

Transcript – Mitchell Foster, staff

Narrator: Mitchell Foster

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist, & Michelle Liu

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Amanda Knox: All right. Good morning. It is Wednesday, April 21, 2021. It is 10am. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Assistant Archivist at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University. I am here conducting another oral history today with my co-interviewer and my interviewee. So, Michelle is going to be my co-interviewer. Would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners?

Michelle Liu: Yeah, thanks, Amanda. My name is Michelle Liu. I am a junior at Brown studying statistics in sociology. I'm very passionate about Asian American advocacy. And I'm the co-founder of Red Envelope Stories, a weekly newsletter highlighting the intersectionalities and nuances of the AAPI experience.

AK: Thank you so much for being with me today. And Mitchell, would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners?

Mitchell Foster: Absolutely. Good morning, everyone. [1:00] My name is Mitchell Foster, I am an area coordinator for the Office of Residential Life at Brown. I have been at Brown for eight months now. And what I do primarily is I supervise on campus residential communities that includes residence halls on campus as well as remote residential communities for students at Brown who have chosen to stay remote because of the pandemic. I also supervise residential peer leaders, including women peer counselors, and minority peer counselors. And all of the RPLs that I supervise serve first year students on campus. And, yeah.

AK: Fantastic. Well, again, I thank you both for joining me today, I think there is much to discuss. And I would just kind of like to set up a little bit of historical context of what brought us here today.

So, we are, of course, now over a year into the [2:00] COVID-19 global pandemic. COVID-19 was a virus that originated from or was first identified in China. And with all sorts of other things going on, we also had a president who did not use scientific terms to discuss this pandemic, and definitely fueled racial fires because of the nature of what we're experiencing. And so because of that, we have unfortunately had an incredible rise in anti-Asian rhetoric, violence, etc. So, we at the Pembroke Center put out a call to ask for members of the Brown community to share their stories on what it means to them and their experiences in being [3:00] an Asian identity in this time. And if either of you feel that I've poorly represented this moment, please feel free to fill in the blanks there. But Mitchell, you so kindly offered to share your story with us. So, my first question for you is what made you want to raise your hand and participate in this project?

MF: Yeah, so when I moved to Brown in August of 2020, I moved to a new institution and a new town, in the middle of the pandemic. And so things were closed and it was so difficult for me to, to form community, to put myself out there, to meet people. Just because the structures that we are used to in a regular time, were just taken away from us. There were just a lot of restrictions and limitations around community building and gathering. And when I moved here, it was a very difficult [4:00] time for me, not just because of the things that I've already mentioned, but because I felt really siloed in my position. So I'm a staff member on campus and it felt like I was doing my job, and no one even knew that I was here. I didn't know of any groups on campus for staff members that are specifically for Asian folks. I identify as Filipino American. I'm biracial, Filipino and white. And I was actually born and grew up in the Philippines. And so my Asian identity is really important to me. And in a way it's very foundational and fundamental, because I was raised in the Filipino culture before having moved to the states and gone to college in California. And not having a community to go to that share my cultural values [5:00] was very difficult, especially like in the middle of the pandemic, when there's really no other distractions that I could, like, you know, busy myself with. And so, when, when I found out about this project, I immediately thought I wanted to share my experience as an Asian American on campus

because it was, it was difficult, it took me maybe like six or seven months before I attended my first Asian American gathering, and it was a very reactive gathering. It was a reactive gathering because of the violence that Asian Americans were, were experiencing in major metropolitan areas like Oakland and New York City, maybe at the start of the year, or maybe around February. And it really impacted my family in the Bay Area as well. And when I was checking in [6:00] on them, they were not only scared to leave the house because of the pandemic, they were also scared to leave the house because of what they were seeing in the media. They were seeing older Asian American people being beat up on the street for absolutely no reason. And having that experience with the community that I suddenly found at Brown, I had like kind of a dual reaction to it. I was very thankful and grateful that there were solidarity. But at the same time, I kept asking myself, what took this long? Why did it take such negative things to happen for this community to be visible, or for this community to, I don't know, be given some space or be given some leave, to gather, and to be in solidarity with each other? And yeah, so those, those, those are kind of like the reasons why, [7:00] when I heard about this, I wanted to be a part of this project to also share my experiences on campus as someone who is a pseudo immigrant, Asian American, non-binary person.

