an Asian character being played by Scarlett Johansson.*

I struggle to remember the joke I heard from the hallway, just that it struck me as insensitive on the basis of race, or perhaps gender, perhaps both, and that it was not really a good joke. I found myself jarred by the jest, and irresponsible. The look of insult on my face was enough for the jester to tell me that, "it was just a joke! *Lighten up!*" Lighten up. The reason the joke had landed was already because other than me, there was no "lightening up" from the "sea of whiteness" prevalent (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35). Lighten up. I was being asked to Ghost-in-the-Shell myself, to ultimately "whiten up" my humor, to practice getting "used to inhabiting

whiteness” of the hallways, and of the classrooms (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35). It was a reminder that I did not entirely belong, though if I *tried*, I could at least laugh from the hallway with the inner circle. As a Filipina, an Asian American, a brown one at that, I find myself like many other women of color who “at the Borderlands of education and outside the circle of what mainstream American academia considers acceptable scholarship” (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 230).

Here, outside, we have our own inside jokes and knowledges. We feel how “we all share common lived experiences of visceral exclusion from education in general and higher learning in particular” (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 230). Many of us share the encounters of being targeted by the antagonistic wordplay of, “‘lighten up,’ we are told with friendly punches on the arm. ‘Why so angry?’ we are asked with smiles” (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 236). Thus, understanding this, moving towards the possibilities of “[decolonizing performances] depend on the very possibility of narratives of inclusiveness,” however, as the narratives currently exist “fails to connect us beyond simplistic notions of Us-Them exactly because they continue to be written from disembodied theoretical perspectives” (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 234). Moreira & Diversi (2011) continue to argue that “to achieve this utopia [of decolonizing performances] we need to advance scholarship and teaching that elevate visceral experience of oppression above sophisticated theories about oppression thought out in the relative comforts of ivory tower voyeurism” and towards a “both/and approach where the bodies marked by systemic exclusionary experiences participate in the composition of the decolonial imaginary (Pérez) as makers of transformative knowledge, not simply as exotic subjects of theory, research, and educational texts—all the while adding missing lived experiences to narratives of possibility about a more inclusive sense of Us” (p. 234).

I quote Moreira & Diversi's (2011) summary that:

The call to performance in the human disciplines has already been made (Denzin, "Performance", "Emancipatory", "Critical"; Alexander, "Performing", "Performance"; Holman Jones), and so has been the pedagogical turn in performance studies (Garoian 6; Pineau 130; Hill 142-43; to name a few). Much has been written about these schools of thought. Not trying to reinvent the wheel, but to situate our own selves in this ongoing dialogue, we want to show our own understanding of this model. (pp. 236-237)

Situating the self in this ongoing dialogue is the main purpose of this chapter. Not only to contribute to the diversification of experience and topics in performance studies, communication studies and cultural studies, but also to respond to key intercultural urgencies in addressing the crisis of representation (in mainstream academia, media, etc.) and theorizing identity. My questions and responses here extend the previous chapter's recurring question of "what is?" being Filipina American, to consider "how is?" a Filipina American identity working within culture as a liminal identity influenced by colonization, immigration, and visual racial markers (Durham, 2014, p. 39).

The Filipina American body is a shapeshifter slipping in and out of categories further and closer from whiteness, marked by brownness, il/legibly Asian, and into and out of the category of the "collective black" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Filipinxs were once referred to by the late founder of the Filipino American National Historic Society (FANHS), Fred Cordova, as the "Forgotten Asian Americans," as "seldom accurately situated in history or cultures and are therefore often misinterpreted." The disruptive embodiment of Filipinas challenges categorization, but also requires thoughtful "[focus] on the body, and the experiences of the writer," using "critical performance pedagogy [to bring] a reflective, embodied presence to

autoethnography” and various modes of autoperformance (Denzin, 2010, p. 63). The Filipina body’s shapeshifting slippages requires reflective and reflexive consideration as “it leads to an examination of the ways in which everyday language and the ideologies of culture are used to instill compliance” and resistance (Denzin, 2010, p. 63).

As Filipinxs move towards intentionally representational “visibility” and recognition, it becomes equally important to consider representational implications. Emphasizing the question of *how* a Filipina American identity is working within culture is to also consider how my everyday performance of intersectional identity as a first-generation Filipina American disciplined or empowered, by the mediated stand-up comedy narratives of Wong and Alonzo. Secondly, how does a collaged personal narrative performance interrogate, reinvent, and intervene in the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo? Stated otherwise, whereas the last chapter locates the self as *present* among the constellation of points, this chapter locates *where* Filipinas might be among other women of color in the cultural constellation or landscape.

In this chapter, I introduce *kapwa*<sup>30</sup>, an enduring precolonial Philippine virtue/worldview held by Filipinxs that refers to one’s connection and unity with others. Joining *kapwa* to critical performance pedagogy rouses questions of the larger pieces collaged to form a Pilipina identity through peminist performance. I posit critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy as a way for peminists to listen to the issues, topics, and experiences of other women of color, and for the points of entry for collaboration, empathy, and solidarity. This chapter exemplifies my own performative listening to the stand-up comedy of Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo for what they might teach me about the conversation I enter into, and the collective issues we face as first generation, immigrant daughters, in predominantly white masculine spaces. In continuation with

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<sup>30</sup> *Kapwa* is Tagalog and the most readily documented form of the concept. My family’s dialect and my experience of the term was in Visaya/Cebuano as *buot*.



prior chapters, I perform and write here comically not necessarily to be funny – instead, with the “implicit optimism of comedy” (Stott, p. 123). The optimism that critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy might lead to positive political action, and a consideration for the self among others. I am optimistic that we might be able to learn the *capacity* to extend beyond feeling empathy, solidarity, and belonging within our circles. From the perspective of Kusama’s art, I am optimistic that we might come to know that our spot, points, and circle is part of a larger installation – a larger collective. My optimism is aligned with a politic of hope, where *kapwa* epitomizes “imagin[ing] new ways of doing what we do” (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 15).

### **Routine<sup>31</sup>: Introducing *Kapwa***

*Kapwa*’s documentation comes from the Virgilio Enriquez (1994), the founder of Indigenous Philippine Psychology otherwise known as *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. Enriquez (1994), translates *kapwa* to “self in the others” stating that:

[...] the Filipino word *kapwa* is very different from the English word ‘others.’ In Filipino, *kapwa* is the unity of the ‘self’ and ‘others.’ The English ‘others’ is actually used in opposition to the ‘self’ and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others (Enriquez, 1992, p. 52).

Then, from Asian philosophy, Reyes (2015) summarizes *kapwa* as,

[...] literally translated as ‘other’ or ‘other person’ but it is in a way untranslatable into English. This is because it is embedded in an entirely different worldview and web of meanings unique to Philippine culture and history—namely, a Southeast Asian tribal and animist culture mixed with Spanish Catholicism. It is tribal and Christian at the same

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<sup>31</sup> To refer to *Kapwa* as a “routine” is to play on the comedic term but is also meant to refer to the performative repetition of the worldview among Filipinx.

time. *Kapwa* has therefore been translated by local scholars as ‘shared self’, ‘shared identity’, or ‘self-in-the-other’ (p. 149).

Ultimately, *kapwa* is a pre-colonial Filipino concept that has diminishingly endured in the present as a core value, worldview, virtue, and ethic “dedicated to strengthening and preserving human relationships” (Reyes, 2015, p. 148). Enriquez (1994) states that “a person starts having *kapwa* [...] because of his (or her) awareness of shared identity,” thereby finding “unity, connection, or oneness with other people—regardless of ‘blood’ connection, social status, wealth, level of education, place of origin, or other factors typically used to separate or distinguish people” (Enriquez, 1994, p. 45; David, Sharma & Petalio, 2017, p. 48).

