

The Solo Filipina Traveller: From the Insights of Travel Bloggers

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A dissertation submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of International Tourism Management
School of Hospitality and Tourism
Faculty of Culture and Society

November 2019

Abstract

Female travellers play a dominant role in the tourism industry. In recent years, this market has held a strong presence in solo travel, where they represent two thirds of its market. The tourism industry is experiencing an 'Asian Wave', particularly in women's travel, due to the rapid expansion of many Asian economies. Despite this, many tourism studies are still plagued by gendered and Western bias. Chang (2015) suggested that in order to bring about more critical research to Asian tourism, academics need to be more culture-specific in their research in terms of how culture influences traditional gender structures. Current Asian tourism research mainly focuses on eastern Asians, who have a greater capacity for travel than those from western and Southeast Asia. However, the growing tourist market in developing Asian countries has made it vital to emphasise an understanding of specific aspects of these female travellers, since Asia has heterogeneous characteristics due to its different religious and cultural ties. The Philippine market has unique characteristics that make it distinct from other Southeast Asian countries. It neither has a strong middle-class market like Singapore, nor is it predominantly influenced by Islamic or Confucianist culture. Yet, little research has been done on its domestic market, specifically on female travellers.

This research aims to understand female Filipina travellers' motivation and how their solo journeys help in constructing their cultural and personal identities. Using a qualitative method, the research investigates the solo journeys of nine Filipina semi-professional travel bloggers. The data were collected from articles posted on their travel blogs, which are known for providing researchers with key insights into tourist experiences because of their unbiased and unprompted nature. Thematic analysis was used in finding their motivations, constraints and benefits and how they link to the construction of the Filipina's identity. The findings identified similarities between Filipina travellers and other Asian female travellers in their motivations to travel solo. Many bloggers used travel to escape their current lifestyle and for personal growth. Similar constraints can be found in the socio-cultural expectations enforced by family and peers to dissuade these Filipinas from pursuing a life that does not conform to their collectivist mindset. These women faced gendered discrimination, more commonly when they travel domestically, due to locals being franker to their fellow Filipinos. Another major constraint is the limitation all Filipinas faced due to their limited travel accessibility. It was by navigating through these constraints and continuing with their journeys that these Filipina solo travellers experienced benefits such as personal growth, expansion of networks, and finding their form of personal success. These benefits not only aided

in reconstructing each traveller's own individual identity, but also reaffirmed their identity as a Filipino, albeit one that is different from the socially expected norms.

Acknowledgments

I would like to start by acknowledging my supervisor Heike Schänzel, for encouraging me to follow through with my research topic and tirelessly supporting me through my writing journey. Her belief in the importance of my research and in my capabilities encouraged me to overcome all those challenging times

I would like to give special thanks to Richard Aquino, who helped and guided me to find the best way to bring out so many truths in the voices of my Filipino subjects, that reflect greatly on their Filipina identity.

I would like to thank Auckland University of Technology and all the amazing lecturers who guided me and helped me grow, not just as an academic but also as a person. As an international student, I appreciate the welcome and care this university has given me throughout my student life.

I thank my family for supporting me financially and emotionally while I underwent this rigorous process alone in a new country. Distance was never an issue with all the love and support that they offered me in my two years away from home.

To my friends in and outside university. They have been and continue to be my rock during emotional and stressful times. Their constant encouragements keep me going believing that I could reach the end.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all the brave Filipina travellers out there, who are constantly fighting against prejudice and society's pressure to conform. Their messages have been a beacon to female travellers around the world to not let their identities stop them from pursuing their passion and reaching their own version of success.

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List of Abbreviations

DOT	Philippine Department of Tourism
FIES	Family Income Expenditure Survey
FLEMMS	Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
PSA	Philippine Statistics Association
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in acknowledgement), nor materials which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:



Francesca Lacson

Date: 03/12/19

1 Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Female travellers play a dominant role in the tourism industry. They make up half of the market (Bond, 2015) and have the greater purchasing power (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016). In recent years, this market has also held a strong presence in solo travel, where they represent two thirds of its market (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Current gender research has made significant strides in addressing the gender bias that plagues contemporary tourism spheres (Harris & Wilson, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2005) and its racial bias towards a Western lens (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). According to Tan and Abu Bakar (2016), the tourism industry is experiencing an 'Asian Wave' due to the rapid expansion of many Asian economies. They also state that in order to understand this market it is vital to delve deeper into the socio-cultural influences that impact the gender roles and decisions of this market. Academic literature has shown that travel behaviours are greatly influenced by gender and cultural values (Yang et al., 2017), where many Asian solo travellers state they are actively challenging the conventional prejudice and may not deem themselves as the 'typical' Asian woman (Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang, Yang, & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019).