AK: So again, Michelle, I'd like to invite you to jump in at any point, if you have a question. But for the time being, I guess I will follow up. If you don't mind sharing a little bit about your experience as news about COVID-19 was coming out of China before it really hit the United States. Were, what were you kind of thinking and feeling as that was starting to come out?

MF: Yeah, absolutely. So, my mom still lives in the Philippines and I have been in the States for seven years, well, going seven years now. And when it was starting to be [8:00] talked about in Asia, I had already known about it October of 2019, or November of 2019. So, before it even hit the mainstream, I had heard about it because my mom was talking to me about it. And I was very worried because my mom is, is very close to the epicenter of the virus. And I was, it was, it was all, it has always been at the back of my mind even before it became a topic of conversation here in the US. And I was really worried about my family in the Philippines.

And I was still in my previous employment. I was at the University of Arkansas, where I spent two years as a Coordinator for Residential Education. So basically, I was doing the same

thing over there, which was my first full time job after grad school. And by January of 2020, that's when [9:00] it started being talked about. In my previous institution, I did programming around international education, and we did Global Series, which is a series of programs inviting students or international students or student, domestic students who have gone abroad for an exchange or an international study opportunity. And we, in January of 2020, we had Taiwanese students talk about Taiwan and the culture in Taiwan. And I remember there was conversation around how Asian cultures value health and so, and I do remember this growing up in the Philippines where if you have a cold or if you have the flu and you have to go outside and be in public, it's, it's kind of like second nature to wear a mask and that was not something that was, [10:00] you know was debated on or not something that was questioned or not, [people don't like look twice, or think twice, if you're wearing a mask, it was just something that, you know, it happens. You know, people care about community health. It was, it wasn't, it was a value that Filipinos had. And there was conversation when, when the Global Series program was going on about Taiwan. There was conversation around how Asian countries, specifically Taiwan, have handled the coronavirus pandemic. And this was, you know, before March 2020, when, when things closed down in the United States. And there was, there were people in the audience who had a negative reaction to that comment, because the comment was, in a way, directed towards how Taiwanese people were handling the pandemic. [11:00] And there were, there, there were there were comments about like, how they felt triggered, some of the Chinese students felt triggered about why was the comment, why did the comment imply that Taiwanese people were better at handling the pandemic, other than like other Asian countries. And that was something that like I was there, I heard that conversation going on. And that was my first exposure to how it was affecting my international students, most specifically Chinese students, because at that point, they were already telling me that they were getting, they were getting taunted on campus, because of, you know, the rising numbers of the COVID infections happening, even before it became a thing in the US. And as a student affairs professional, [12:00] I definitely had to reach out to these students and make sure that they're fine and make sure that they have the resources that they need, so that they can feel safe on campus. So just talking about like, where I was, what I was experiencing, when this was starting to be a conversation, it was definitely within the context of being a professional and serving students and helping students out and how it has

impacted my students and how it has impacted my work. Because my students were affected negatively by it.

ML: Yeah, Mitchell, you say, sorry, Amanda, you were talking about, you know, working in the University of Arkansas and seeing international students react with like, to the hate, hate comments they got from the pandemic, and especially, especially your mask comment really resonated with me because there definitely was a stigma or notion of if you're wearing a mask like you, what are you doing, [13:00] like you are, you you're kind of relegated to like the international pool or like, kind of, you have this feeling of otherness. And as a, you know, an employee of the university, how did you feel around those wearing masks? And I think something else about your narrative that's really interesting to me is being biracial. So how did you navigate your feelings towards both these parts of your identity, especially when things were just stirring and international students were being a bit more cautious, and, you know, really noticing the impacts of this pandemic?