I argue that there are relevant and meaningful reasons to consider *kapwa* as part of feminist practice, as critical inter/cultural theory, and in humanistic endeavors. First, as feminism moves from monstrosity towards recovering the wholeness of personhood, *kapwa*, entails a similar duty to personhood through connection. David, Sharma & Petalio (2017) summarize Enriquez’s (1994) iteration that:

*Kapwa* is the essence and the foundation of the Filipino value system and that this core value determines the extent to which a person is a person or a human (personhood or *pagkatao*). Not having *kapwa* is the worst a person can be because they have now lost their personhood or *pagkatao*. Thus, *kapwa* is the most important value that Filipinos must understand, have, and display, as it is what makes a Filipino a Filipinos, and what makes a human a human (*pagkatao*) in the Filipino worldview (p. 48)

Connectedly, Bernardo and Monberg (2019) stress “this is why it is so critical to deepen knowledge of self and formation of indigeneity [...] there’s an ‘attunement’ that happens within a shared sense of self” (p. 87). Such an idea links with a critical inter/cultural perspective, where

understanding and being *kapwa* is to challenge the mere “narrow [definition] of reciprocity as give and take [of] academia align[ing] itself with the extractive measures of capitalism as well as the violent history of indigenous erasure” (p. 87). As a critical and peminist notion and praxis, *kapwa* brings cohesiveness and indigeneity to a fractured Filipino culture exacerbated from histories of colonial and imperial forces. Therefore, it is critical in the way it challenges normalized American (academic) culture, and intercultural in the way that it may work within and among cultural American subsets.

### **Critical *Kapwa* Pedagogy**

I learned *kapwa* early, in my family’s dialect as *buot*. I did not understand its direct English translation, nor did I connect the dots in how *buot* would form my worldview and everyday being. I just knew that when I helped my grandmother unprompted, she would endearingly remark how I was *buotan*. This remark coming from my grandma always significantly pleased my parents, as though raising a daughter who was *buotan* was a proud accomplishment. I also remember the context of my mother scolding me, “*pag buot!*” on my most troublesome days. The context and meaning of my mother’s exclamation varied from “be good!” or “cooperate!” or “listen!” From *buot*, I learned about *kapwa*. From *kapwa* I learned about my helpfulness to others, benevolence, and a demand for cooperation and listening.

From education, Maharaj Desai (2016) writes about critical *kapwa* pedagogy. Stated by Desai (2016), “Critical *Kapwa* pedagogy is about individuals and communities coming together to heal themselves. It is about reviving and rearticulating the most fundamental indigenous Filipina/o value of *kapwa*—a deep connection with and commitment to community” and is based on “three pillars—Humanization, On Becoming Diwa(ta), and Decolonizing Epistemologies—intersect[ing] with one another to destroy hegemonic ideological structures that perpetuate

colonial domination while they also empower the individual to operate outside of those hegemonic ideological structures” (p. 37). In this section, I will briefly review the three pillars pertinent to critical *Kapwa* pedagogy and set the premise for critical *Kapwa* performance pedagogy (CKPP) situated in performance in/as communication theory.

Critical *Kapwa* pedagogy ultimately seeks “to uncover the many layers and aspects of the value of *kapwa* and its application for Filipina/o Americans as well as for all people” (p. 36). This pedagogy is based on three pillars, the first pillar being humanization. Desai (2016) states that, “humanization through *kapwa* aims to reinforce an examination of and understanding of human interactions through multiple lenses to see how people are affected by these various oppressive ideologies. Humanization must not only be practiced on other people, but also, more importantly on the self” (p. 37). Humanization through critical *kapwa* pedagogy echoes feminism’s trend to reclaim personhood. Moreover, critical *kapwa* pedagogy specifically takes a turn reminding us to practice humanization on ourselves. The second pillar is referred to as “becoming *Diwa(ta)*.” The phrase “is a combination of two words that are found in many Philippine languages – *diwa* or spirit and *diwata* or deity” (Desai, 2016, p. 37). In critical *kapwa* pedagogy, “in order to heal the disconnects between mind, spirit, and body, *diwa(ta)* is a return to seeing the self as a spiritual being that is connected to different realms” (Desai, 2016, p. 37). This pillar is but another way of suturing multiple disconnects and collaging to make whole. To further contextualize *Diwata* within American culture, a similar “central crisis, as defined by American Indian pedagogy, is spiritual, ‘rooted in the increasingly virulent relationship between human beings and the rest of nature’ (Grande 2000:354)” (Denzin, 2003, n.p.). *Diwata* connects the individual to “something larger.” This second pillar leads to the intersection with the third pillar—decolonizing epistemologies. Desai’s (2016) summary of this “requires us to take aspects

of indigenous spirituality and ideology and rearticulate them in order to serve as a counter-hegemonic narrative for survival” (Desai, 2016, p. 37). Thus, critical *kapwa* pedagogy aims to “assist students and the community in redefining themselves, [with] access to new tools to help articulate a renewed sense of being and self-worth” (Desai, 2016, p. 37).

### **Critical *Kapwa* Performance Pedagogy**

*Pag buot!* I have internalized *kapwa*, learning performatively through the years from family. Desai’s (2016) ideas of critical *kapwa* pedagogy provides the initial bits for what might be critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy. I couple critical *kapwa* pedagogy with performance because of the expanding possibilities of *kapwa* going wherever performance goes—trickling beyond the realm of the educational classroom and education theory. *Kapwa* can be learned *and* taught interpersonally, performatively, from media, from communication in/as aesthetic performance, texts, and more. Moreover, *kapwa* is a way *of* learning and listening from “pedagogy-as-performance” (Denzin, 2003, n.p.). The way I am inclined to extend critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy from critical *kapwa* pedagogy is two-fold. First, to iterate and remind of the utopian view of *kapwa*; and second, to take an additional turn from the collective aspect of *kapwa* back to the self as human, and the role we take among others.

### **Utopia: Imagining Solidarity**

“*Pag buot!*” Is the reminder that I *can* be buotan, but that I am *not* buotan. Even my grandmother’s praises that I *was* buotan were contextual, momentary, and fleeting. *Kapwa* comes and goes. I have learned *kapwa*, and yet *kapwa* struggles to survive in a capitalist, colonial, individualist American culture. The more “white American” I perform, the less *kapwa* I am considered to be. The less *kapwa* I perform, the less Filipina I am considered. In the postcolonial state, *kapwa* is always in flux, coming and going. In the imagined decolonized state,

*kapwa* is embedded into being, doing, and understanding. As it stands, I understand *Kapwa* as an aspirational state – a utopia – an un/fortunate “no place” that can only be worked towards (Dolan, 2010). Critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy fits within the framework imagined by Dolan (2010), who writes:

It is these fleeting glimpses of a better world “utopian performatives,” which point toward a corrective vision of social life in the "doing" of certain elements of performance. These utopian performatives work primarily at the level of affect. That is, my concern is not with performance about utopia (since few such texts even come to mind). I'm interested in utopia as a placeholder for social change, as a "no place" that the apparatus of theatre - its liveness, the potential it holds for real social exchange, its mortality, its openness to human interactions that life outside this magical space prohibits - can model productively (p. 496).