MF: Yeah, that's a fabulous question. I'm a huge proponent of mask wearing because I grew up wearing masks when I'm sick. And I was, in school in the Philippines, we were taught that if you're sick, or if you're feeling, you know, under the weather, and you still want to come to class, just wear a mask and you know, no one will like bat an eye. And that that was actually looked at something that you're doing [14:00] as a responsible person. Like, if you're sick, and you're wearing a mask, you are looked at as someone who's responsible and not someone who's suspect, you know, which is what I experienced here, which is a total contrast to my experience growing up, which is like, if you're wearing a mask here, you're suspect, like you must, you must have the virus because you're wearing a mask and actually not the other way around, which was a total, I don't know, my brain was like reoriented and exposed to that cultural reality. So when, when my students were being very cautious, I was encouraging them and I was telling them, please wear a mask if that makes you feel comfortable, if that makes you feel safe, please do so. And also giving them kind of like a caveat of like you may be looked at as someone who is dangerous or a threat to everyone's health because you're wearing a mask, but that's a cultural barrier that you're going to face here, especially in the south in the United States. [15:00] And you just have to be aware of that. And most of my international students, you know, Asian

international, Korean international students, Chinese international students, Taiwanese international students, they were receptive to that. And they were like, well, we're going to wear a mask, because that, that's what is best for us. And I'm like, definitely, and if you're getting any sort of pushback, or if someone talks to you on campus, let me know, and I could handle it. So I was, I was definitely on the side of I want to protect the wellbeing of my students, especially international students. Also, because I was supervising an international hall on campus, and making sure that they, they know that they have the agency to do what's best for them, especially during that time.

As for being biracial, that was definitely very tricky, because my mom and my dad are not together. And my dad, who is white remarried a white woman. [16:00] And they were definitely on the side of I don't know how to put this, they did not grow up the way I grew up. And so they had a lot of thoughts around, at first, wearing masks. Like, my dad was adamant about not wearing masks at first, and he's, he's 68, he's, he's older, so he's even a part of that age group, where they're, he's very vulnerable to this. And still, he was a little bit adamant about that. And there's nothing like really I could do with that. I mean, I, I made sure to remind him that it was important, I made sure to remind him that he was in the vulnerable age group, and I made sure to remind him that that is good for him. And that sort of like changed his mind, little by little until he started wearing masks in public. And also, my dad and my stepmom live in a rural area in California so it's a, it's a red, the town that they live in is a red [17:00] dot in the sea of blue, so to speak, where it's like a republican area in, in California. And so they were also surrounded by people who did not believe it, perhaps, did not think that it was a case for national emergency or a national health crisis. And so, I'm, I experienced them as well, being on the other side of like, you know, this is, this is not a thing that we should worry about, and this is all just going to go away. And this, this, you know, liberal agenda, I've also heard those words being thrown around at first. And until you know, it got really worse and they kind of like changed their minds about it and started, you know, physically distancing from others and following safety measures. And that was, for me, it's being biracial is always kind of a tension [18:00] between my parents who are white, who are from here, their mindset, their perspective, where they come from, and also like where I come from, because I'm not from here. And I mentioned earlier that I'm a pseudo immigrant. And I actually coined that term for my experience, because I was born in the Philippines as an American citizen. I was born an American citizen offshore. So

citizenship wise, I didn't have any struggles when I moved to the States. I didn't have to go through processes that people go through when they, when they come here as immigrants. What I didn't have was the socio cultural context and the socio cultural privileges because I did, I had to learn how to be an American. I had to learn the history of this country, as if it were my own, because it's not my own, like I didn't grow up here. And so it's always kind of like an interesting dance [19:00] between I have my own values, I'm not from here, and at the same time, acknowledging the privileges that I have, because of the presence of my parents in my life, because of the citizenship that I've had since the time I was born, that not a lot of people have, and not a lot of people have access to quite easily as I did. So in every single thing at work, in my relationships, whether it's romantic or friendships, there's, there always needs to be an education that I have to give and that I have to offer so people understand my positionality which is very unique, difficult, and interesting. But as it pertains to the covid 19 pandemic, I was definitely balancing my worries and my concerns about my family in the Philippines and my frustration [20:00] with my parents about them not taking the virus seriously on the onset of it.

AK: And so can I follow up and ask then, how, if at all, did the political rhetoric that was going on at the same time add pressure or concern to you about yourself and your family or even the students who were in your charge?

MF: Yeah. I think, for me, personally, I, I understand and acknowledged the positionality that I had on campus at that time. So at that time, I was already working for the University of Arkansas for a year and a half. So people somewhat recognized who I was, people [21:00] recognized the work that I have done, and people know me as someone who is in a position of power. So in a way I wasn't at all worried about myself being taunted. Although that was always in the back of my head. Like, I also thought about like, what if I was walking down the street and someone just decides to cat call, well, not cat call, but like, taunt me from their cars or yells, yell a, yell a, a racial slur from their car and I'm there left powerless? Because I feel like in many situations that I've imagined myself being in or I have experienced, I feel like being called a racial slur from a moving car is the most difficult and frustrating experience one could ever experience [22:00] because like you really, what can you do when, when the person who just taunted you or insulted you is already like 100 feet away in point two seconds? You know, like, you can't do anything

other than like, you know, maybe taking down the license plate. And so maybe I'm saying this to say like, I was worried for myself, and I was trying to think of ways of how to protect myself, if that happened to me. And I want to, I had to be 10 steps ahead of everyone and think of like, if this happens to me, what do I do? What is my response? And who can I call? So that was for me. For my family, definitely very worried about how it, what it means for immigration, because I'm also in the process of petitioning my mom, my mom is not an American citizen. And I want her to get a green card so that she could [23:00] be with me whenever she chooses. She has a business in the Philippines so I'm not, I don't think she's ever going to move to the United States full time. But I was definitely thinking about like, what is this going to look like for immigration? If I want to petition my mom, should I start petitioning my mom? What is it going to mean for her? What is it going to mean for the process? And what is it going to mean for my mom coming to the states as an Asian woman who is, who is in her late 50s? Is she going to be safe here? Is she going to experience what older Asian folks experience where they, you know, what we see in the media, where they get pushed on the street and beat up in the street in their old age? And that was something that I had to talk to my mom too about and, and also expose her to like what was happening in the United States, and the possibilities, and how we need to think of ways to be safe, should she come here. And that is [24:00] the process that I'm now just starting. I definitely held off on that from March 2020 until March of 2021 because I was like there might be no future if I start this process right now and you coming from an Asian country. So definitely worried about that.

And also, like my geographical location, I was like, I don't know if Arkansas was the best place for her to go to, was the best place for her to be during that time, you know. On the one hand, I lived on campus because it was a part of my job so it was a bubble, it was a, it was a safe haven bubble. But outside of that, that's, it's free for all you know, anything could happen. So that was definitely something that I was also thinking about. And also for my students, definitely concerned about, like what they're going through, concerned about what they feel, perhaps the isolation that they have felt from the [25:00] campus community, especially because it was a predominantly white institution. And what I could do to help them not feel so isolated, not just because of the pandemic, but because of also their racial identity that was deliberately and intentionally attached and connected to the COVID-19 and mainstream media, which was disgusting, and awful, and I was really worried about them, too.

AK: I have two follow up questions on that. One, if you're comfortable sharing, would you mind sharing some of the ways that you have planned to protect yourself in the event of being taunted, or another [26:00] act of racism against you?

MF: Yeah, so like, I was definitely preparing for slurs. Well, I was imagining, rather, that if I was walking down the street, the worst thing that could happen was someone calling me a racial slur through their car window, and I was thinking of like, okay, if that happens, keep on walking, maybe look back, write down or memorize the license plate and call the police and see what they, what they say, you know. Did I have trust that if I had done that something would have been done? No. Did not at all have any trust as to any follow up, that would have been done around if I had recorded that. But having that in my mind, I was able to maintain a sense of control and say, like, [27:00] I am not going to be helpless if that happens to me, and I'm not going to feel powerless if that happens to me. And so that was one, and then number two is if it was, if it happened on campus, and if it was something that was directed towards me as a staff member by a student, then I'm thinking of, you know, approaching the student, getting their ID information, getting their name and reporting it to the Student Conduct, Office of Student Conduct so that it could be addressed and proper sanctions could be assigned to the student. So those were like the two things that I was definitely imagining that could happen to me and obviously also preparing for.