I want to emphasize Dolan's (2010) point that is applicable to critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy: that it works primarily at the level of affect, that the utopia of critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy is a placeholder for social change, and that it models human interactions beyond the performance stage.

Critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy functions unequivocally at the level of affect. Feeling with others, or empathy, is a marked interest in performance studies, defined as the process by which one “understand[s] and feel[s] with another,” and is reached through the doing, duration, and embodiment asked of performance (Pelias, 2019, p. 132). Meanwhile, feeling as affective and emotive is a marked interest in cultural studies (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed (2004) theorizes affective economies at work, as feelings or “emotions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)” (p. 119). Feelings

can be shared and people unionized, by finding solidarity through affect. The utopian solidarity of *kapwa* challenges the splintered, and fractured, schisms of indifference by welcoming affect. Shared affect, as solidarity, is a necessity for social change. The alignment of Friere's (2014) pedagogy of solidarity and critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy recognizes the role of imaginative, affective community transformation as a part of social change. "The critical imagination is radically democratic, pedagogical, and interventionist" states Denzin (2010), who continues to reflect that the critical "imagination dialogically inserts itself into the world, provoking conflict, curiosity, criticism, and reflection" (p. 67).

The family that instilled *kapwa* is just as real, as it is playfully imagined. To my brother, my cousins, and a Pinay undergraduate I mentored while a graduate student student, I am *ate*. While I had my own biological *titos* and *titas*, other older Filipinxs I would meet along the way would insist I call them my *tito* and *tita* too. These are all widespread familial terms common among Filipinxs. Family extends beyond the nuclear, to those that *seemed*, in one way or another, familial – a larger family network imagined. I hear similarly, the inclusive familial extension, in Jones (1997) performance, *sista docta*, that attends to "the collective history of African American women" (Jones, 1997, p. 57). *Kapwa* extends the collective history of belonging beyond family, widening the circle. *Kapwa* gleaned from the everyday, performative, Filipinx experience is conceivably performed on stage; and the stage, "its liveness, the potential it holds for real social exchange, its mortality, its openness to human interactions that life outside this magical space prohibits - can model productively" a performance of solidarity among a widened circle of women of color (Dolan, 2010, p. 496).

## Critical “I”

While recent academic manuscripts contain calls to turn to collectivistic tendencies, “collaboration,” etc. *Kapwa* requires another turn, back to the individual. *Kapwa* simultaneously recognizes *both* the individual in the collective, *and* the collective of individuals – neither in opposition. This section is a reminder of the critically reflexive turn that *kapwa* encircles. It is because of “I” and “we” that a critical, relational, reflexive, circle forms. Entry into the conversational circle happens when “I” listen. I listen *to* the comedy of Alonzo and Wong for my point of entry as a Filipina to finding solidarity, and listen *with* Alonzo and Wong as a woman of color critical of our representation. I stress McRae’s (2015) prepositional way of *listening with*, as it enlists listening aligned with *kapwa*. The process of listening *with*, “creates the opportunity to generate embodied knowledge by learning from the sounds and experiences of others in relation to my sounds and experiences” (McRae, 2015, p. 24). Thus, the following bits of this chapter interrogates the resonant jokes or points in the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo, not only with one another, but also as it informs my feminist performance and identity as I listen *to* and *with*. The resulting analysis relates the author on scripting and conceptualizing the performance, the points of entry into larger cultural conversations, and locates the critical potential of *our* narrative points.

### Headliners: Analyzing Cristela Alonzo and Ali Wong

*All right, I’ve been Ali Wong! Have a good night, everybody. Thank you!*

Wong closes both of her Netflix specials performances in the past tense, “I’ve been Ali Wong!” she concludes. In analyzing Wong and Alonzo’s performances, it is necessary to make the distinction of the person from the persona. In referring to Ali Wong and Cristela Alonzo, each as a person, I will mention them by their last names: Wong and Alonzo. Their “persona” as



they “exist only within aesthetic texts” and perform on stage will be referred to as Ali and Cristela (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007, p. 66).

### **Our Immigrant Mother’s Daughters**

I reread the pages leading to this point in this project, my script, and the transcripts of Alonzo and Wong’s stand-up comedy specials; the theme of “our mothers” consonantly emerges. “I talk a lot about my mom” says Cristela in *Lower Classy*, “because I feel like when we talk about immigrants...we never really give them a heart or a soul. And I wanted people to know the story of my mom and know that she was a real person and she was like that, and that she went through a lot so that I could be here tonight.” The present absence of our mothers is palpable on the stage and the page and as I listen and watch the stand-up comedy of Alonzo and Wong reminisce on their mothers, they bring the abstractions of a family to the stage. “I have a hoarding problem because my mom is from a third world country,” Ali performs in *Baby Cobra*, “and she taught me that you can never throw away anything, because you never know when a dictator’s gonna overtake the country and snatch all your wealth.” “Third world” notes immigrant status from “those states in Africa, Asia and Latin America which called themselves ‘non-aligned,’ that is to say, affiliated with neither the Western (capitalist) nor the Eastern (communist) power blocs” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 98). The bits about our mothers serve as a critical juncture point for other jokes about ourselves to unfold, relating our individual and collective racial ethnic experiences and identities, survival methods, class, (em)power(ment), and our performance and performative personas. Alonzo, Wong, and I share our entanglements with “motherwork,” a term used by Collins (1994) “to soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing

from the collective self-determination of one's group" (p. 47-48). Motherwork is, "on behalf of one's own biological children, or for the children of one's own racial ethnic community, or to preserve the earth for those children who are yet unborn," (Collins, 1994, p. 48). Motherwork then, in its extension beyond care on behalf of biological children, is an act of *kapwa* specifically enacted from the standpoint of non-white women of color<sup>32</sup>. A biological relationship for motherwork is not a requisite as, "the practice of othermothering/community mothering [is] a cultural sustaining mechanism [and a] mode of empowerment" that extends the work of biological mothering (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 7). Motherwork and othermothering becomes a critical act of constructing homeplace and acknowledging the present absence of a "community of resistance" as an act of survival (hooks, 2003, p. 213).

The "themes of survival, power, and identity form the bedrock and reveal how racial ethnic women in the United States encounter and fashion motherwork," conversely, I understand motherwork as a pedagogical force instilling ways for women of color's survival, power, and claiming our racial/ethnic identity (Collins, 1994, p. 49). This is to say that, motherwork is critical in forming a racialized gendered identity, since "for women of color, the subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial ethnic communities—one does not exist without the other" (Collins, 1994, p. 47). As daughters of immigrant mothers, Alonzo and Wong can also explicitly articulate their racial/ethnic identity as part of the set up for their jokes. "I'm half-Chinese and half-Vietnamese" says Ali extending her bit about her mother. "I'm Latina" says Cristela, who then specifies, "I come from an old-

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<sup>32</sup> I am inspired by Patricia Hill Collins' interchangeable use of the terms "racial ethnic women" and "women of color." Likewise, "the term 'racial ethnic' implies more solidarity with men involved in struggles against racism. In contrast, the term 'women of color' emerges from a feminist background where racial ethnic women committed to feminist struggle aimed to distinguish their history and issues from those of middle-class, white women" (Collins, 1994, p. 62-63).

school Mexican family.” Wong and Alonzo’s racial/ethnic identification, “reflects the tensions,” perhaps also the readiness, made im/possible by their mothers’ motherwork “inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color” (Collins, 1994, p. 57). Mothering is specifically racialized, whereby from stories of mothering come stories related to race/ethnicity. Therefore, “the racial privilege enjoyed by white, middle-class women makes unnecessary this complicated dimension of the mothering tradition of women of color” (Collins, 1994, p. 57).

Explicitly articulating our racial/ethnic identities from our relationship to our immigrant mothers as a set-up for points and punchlines re/casts Wong, Alonzo, and I in the roles of comediennes and as *tricksters*. Broadly, from cultural studies of tricksters, “the trickster is a *boundary crosser*” who “may appear as an outsider, or as one who speaks to the centre from the periphery” (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 481). This entanglement between our ethnic/racial identities and performance as point-makers racializes the role of the trickster where, “for decades, people of color have performed the trickster role to make do” (Calafell, 2007, p. 429). By other accounts, “the trickster is a force that seeks to transform, destroy or disturb the existing order” (Radin, 1972, n.p.). The anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) described the trickster as a liminal actor, as someone who appears in unstable situations and has the potential to impact on those situations” (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 480). The trickster role, as that of a woman of color, “are provocateurs and dissidents by nature,” and facetiously provides an “integral check on beliefs to prevent [any] from becoming too secure in themselves” (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 484; Stott, 2013, p. 52). Tricksters elucidate the instabilities of structure and understanding. Even as I, Alonzo, and Wong identify our racial/ethnic selves, *what* those racial/ethnic identities mean, and *how* our races/ethnicities are performed, are both defined and contested.

Tricksters illuminate the holes in what might seem steady and understood, “the different genres where tricksters have appeared always stress the trickster’s intent to provoke and raise questions” (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 481). Moreover, “tricksters intend to disrupt the normative, as creators of anti-structure or as boundary crossers. Trickster discourse tends to break with traditional norms and societal codes, opening up new spaces for social activism and critical consciousness. Although not always a liberatory force, the trickster is a precursor of change and disturbance, and closely connected to the recreation of social and cultural life” (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 481). The following section relates this disturbance of the trickster to identity categories, while falling short of liberation being constrained by expectations to perform hegemonic whiteness.

### **Self-Improvement**

As tricksters, destabilizing indisputable familial and racial/ethnic categories demonstrate the way, “concepts of race prove to be unreliable as supposed boundaries shift, slippages occur, realignments become evident, and new collectivities emerge” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 105). As the utopian grounds of *Critical Kapwa Performance Pedagogy* propose, the circle of classifications can be widened. In this section, I consider the overlapping bits of Wong and Alonzo’s stand-up comedy as it informs my collaged performance and doing of researcher-performer. In these bits, I hear the resultant, shared affect of frustration of a particularly racialized-gendered past and present, that suggests a desire for a futurity for cultural citizenship achieved through self-help and self-improvement. We seek inclusion into the dominant circle that self-help and self-improvement suggest. However, in analyzing these points, I come to note the pervasive social hegemonic understandings that discipline our bodies and performances.

In Wong and Alonzo's stand-up comedy specials, I hear the jokes that echo the pursuit of self-improvement. "Every year, you get older, I feel like I can't believe we're already at this point. Like, you know? Every year goes by quicker and quicker. It's insane, you know? And I feel bad because at this point, I told myself that I was gonna get my shit together this year. This was gonna be the year, you guys!" says Alonzo in the set-up of a joke. Similarly, Wong jokes that: "Um, I can also tell that I'm getting older, because my Kindle is turning into a self-help library. I'm not interested in books like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, OK? I'm interested in *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. Yes. Yes, that's right, how to declutter my home to achieve inner peace and my optimum level of success. That's what your 30s is all about. How can I turn this shit around? I'm a horrible person, I'm not happy with where I am, how can I turn this shit around? Help me, Tony Robbins, help me!" Both comedienne continue to mention shared interest of popular self-help authors, speakers, and videos throughout their comedy sets, dropping references to Deepak Chopra, home exercise videos, and the like.

In contrast to the nostalgia of Wong and Alonzo narrating memories of their mothers from the past, these bits move forward temporally. I gather the message of an accumulating frustration of a specific-past and present-self, and a desire for a changed future-self. In matters of identity and communication research, the pursuit of grasping an "authentic" self or identity is central to the message of the self-help genre (Guignon, 2004). The self-help genre convinces individuals to participate in the pursuit of authenticity that "looks like a purely personal project" towards self-identification and self-discovery (Guignon, 2004, p. 157). In ruminations of authenticity, self-help, and identity, I come to understand "authenticity" as a myth, and as an overarching pseudo-achievement aligned with hegemonic whiteness in United States' individualist culture. Dubrofsky & Ryalls (2014) have succinctly described the performance of

white (feminine) authenticity as “performing not-performing” (p. 405). As women of color, accusatory remarks of “performing too ethnically” *and* “performing too white” (e.g. being described as a “coconut” for being brown on the outside and white on the inside) surface in different contexts. Both Wong and Alonzo allude to the common experience of “whitening” or “performing whiteness” in their stand-up comedy. A performance between “whiteness” and a “racialized non-whiteness” are noted when the body in question itself is non-white. Meanwhile, authenticity as a performance of not-performing from a white body often goes invisible, especially when the white body is already performing the hegemonic racialized expectations of itself.

I reflexively ponder the process of my project and the initial questions I raised, since edited, that asked to stake a claim to my identity: how it was performed, what it meant, how I could define an experience and Filipinx identity. I had been aggressively and defensively staking a claim to an identity before someone else did, imagining the false possibility of an authentic story, an authentic definition and claim to a gendered-racial/ethnic identity. But authenticity cannot be reached when (1) it is a myth and (2) cannot even be approximated, especially through the *individualized* and exclusive work of “self” help or improvement. In regards to “the conceptualization of ‘performing race’ as a sign of racial authenticity,” Bryant Keith Alexander (2004), “question[s] this conceptualization of ‘performing race’ and the ‘notion of racializing’—as a collective description of the social mandates and expectations of race, as the performance or signification of tribal affiliation” (p. 13). The field of communication work on racialized/ethnic identities continue to postulate these identities as performative, understood through qualitative and ethnographic work (Holling & Calafell, 2007, p. 60). The performative process of coming to

a “performance of race/ethnicity” allows identities and categories of such to be continually re/made, shifted, expanded, and contracted (Conquergood, 1985).

The comedic frames of Alonzo and Wong’s performances are particularly provocative sites to begin to consider the untraditionally ethnographic ways that each comedienne “uses the stage to perform, resist, negotiate, and rewrite the cultural politics surrounding” their performed identities (Holling & Calafell, 2007, p. 60). Their comedic performances scripts intentional arrival to humor, the goal to incite laughter as a “social signal” that communicates “agreement or disagreement” with cultural understandings of racial categories (Provine, 1996). Their performances rely on jokes as arguments and jokes contingent on racial logics, that audience members can relate to. Both comediennes carefully craft their bits deductively, both Alonzo and Wong initially casting expansive racial/ethnic categories that could implicate and include many audience members before specifying their own racial/ethnic identity. For example, before Alonzo specifically identifies herself as Mexican American, she jokes about her and her collective “brownness.” The performance of “brown” identity and what that means is “a moving target that is applied (literally and metaphorically) to bodies to mark otherness in seemingly benign but exceedingly insidious fashion,” and one that connects those with a brown identity, “around a sense of shared alterity” (Silva, 2016, n.p.). Alonzo connects broadly across her audience to anyone relating to the sense of divergence from hegemonic whiteness. Similarly, Wong identifies herself as mixed Asian American (racial category) before specifying herself as Vietnamese-Chinese-American (ethnic category). Wong jokes about her collective “Asian” identity, deductively differentiating “jungle Asians” versus “fancy Asians,” and then introducing her specific ethnic experience and identity. These examples are indicative of a subconscious awareness of the coherence of a personal and political identity, and the recognition of the avowal

(presentation of self) and ascription (outside perceptions) of racial/ethnic categories (Collier, 1989). Said similarly by Omi & Winant (2004), racial/ethnic identities “are framed and contested from ‘above’ and ‘below,’” where, “the social identities of marginalized and subordinate groups [...] are both imposed from above by dominant social groups and/or state institutions, and constituted from below by these groups themselves as expressions of self-identification and resistance to dominant forms of categorization” (p. 106). Racial/ethnic identities and performances are being re/made individually and collectively, and “in any given historical moment, one can understand a social category’s prevailing meaning, but such understandings can also be erroneous or transitory,” as understandings, “are often no more than the unstable and tentative result of the dynamic engagement between ‘elite’ and ‘street definitions and meanings” (Omi & Winant, 2004, p. 106). The re/making of these performances and categories occurs simultaneously from cultural participants individually, collectively, and dialogically.