AK: And also, could you share, in what ways your experiences with racism or, and or the pandemic have been the same or different between Arkansas and Rhode Island? [28:00]

MF: I think I want to share actually a story of my first experience of racism that I didn't realize was an explicit, was a microaggression until maybe a day after it happened, because it really affected me in a weird way. So growing up in the Philippines, I didn't have a black and white dichotomy, I did not, I was not aware of the racist history of the country, of the USA rather. And Filipinos were not, we're not separated by racial lines so this was not something that I was aware of. And this was not something that I was educated in. And so when I first moved to California, I took a job at Wells Fargo as a teller. And [29:00] when I moved here, I had a very distinct Filipino accent. And, you know, I was, I was helping customers and clients as they come into the

store with what they need. And one client, and I was probably working as a teller for maybe like three months at this point, and one client went out of his way, white cis male, to ask me where my accent was from. And I was like, "I'm from the Philippines and that's probably what you're hearing." And he said, "Oh, that's right. I recognize that accent because that's the same accent of my aunt's housekeepers in the Bay Area." And he said it very like nonchalantly. And I was like, "Oh, great." And you know, like, I had to keep my cool, I had to smile because I was doing my job in that moment and I just kind of like, you know, kind of like brushed that [30:00] off. And again, I didn't really, I was affected by it, I felt feelings about the interaction. But at that moment, I was like, I don't know what's happening, like, what was that? What was that comment about? And then it's, it's after a couple of days where I'm like, that guy just reduced me just to a stereotype, or reduced my accent, reduced my country of origin, to a stereotype. And I was like, I don't like that. And I had to decide for myself, like, I don't like that. And that should not happen. And then in grad school, when I, when I went through grad school at California State, that's when I started learning about microaggressions, and racial relations in the US, and history, the history of racial relations in the US. And I was like, yeah, that was, and to this day, I remember that as like [31:00] my first encounter to a blatant microaggression.

So going back to your question, like, how has my experience varied from, because I've lived in California for grad school, Arkansas for my first full time employment, and then Rhode Island for my second full time employment. I don't think the worries and the concerns ever leave me like, I don't think that like there is ever a day where I'm not worried about being a person of color, anywhere in this country, and a non-binary person of color at that, especially because I'm feminine presenting as well. So that adds another layer to all of that. So, I, I'm, I'm not ever like, I don't ever have my guard down. I mean, there are moments where I'm like, okay, these are the people I could trust. I've spent a lot of time with these people and I could probably let my guard down because I know these [32:00] folks, but those are spaces. Right? Those are spaces that I, I know, and those are spaces that I choose to put myself in. And those are spaces that I trust, but like if, if it's, if it's not within those communities that I sought out, created, or created for myself, or vetted, I'm never not worried. And you know, thoughts about like, is this going to happen to me today? Am I going to be the receiver of a racial slur or transphobic slur on the street, on Thayer Street, right, like, because I live close to Thayer Street as well and that has been kind of like a theme. It's been a theme since I started living in the States. And I've been here

again for seven years. And that has always been a theme in whatever places I go in, go. [33:00] And I've also definitely experienced being called a homophobic slur on the street as well, in Nashville specifically. And that tells you a lot about Nashville and I have a lot of opinions about Nashville, but we don't have to get into that. But yeah, so going back to that question, I, it's the same, I guess it's the same. And I've always, I've always like, really, just to wrap up my answer, I've always thought of like, if I want to feel safe, I have to create that for myself. That's not something that will come to me automatically. And that relates to my experience with Brown, too, where it's like the Asian American group, staff group, which I don't even think exists, I don't know if that's, that's a, that's a, that's an established thing, where there's [34:00] an Asian American staff or faculty coalition that's official. That's not even something that like was, you know, someone said, "Mitchell, we know that you're from the Philippines and we know that you are Asian identified, why don't you, you know, reach out to this person, and maybe they could connect you to an Asian American staff, faculty group." That was not something that was given to me on campus like that was not. So I say that to say like, communities that I find solace and comfort and safety in are never something that just falls on my lap. It's something that I always have to create for myself. It's always something that I have to, to seek for myself, which, you know, adds, adds a lot of emotional labor and labor on top of the things that you need to do as an employee, as an all the identities that I have.