Thus, “the conclusion to draw from the dialogical nature of experience,” might come from, “Bakhtin’s dialogical conception of human existence,” that “we are at the deepest level *polyphonic* points of intersection with a social world rather than *monophonic* centers of self-talk and will” (Guignon, 2004, p. 121). The myth of a performance of racial/ethnic authenticity achieved through individual work and self-improvement, presents itself as impervious for the following reasons. First, the concept of authenticity is troubled because of the illusion of self-will. As described above, racial/ethnic performances, expectations, and understandings are constrained by inescapable structures and ideologies that are re/made individually and collectively. Second, the connection of authenticity is intertwined with the ideals of hegemonic white-American individualism that is unattainable for non-white-racialized bodies. The point that can be made then follows that, “the narrativist conception of authentic existence we have been



exploring can leave us with a sense of the absolute *contingency* of all life stories. For if *any* story can be mine, then no story is *really* mine” (Guignon, 2004, p. 143). While representation of the parts of my existence might empower aspects of my identity, it falls short of representing a wholly Pilipina American experience. The work that *is* possible is an act of *kapwa*: to put into dialogue and to connect the individual points delivered by Wong and Alonzo, reinventing jokes and performances to be taken into serious consideration lest “we recognize the multiplicity of stories we can tell and the ultimate arbitrariness of every choice of storyline, we can begin to sense the utter groundlessness of any attempt at self-formation” (Guignon, 2004, p. 143).

### **Bodily Excess**

On stage their personas: Cristela and Ali; are physically large and excessive from pregnancy or from self-identified fat. “Guess what I found out,” jokes Cristela in *Lower Classy*, “I’m too fat to fit into their workout clothes. I’m too fat to work out? I have to lose 20 pounds before I can start working out.” Likewise, Ali’s persona in both of her stand-up comedy specials are perpetually pregnant. “So, I don’t know if you guys can tell, but I am seven and a half months pregnant. Yeah. It’s very rare and unusual to see a female comic perform pregnant, because female comics... don’t get pregnant. Just try to think of one. I dare you. There’s— None of them. Once they do get pregnant, they generally disappear,” Ali jokes initially jokes in *Baby Cobra*. Again, in *Hard Knock Wife*, Ali performs visibly pregnant in her third trimester. Both comedienne’s personas determinately embody physical excess. A discussion on the topic of bodily excess on the comedy stage is well theorized for the ways in which size overlaps with gendered performance, expectation, body politics, and identity (Mizejewski, 2014).

I recall writing, staging, and rehearsing my performance, during which I felt a hesitancy to make myself physically bigger beyond embodying Cristela’s and Ali’s stances affected by

their size. I became interested in the way that Ali's and Cristela's large bodies do not necessarily critique a cultural phobia of fatness. Both comediennes joke about aiming for weight loss or fondly recall their bodies pre-pregnancy, while both comediennes' large sizes are exclusively part of their stage persona. Ali's and Cristela's weight and size becomes part of their aesthetic, staged performance – momentary, temporary, and suspended to the carnivalesque-nature of the comedy stage. Here, the stage is, “carnavalesque as a liberating space does,” where participants can, “celebrate temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order [and] mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibition” (Tseëlon, 2001, p. 28; Bakhtin, 1968, p. 104). Intertwined with the temporality of carnival is the masquerade (Bakhtin, 1968). Ali's and Cristela's performance personas masquerade their size revealing the instability of a gendered racialized identity. The relationship between fat women, performativity and masquerade is complex. However, there is utility in the metaphor of size as masquerade in Ali and Cristela's performances as a, “decorative layer which conceals a non-identity,” worn or removed, but always at a distance (Doane, 1991, p. 25). Masquerade is deliberate and serves a critical function (if not here towards fat liberation but in other ways) by calling “attention to such fundamental issues as the nature of identity, the truth of identity, the stability of identity categories and the relationship between the supposed identity and its outward manifestations (or essence and appearance)” (Tseëlon, 2001, p. 3).

By masquerading their size, Ali and Cristela's representations visually depict the added layer of their size challenging the racialized gendered basis of the status quo. Wong jokes regarding the bodily expectation of the Asian woman's body in *Baby Cobra* saying, “I was like, ‘uh, you're a idiot, dude. Do you realize that if I went on Craigslist... and posted ‘Tiny Asian female seeking anal...’ the Internet would crash.”” Yet, Ali stands up before her audience with

an enlarged, pregnant body that contradicts the expectation of a desirable, small figure; while subsequently flaunting her pregnancy as the outcome of her sexual and racialized hypersexualization. With size, the excess body evades simple categorization. Instead, bodily excess denotes, “a postmodern subject position characterized by fragmentation, contradiction and instability; a position of disadvantage (abjection)” (Hole, 2003, p. 316). The fat female body is one of liminal cultural meaning betwixt the, “figure of fun and sign of fear (figure of fun because sign of fear) [...] both less-than and more-than Woman [and] the ‘monstrous feminine’ that haunts the imagination, and the abjected Mother that creates identity” (Hole, 2003, p. 327).

Where bodily excess is part of Ali and Cristela’s masqueraded performance, I similarly found that to perform their bits was my masquerade. Performing from their embodied stances, and their (and our) comedy bits and words, meant momentarily wearing the mask of Wong and Alonzo’s racial/ethnic and embodied identities without aim to deceive the audience that I was them, nor were they me. Instead, the masquerade further emphasizes the instabilities of my own gendered racial/ethnic identity, and unmask the shortcomings of representation.

It is at this last resonating point of masquerading that I come to connect the points of unruliness, the excess body as grotesque, and carnival. The seemingly dotted array of bits provide the outline for a constellation of the image of the maternal body which has been theorized in connection to these terms. I turn to Kristeva’s (2003) concept of the maternal body that, “by no means reduces woman to the function of motherhood, [rather] she returns to the maternal body at least in part to *free* woman from this very reduction” (Söderbäck, 2011, p. 65). I consider the dis/connect between Ali’s pregnant body, Cristela’s fat body that she blames in part for her undesirability, and my own embodied performance as variances of “the maternal body to which [Kristeva] urges us to return [to must] be understood *quo temporalization*: that to

which we return is temporal, moving, displacing, renewing. The return is neither nostalgic nor aimed at preserving some essential notion of motherhood—it makes possible new beginnings, allowing for a future pregnant with change and transformation” (Söderbäck, 2011, p. 66). Our staged maternal bodies “must be understood as that rare location where time and space merge, where they can be thought of as one, at once” (Söderbäck, 2011, p. 74). Specifically, the staged moment of my performance acknowledges a point between a dual temporality. The past, where we make sense of our identities as the daughters of our immigrant mothers; and the future, as the imagined *Ates, titas*, and mothers of future unruly women of color. The recognition of our maternal bodies is to mindfully acknowledge that the virtue of *kapwa* is to imagine a larger familial-like network, widening the circle for inclusion and accountability to one another.

### **Conclusion: Coming Full Circle**

To conclude this chapter, I respond directly to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter: (1) Relationally, how does a collaged personal narrative performance interrogate, reinvent, and intervene in the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo? And (2) How is my everyday performance of intersectional identity as a first generation, brown, Filipina American disciplined, or empowered, by the mediated stand-up comedy narratives of Wong and Alonzo? It is in writing this chapter, the process of theorizing from the accompanying performance, and interrogating the pieces of Wong and Alonzo’s comedy that I observe the obfuscating potentialities of a Filipina American identity as it challenges racial/ethnic categories and identities. There is a similar anxiety that grips me when I am asked dis/similar questions about what categories I dwell in, or to define pieces of myself, and categorize what I do.

Asian?

Latin-something? *Your Spanish accent is so good!*

Do you consider yourself Pacific Islander?

Student?

Teacher? *How long have you been doing this? You look too young.*

Do your students call you “professor?”

Auto/ethnographic performance?

Personal narrative?

Performance? Comedy? Media? Monsters? Method? *Pick one.*

Genre?

Form?

How would you categorize this? How do you categorize *yourself*?

Working backwards from Holman Jones’ (2020) re/articulations of autotheory, I am able to think about responses to the questions posed. As a simplified summary, “autotheory is positioned as a distinctly feminist practice, extending second wave feminism’s commitment to putting ‘flesh’ on the universalist pretensions of established theoretical traditions by situating the story of lived experience in politically consequential terms” (Wiegman, 2020, pp. 7-8). Shortened in communication studies, autotheory is a “combination of autobiography and critical theory” where the “categories we are working on either side of that equation *change* as they come into contact” (Holman Jones, 2020, p. 250). Therefore, “when we’re using critical theory in autobiographic accounts we ‘stretch’ the categories/genres of both autobiography and critical theory,” transforming the purposes of each, neither are “the same things, depending on who is doing it, who is doing *it* with whom, and how they are thinking about it. It has new parts” (Holman Jones, 2020, p. 250).

Correspondingly so, the queer potentialities of autotheory provides a useful way of thinking about a Pilipina identity, political identity, belonging, and the knowledges that transpires from en fleshed being. To the first question, my collaged personal narrative reinvents the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo as critical performances with moments and bits to be *seriously* considered beyond jest. Wong and Alonzo’s stand-up in its original form, and done by its original performers, is staged with the humorous intentionality of comedy – the lightness of enjoyment, to provoke laughter, and pleasure. But just as autotheory reinvents autobiography and critical theory into “new parts” dependent on “who is doing it, who is doing *it* with whom, and how they are thinking about it,” I reinvent the collaged moments from Wong and Alonzo’s comedy by transforming them into “new parts” of theory and for understanding resultant from *my* doing and thinking (Holman Jones, 2020, p, 250). In its original form and original actors, Wong and Alonzo perform from the slippery zone of a comic space considered simultaneously both playful and persuasive, both serious and flippant. The liminality of comedy makes it difficult to theorize from or to critique, since as soon as it is taken seriously, it calls the critic to “lighten up!” and slips away as “just a joke!” Through my reinvention, I stretch the category of “seriousness” to include stand-up comedy bits as points to be thoughtfully considered. Through the reinvention of Wong and Alonzo’s comedy as part of a site for analysis creates the potential to momentarily consider a (specifically *my*) scholarly perspective sans the fear of the joke disintegrating as “humor” and slipping away.

Secondarily, again on the basis of categorical “stretching,” I respond to the second question posed. In this chapter, I identify moments by which my intersectional identity as a first generation, brown, Filipina American are disciplined and empowered by the mediated stand-up comedy narratives of Wong and Alonzo. I am empowered simply by representation – never to

discredit the power of visibility – to see skin, eyes, hair, and to hear stories that echo my own on a large-reaching platform. While recognizing the limitations and ways that representation will always fall short. I am also empowered knowing that there is power in my abilities to shapeshift between and within categories: brown, Asian, Spanish influenced, first generation, class, and more. I am disciplined as I am rhetorically and directly hailed in Wong’s stand-up comedy as “jungle Asian,” and take into consideration the collective and cultural consensus of who I am and what is expected of me. On the basis of stretching categories/genres of autotheory, the beauty of a circle is its ability to expand. Racial/ethnic categories, as closed as they might seem are also pliable, stretchable -- but strategically so.

Encircling back to *kapwa*, the metaphor of the circle sustains. In this chapter I posit critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy as a way for peminists to listen to the issues, topics, and experiences of other women of color, and for the points of entry for collaboration, empathy, and solidarity on social issues. I outlined bits of themes shared among Alonzo’s, Wong’s, and my autoperformance/s, namely: (1) our position as daughters of immigrant mothers, (2) the futile pursuit of arriving at a concrete or “authentic” identity, and (3) the unruliness of our excess, with bits of theoretical overlap with BIWOC issues. Our individual points becoming a widened circle of shared experience. At the crux of critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy, the staged performance of a collaged personal narrative becomes the embodiment of the utopian possibility of widening our collective, collaborative, and affective circles. From the analysis of the overlapping themes that form my collaged performance pieced from Alonzo and Wong’s stand-up comedy, the utopia of critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy makes a point in imagining ways to stage the familiar, if not always familial, construction of homeplace. Furthermore, the

pedagogical point is made to recognize that constellations of points versus widening hegemonic circles has more liberatory potential to broaden democratic horizons.



## CHAPTER 5

The concluding chapter of this project, with all of its shared characteristics with stand-up comedy, is a *mise en abyme*. The comedic technique of *mise en abyme* is to provide “re-layerings,” via the, “perpetual retelling of jokes and their variations” (Roof, 2018, p. 24). The comedic use of *mise en abyme* used similarly in the conclusion is as, “always a scene about another scene, opening and folding in sometimes infinitely” (Roof, 2018, p. 2). Thus, I provide a final chapter of the preceding chapters, stories of the stories told, and points about points already made. Here, I conclude with a summary of the project, its implications, and suggestions for future research – such that the ideas presented here continue like the *mise en abyme* of a comic event: “never finished; it perpetually chains” (Roof, 2018, p. 25).

### Closer: Summaries

“Tin! Have you seen my glasses? They’re inside somewhere. I think it’s near you,” my mother called to me from the backyard. I was 11 and inside the house, but I could hear her through the screen door. Mom spent Saturday mornings weeding the garden, often inviting me. I typically declined as I had not yet grown to appreciate tending to plants.

“No,” I responded absently without looking up or even looking for them nearby. I was thoroughly engrossed in my book.

“Can you *find* them?” she requested. I flashed her a scornful look and grumbled that I did not know where they were. I stayed where I was.

She noticed my look, and she heard my attitude. “*Hoy! Pag buot!* I’m asking for your help,” she scolded me while wiping the sweat from her brow. Her temper was short that Saturday morning and she stopped asking me to be outside with her as she continued to weed.

In the afternoon, I approached her apprehensively to help with the gardening, and to make amends. “No, I can do it myself,” she had responded grumpily tending to the spiky plant in the yard. “Do you know how the pineapple fruit formed?” My silence was an answer that I did not know. Mom continued with the tale.