AK: So it's probably clear that my question came from a place of assuming Arkansas and [35:00] Rhode Island are very different places and, and in some ways they probably are, but I also know full well that, unfortunately, New England is not the bubble that we'd like to believe it is. And this might be a big question, but what might you say to the person who thinks or claims that racism, homophobia, that these things don't live here?

MF: Oh my gosh, to not live under a rock. I think it's like the most obvious like, get yourself out of the rock that you're living under. Media, media will prove to us that the most visible and blatant acts of racism and violence against Asian American, the community, [36:00] that have taken the lives of Asian Americans in this country did not happen in rural areas. They happen in metropolitan areas. They happen in Atlanta, they happen in Oakland, they happen in New York City. And so like it's there's, there's no such thing as like, oh, I'm, I'm in a, I'm in a progressive,

I'm in a democratic state, or I'm in like a metropolitan area so I'm safe as a person of color as a non-binary, there's no such thing. There is no such thing. Whether you're in a rural, red state, or you're in a blue state, your life could be taken away from you just because of the identities that you hold, wherever you are in this country. So I would say that to the person who says, homophobia and racism doesn't live here, like look at the statistics. Look at the, where, where [37:00] do these things happen? I mean, obviously, it happens, even when it's covered by media or not. But it's, it's, it's definitely not just something that happens in red states. Not at all. It happens in blue states. It happens in diverse areas. It happens in multiple bubbles. So, I would say being an Asian American, pseudo immigrant, non-binary person, I, again, if I don't create that community for myself, that's never going to fall in my lap.

AK: And can I ask, did you participate in any Stop Asian Hate protests or marches or vigils or anything like that anywhere in the country?

MF: I definitely attended multiple meetings on campus. One, because I wanted to be in solidarity with folks and two, [38:00] because I want to contribute to that conversation. Especially when it's spaces for students, I want them to feel like – B, the BCSC organized a conversation for Asian American queer students, and staff members were also – staff and faculty were also invited so I popped in, to make sure that students know that staff members look like them, and staff members are like them. Like there is an Asian American, queer, non-binary person, staff member, on campus that they could go to for, for further resource or for any type of help that they need. So, I've attended multiple of these meetings on campus and multiple webinars, to contribute to the conversation and to, to let people know that I am their resource.

When it comes to protests, it's more of a logistical thing [39:00] that I am not able to go to these protests. One protest happened here in Providence during the weekend that I was out of town. And of course, because of the pandemic, the opportunities to join protests, is also limited. So there's not a lot that I could just join and say, like, I can't attend this one, because I'm going to be out of time, out of town, but I'll attend this one instead, because that's also forthcoming. So, I have not attended any Asian American protests that are in person because of logistical matters and issues. But I have definitely attended meetings, conversations, gatherings for Asian American staff, faculty, and Asian American students on campus.

AK: So as we're kind of coming up on time here, I want to ask a really big question. If somebody listens to this interview tomorrow, what is one thing you would want that person [40:00] to know? And if they're listening to this interview, 50 years from now, what is something you want that person to know? And it can be about you, the pandemic, racism, anything you think these people should know.

MF: Wow. If someone were to like, listen, if someone were to listen to this tomorrow, and if you are an Asian American, queer, gender non-conforming person, whether you hold all of these identities or some of these identities, I want you to know that there are people who want to help you. And there are people who are there to talk through things with you, and don't take it on yourself. And I personally had a tendency to not talk about my problems, because I was also programmed and raised in a culture [41:00] where if you have problems and you talk to someone about it, you end up gaslit. And you're not really helped by that person, whether it's a person that you trust, that you love. And I want the listener to know that there are people out there who would love to listen to you, who would believe you. And it's just a matter of reaching out and asking for help. Unfortunately, sometimes help doesn't come right away, and don't let that discourage you. Don't stop just because it didn't come right away. Continue asking for help because I'm pretty sure someone will know someone, and someone will point you to a person who could listen to you and who could help you with any struggle [42:00] that you might face, or any bad experiences that you're holding on to.