“Piña lived with her mother in a small hut back in the Philippines. Her mother was always asking Piña for help with things around the house, but Piña would always make an excuse that she couldn’t find what she needed to help her – even if it was right in front of her! Eventually, Piña’s mom got sick and called to Piña to make *arroz caldo*<sup>33</sup>.” My own mother paused here, typical of her storytelling, “you know how to make *arroz caldo*? You use leftover rice – ”

“Mom, finish your story!” I interjected.

“Anyway, ok, Piña’s mom asked her to make *arroz caldo*. She gave her directions from bed and told her that she just had to stir it occasionally with the ladle. Piña started making the *arroz caldo*, but her mom could hear her banging around the kitchen, slamming pots and cupboards. It took a while, until her mother asked her if it was done. Piña told her she didn’t make it, because she could not find the ladle. Her mother, so frustrated, said out loud: ‘I wish you had a thousand eyes so you could find what you were looking for and help me!’ The next morning, it was quiet. Piña was nowhere to be found. Piña’s mother looked for her where she usually played, and found an unfamiliar plant instead. Broken hearted, Piña’s mother named the

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: “rice soup” or “rice porridge”

plant after her lost daughter and tended to it. For years, the plant continued to grow and a fruit emerged that would be a pineapple. Inside of the pineapple, were the thousand eyes of Piña.”

*Pag buot!* It has been nearly two decades since my mother told me the story of Piña. It was not a story she typically repeated like the one of the *Wakwak*, but I remember it nonetheless. Just as Piña’s mother cursed her daughter into a plant, I think my mother similarly conjured eyes in me, or at least, opened the ones I have on that day. Piña and I shared the troublesome position of daughters *walay buot*, neglecting a “value of others (*kapwa*),” and “by recognizing others, [showing] co-responsibility” (Mercado, 1994, p. 30). Punished for our inability to provide altruistic support to our mothers, and inability to locate the tools necessary to do so, our penance would be an existence of an excess of eyes. My own eyes, and what they symbolize, would be frequently attuned to searching for connection, and looking for moments that I could enliven *kapwa* to meet my mother’s demand to be *buotan*. Thus, connected to what I would symbolically find by a call to *kapwa*, this section summarizes the previous chapters and pointedly responds to the exigencies and questions framing this project.

Chapter one opened a project rooted heavily inspired by personal narrative, and the general topic of “identity” without explicitly staking an “I.” In keeping with the virtues of *kapwa*, the intention of the project to politicize personal narrative as one that “does not act alone” while still reflexively accounting for the perspective of my/a unique Filipina American experience was integral to each step of the research, performance, and writing processes (Holman Jones, 2008, p. 763). The collaged aesthetic performance from which I theorize maintains this same ethic of *kapwa*. Furthermore, the theories and arguments in chapter three and four document give a language and terminology to the work of navigating the illusionary separation of individual and collective experience in personal narrative inquiry. The secondary

point of entry into the project was rooted in issues of representation. Because, “the indigenous wisdom of interconnectedness and interdependence,” of *kapwa*, it is, “often expressed through sibling, elder, and ancestor reverence, spirituality, cosmology, and Earth-based subsistence traditions,” I found myself early in the project *searching* for a missing familial connection in mainstream American media through the familiarity of representation via embodiment, visuals cues, and storied experience. In doing so, I learned to search for interconnectedness not only with my eyes, but through the set of methods I posed in chapter two: performative listening, narrative performance, conspicuous aesthetic performance, and collage. Through senses engaged in other ways beyond visual, I listened to stories and performances, and embodied myself and Other(s) to find common points of shared affect, resonance, empathy, and solidarity among issues that similarly and differently impact American women of color. Thereby, despite the failures of mediated representation, the opportunity for *kapwa* is still found.

Noting the exigencies that “set-up” this project and the outcomes, I continue by restating the research question that ensued and the responses posed at the conclusion of each analytical chapter. The research question I posed was:

What is the story, space, and theory that I create for myself (and others) by recovering/reclaiming lived knowledge through storying a past, embodying my present, and performing possibilities for transformation, resistance, and transgression of cultural identity expectations?

Chapter three’s focus was to document the bits of the conspicuous aesthetic performance that illuminated a Filipina American experience. The outcome of the chapter primarily responds directly the research question by way of the peminist performance writing in the dissertation and the script provided. My story emerges in between Wong and Alonzo’s comedy collaged – much

like the metaphorical rice in the opening chapters. Chapter three claims my Filipina American identity, and reclaims the power of the particular *Wakwak* monstrosity that is symbolic of my fractured gendered ethnic identity. Thus, I create my present theoretical moment documented by lived knowledges recovered from a past, and argue for the powerful possibilities that my particular ethnic monstrosity can offer.

Chapter four interrogates the resonant jokes or points in the stand-up comedy of Wong and Alonzo, not only with one another, but also as it informed my peminist performance and identity as I listened *to* and *with* Wong and Alonzo. In short, Wong and Alonzo's performances taken as a site of study to understand identity, reinvents the stand-up comedy as critical performances with moments and bits to be seriously interrogated beyond jest. Secondly, the resonant bits between me, Wong, and Alonzo risks reinforcing expectations that discipline, the potential for shared solidarity within these issues is cause for empowerment. Moreover, the imperfections of representation by the mediated stand-up comedy narratives of Wong and Alonzo re-emphasizes the potential of failed representation enhancing my monstrous power to shapeshift between and within categories: brown, Asian, Spanish influenced, first generation, class, and more.

The aesthetic, theoretical, and methodological contributions of this project – much like the scavenged and collaged bits of my identity – shifts between and within disciplinary categories. The outcome of this project *is* interdisciplinary, a collaged manifestation of bits from Performance Studies in Communication, Women and Gender/Feminist Studies, and Asian/American Studies in Communication and Race/Ethnic Studies. To Feminist Studies, I contribute pieces and particularities of my Filipina feminist identity, utilizing peminist performance in/as feminist praxis. To Performance Studies in Communication, I extend the

method of collage informed by my Filipina American experience and demonstrate how my understanding of it can be written and performed. Finally to Asian American studies, I introduce *kapwa*, again taken from the specificity of my ethnic identity as an aspirational way to discuss affect vis-à-vis storytelling and standup performance, and to extend solidarities *beyond* Asian American circles into the racial/ethnic boundaries of which I shift between and within.

### **Closer: Implications & Reflexivity**

My collaged book report was an early educational achievement that was never found out to be pieced together by rice. It would not be until my final project here as a PhD candidate that I would reveal that under the cuttings from newspapers and magazines showcasing people, food, and rituals unlike me, were rice. Now, I point to the rice that others did not know were there. The rice – if not *seen*, then *felt* – raises the pieces collaged, and adds a dimension complicating the flat, two-dimensionality and perhaps even binary way that race is mis/understood as a black-and-white dynamic in America. Here, I take up the specificity of the rice, the specificity of documenting my gendered ethnic identity, the specificity of theorizing from my lived experience, and the implications on communication, performance studies, critical inter/cultural studies, Filipinx American studies, and place among coalitional politics towards racial justice.