50 years from now, if you're listening 50 years from this interview, call me. I want to know what the state of the world is. I want to know how things have changed. On a student level, I want to know how things have changed on that level, definitely. And I think, I think I would say the same thing. If you experienced racial discrimination, homophobia or transphobia, on campus, in the community, don't isolate yourself, please just, just don't do that. Don't hold on to that experience. Find someone who you could talk to and find someone who you could process that with. [43:00] And that someone probably will be able to help you or point you to a person who could help you and provide you with the resources that you need to heal, and to be whole again, because in my experience microaggressions and racism eats on, eats, eats, eats you up, and it kind of like chips on your soul and it chips on your personhood and your feelings of worthiness

to be and to exist. So, find someone and seek healing. Seek healing for yourself and for community.

AK: Before we close, Michelle, do you have any other questions you would like to ask?

ML: Not really. I guess just, I'm interested in what you plan to do next, Mitchell working within [44:00] the Brown community and, you know, really, having, having reflected so much upon your Asian identity, what you want to do moving forward, you know, not only with the pandemic, but also life afterward.

MF: Michelle, thank you so much for that question. I'm excited first and foremost for things to be typical again. And I'm very conscious of not using the word, word "normal," but things to be typical again, and things to open back up again. I'm looking forward to that because since moving to Brown, I really have not seen what the Brown community is. So, I'm looking forward to that first and foremost.

I want to continue being an area coordinator for maybe one more year, and I want to move on to a Ph.D program that could support me in doing [45:00] research about Filipino indigenous cultures, the Filipino American experience, Asian American experience, mixed API experience, and gender nonconformity in the pre-colonial context and as it relates to decolonization, so those are my research interests. And I definitely want to spend time making knowledge around these topics, because I think that there is so much to be done around these areas, there is so much to contribute around these areas, there's so much to be uncovered around these areas. And in doing so, I think, I also feel that I am contributing to a change in culture and contributing in the visibility of Filipino Americans in academia, Asian Americans in academia. [46:00] And make, make folks know, especially Asian American, queer, non-binary, non, gender non-conforming students, make them know that there is a path for them. And someone like them could be seen in, in, in positions where there can be visibility. And we're, we're, we're no longer in the shadow. So yeah, so that's kind of like my five-year plan is to get into a Ph. D. program, and do research in those areas and stay at Brown, at Brown a little bit more longer, and see what other things Brown has to offer.

AK: Fantastic. So, finally, I just like to leave some open space for you to share anything that you were maybe hoping I would ask you today that I didn't or that you really want to have in the historical record before we [47:00] end the interview today.

MF: Yeah, thank you so much, Amanda, I actually forgot to share my pronouns when I introduced myself. And my pronouns are they/them/their/siya. And I want to share this that siya is a pronoun that we use in the Filipino language in Tagalog. And it's actually the only pronoun that we use. So fun fact, in the Filipino language, the pronouns that we use for people are gender inclusive. So siya is they. So whether we, we talk to, we refer to them a man or a woman, it's always siya, and it's always gender inclusive. And that was something that I found interesting to really think critically about, as of recently, because I grew up using the language, but I didn't really connect it to English where I'm like, that's right! Our pronouns in the Philippines and the Filipino Tagalog language [48:00] is actually gender neutral. And there's no such thing as a feminine and masculine pronoun in the Filipino language. So it's pretty cool. And I wanted to share that.

AK: That's great. Thank you so much. I did notice that in your emails, and I was like, this is the coolest thing I've ever seen. So, thank you so much for giving some context of that. Thank you both Mitchell and Michelle, for joining me today for this really fantastic interview. It will go into a collection of nearly 300 other interviews about women, transgender, and non-binary people at Brown and during the pandemic. Thank you both so, so much.

MF: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

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