The conjoining of Filipina American identity research with performance-based theories and methods, and especially including the component of conspicuous aesthetic performance is a contribution to (1) the necessary diversification of representation within communication studies and performance studies, and (2) expanding literature on Filipinx American identity formation and experience as it has been studied with heavy emphasis on Filipinx American psychology (David & Okazaki, 2006; Nadal, 2021; Tuason, Reyes Taylor, Rollings, Harris, & Martin, 2007). The research pertinent to this project from Asian American media and critical cultural studies,

likewise, have stressed the importance of critical representation towards cultural citizenship and, “fighting for inclusion, belonging, recognition, and a voice within the national collective” (Lopez, 2016, p. 218). However, I find such pursuits to still be too narrow and self-interested. Keeping *kapwa* in mind, and the symbolic function of rice, I contend that this research project’s widespread implication is to *begin* to disrupt the flatness of America’s racial landscape in the pursuit of a coalitional struggle for racial justice and “the right of all human beings to control their own bodies [as] a fundamental democratic demand” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 145).

Shireen Roshanravan (2018) published a compelling piece regarding the “coalitional imperative of Asian American feminist visibility” (p. 115). Roshanravan (2018) reviews the “unnatural invisibility” of Asian American women reinforced by, and reinforcing, Orientalist gender stereotypes. Similarly, in previous chapters, I have noted the furthered exclusion of Filipinx American identities from Asian American representation. Roshanravan (2018) contends that undoing Asian American feminist invisibility (and relatedly my peminist invisibility), “must communicate a horizontal cross-racial coalitional invitation that unequivocally refuses complicity with the anti-black logics of the model-minority racial project” (p. 116). She states in other words, that, “Asian American feminist visibility must be accountable to the coalitional imperative that Women of Color feminist scholars and cultural workers have insisted is integral to living and building violence-free lives” (Roshanravan, 2018, pp. 116-117). Counter to, “the notion of ‘visibility for visibility sake,’” the Asian American feminist representation becomes critical when it, “seeks to use its visibility as a ‘call-out’ to ‘build bigger coalitions’ against violence in its forms” (Roshanravan, 2018, p. 118). Thus, the work of (self-) representation in this project is an act of undoing my political invisibility towards cultural citizenship, so that my voice and positionality is taken seriously in the fight for American justice.

Within the same piece, Roshanravan (2018) cautions against Asian American “us too!” appeals for racial visibility, stating that, “the manipulative staging and behind-the-scenes operations of the racial state go unaddressed as black folks re-emerge as the aggressors against Asians, stealing from them their fair share of public recognition *as victims in need of redress*” (p. 118). Here, I want to reflexively address the potential shortcomings of my project. I entered the project with an awareness of the “us too!” appeals Roshanravan (2018) warns, while claiming solidarity among *women of color* (WOC) in the American cultural landscape. My use of WOC coincides with the gendered racialized aspect of what Omi & Winant (2014) write that, “while groups of color have been treated differently, all can bear witness to the tragic consequences of racial oppression” (p. 8). Omi & Winant (2014) continue to state that, “the United States has confronted each group with a unique form of despotism and degradation. The examples are familiar: Native Americans faced removal and genocide, blacks were subjected to racial slavery and Jim Crow, Latin@s were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion” (p. 8). As such, the comedienues with whom I speak with, and whose performances I interrogate, are very specifically aligned with my Filipina American identity – experiencing the same/similar exclusion of Asians in American culture, and shared Latin@ cultural history of invasion and colonization. Meanwhile, in analysis and discussion, Black feminist theories and concepts were specifically referenced and brought into conversation, although ideas from Indigenous scholarship is largely missing. This is to state that, my project and performance are a *practice* in expanding circles of coalitional politics (and *kapwa*), and demonstrates their possibility, but still falls short in accounting for all groups under “women of color.” Still, the position of “women of color” is taken as an aspirational and coalitional political identity to unite non-white women as people of color in resistance of white domination.



### Closer: Future Research

I am on the phone with my younger brother, who is now in Boston. I like to confer with him the stories our parents told me, and told us, as children. I am on the porch having a variety of fruit that can be found in South Florida. “Did mom ever tell you the pineapple story?” I ask him inspired by the “eyes” of the fruit on my plate. I had unskillfully cut the pineapple so that I had missed carving out the tough pieces that dotted the fruit. I nibbled around it.

“No. They told you some different stories than the ones they told me,” he replies. It was true. My brother’s childhood mischievousness was dealt with differently. I had stories. He was made to take naps. “That’s a pretty messed up story to tell a little kid,” my brother responds after I tell him the story of Piña.

I laugh in response, because of the duality of Piña’s curse as a *blessing* in a search for connection, meaning, and answers. I believe my research aims and goal presented in the first chapter of this project were met. The motif repeats on and on, much as a *mise en abyme*. Holes in representation were filled, the dottiness of a creative research praxis satisfied, circles of inclusion widened, and spots created for future Filipina feminist research.

“Ow,” I whimper while on the phone.

“What happened?”

“I didn’t do such a good job cutting some pineapple. I got a little cut from one of the pointy parts.”

It was a sharp reminder that there were still (and always will be) new ways to imagine the ideas presented. Not only had I seen holes, dots, circles, and spots in the art of Yayoi Kusama, I had seen (and thus, achieved in this project) points. I had *made* points regarding peminist performance, critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy, and Filipina American identity. The future

of this project is that there are still *points* to be made, at least a thousand more by count of the eyes Piña's mother had wished for. The smallest and largest of circles can still expand, and future renderings of critical *kapwa* performance pedagogy can make this happen.

Since the start of this project, I have been glad to see holes in Filipinx representation be filled in mainstream American media *across* genres. For example, Filipino American make-up artist, Bretman Rock, just premiered a reality series on February 8, 2021 on MTV called *MTV's Following: Bretman Rock*. Likewise, Disney's upcoming animated film, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, features influences from the Philippines and South East Asia to American-based animated storytelling. Such media representations are opportunities for sites of analysis via the conceptual and theoretical points posed in this project. Similarly so, this project aims to inspire Pilipina Peminist creators-scholars to transform rice to glue, experience to theory, and to add to the constellation of dots. Thus, this poses as an invitation and a promise to continue the growing body of points.

### **Closer to Home, Closer to *Kapwa***

I have been in Florida while completing the requirements for my Ph.D. When I go home to Southern California to visit my family, my mom and dad like to show me the work they have done in the backyard of my childhood home. Dad shows me the new patio furniture that Mom found secondhand and that he had painstakingly cleaned and reassembled, while Mom is especially proud of her garden.

“See! That's *malunggay!*” she says excitedly. “You don't have to buy moringa while you're here. It's too expensive – and look!” she quickly redirects like she often does, “my cactus, I grew these from cuttings. Avocado! —” Mom lowers her voice, “—sometimes I water the

avocado tree without telling your dad. Now I know why avocados are so expensive! It takes *so* much water.”

The garden is flourishing under my parents’ green thumbs, and is a mighty change of scenery since I had moved out of the house and out of state. I had observed a similar phenomenon as a child, when I was left to be cared for by my grandmother. She had raised her own ten children, and with just two grandchildren left in her care during the day, she was in a comparably empty house. She poured her efforts and time into her rose and orchid garden, humming as she woke up early to trim the stems, fertilize the soil with egg shells, and water rows upon rows of raised planters of the flowers by hand. They were always nurturing growth, whether in their children, or inversely to nurture the plant life around them when the house became empty.

I walked around the garden. Tomato vines crawled up the wall, delicate orchid flowers swayed in the mild California breeze, the *kalamansi* tree was hanging with orange gems of fruit. I was home, with my family, I bent down to take a closer look at some of the plants my mom was growing. In clear view, was a somewhat familiar plant—its leaves were longer than the short leaves that made it appear “spiky” in the recesses of my memory. Longer, they seemed less spiky and more pointed, and behind them, the red-brown of a tiny growing pineapple.

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