Due to the vast heterogenous characteristics that make up the different cultures in Asia, a homogenous image of the Asian market is an erroneous construct. Many tourism industries tend to focus on developed Asian countries like China and Japan, ignoring the potential of developing economies (Seow & Brown, 2018). A survey on TripAdvisor (2015) revealed that 79% of women from Southeast Asia planned to travel alone. Other key factors from this region are the growing middle-class economies and its huge population, making them a potential and profitable outbound market. However, there are few studies focused on Southeast Asian female travellers, despite their active voice in local news and community websites. There have however, been recent strides in academic research on Southeast Asian female travellers. These studies have highlighted the strong middle-class market of Singapore (Chan, 2007), the Malay Muslim 'cultural bubble' women are slowly breaking free through technology (Asbollah, Lade, & Michael, 2013; Rathinan & Selamat, 2019), and how Vietnamese 'historical baggage' affects Vietnamese female tourists' experience with regards to a destination (Osman, Brown, & Phung, 2019). All these studies show glimpses of the Southeast Asian female market but there is one market that has still been overlooked by academic research - the Filipina market.

1.2. Contextualising the Filipino Market

The Republic of the Philippines is a country located in Southeast Asia and is known for having more than 1,700 islands (see Figure 1). Its people and culture are a blend of immigrants and colonial imperialism. It is the only country in Southeast Asia (SEA) that is predominantly Catholic and where many Filipinos are fluent in English due to this language being the primary medium of instruction in higher educational institutions and the second official language of the country, with Filipino being the first. Tourism is a significant sector for the Philippine economy. In 2018, tourism contributed 12.7% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 13% of the country's employment was in the tourism industry (PSA, 2019). In Quarter 1 (Jan-Mar) of 2019 there was a seven percent increase in foreign tourist arrivals, with most of the international visitors originating from Korea, China and the United States (USA) (Philippine Department of Tourism [DOT], 2019). However, the domestic market remains the bread and butter for the Philippines' tourism, where domestic tourists made up 84% of overnight travellers in accommodation in 2018, and where domestic tourism expenditure grew by 21% from the previous year (PSA, 2019).

An expanding economy has allowed more Filipinos to travel for leisure. Former DOT Assistant Secretary Ricky Alegre explained that most of the domestic tourists come from major cities that look for accessible destinations for their holidays or long weekends (Citrinot, 2017). Domestic destinations are the first choice due to the new highways, which have halved the travel time to places such as Baguio, a popular vacation city for residents in Metro Manila. Increased connectivity through budget airlines such as Cebu Pacific and Air Asia, has also boosted the number of Filipino travellers domestically and internationally (Centre for Aviation [CAPA], 2018). When travelling internationally, most Filipinos travel within Asia. According to the booking data of Agoda in 2018, Hong Kong and Japan were the most popular countries for Filipinos to travel to. This may be due to the proximity and, in the case of Hong Kong, the lack of visa requirements. The Philippine passport allows its citizens to visit 75 countries visa free (Passportindex, 2019). This is less than the Asian passport average of 88 visa free countries and significantly less than that of other neighbouring Southeast Asian countries like Singapore (allowed to visit 169 countries) and Malaysia (allowed to visit 164 countries). Despite the limited number of countries that the Philippine passport allows its citizen to visit visa-free, this has not stopped Filipinos from travelling to visa-required countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), France, Italy and the USA, which remain popular international destinations.



Figure 1. Map of Philippines in Southeast Asia. Source: Amazon (2019).

The Philippine domestic market poses its own unique set of characteristics. A recent survey by Amadeus (2018) in collaboration with YouGov found several interesting travel behaviours in the Filipino market. The most prominent finding showed that majority of travellers put the recommendations of their family, friends and colleagues as a top influencer in deciding where and what to do for their travel. They also discovered that Filipinos prioritised tips that would help them save money rather than time. While these findings show that each market in Asia has its own particularities, there is still a lack of research on understanding the deeper minds of the Filipino traveller. The female market is of importance because Filipinas are usually the organisers for family or group trips, and according to a survey by the Philippine Statistics Association (PSA)

(2016), there are more female domestic travellers than there are males. Current literature has accounted for the collectivist culture as a reason for most Filipinos to travel in groups (Church & Katigbak, 2000). However, there is lack of research on the Filipino market's travel motivation. Filipino tourism research has mainly focused on applied management studies on local tourism products (Aquino, 2019) leaving a gap in academic knowledge, specifically on the Filipina market. Given this lack of information, this research aims to address this gap in the knowledge by shedding some light on the Filipina market and how their experiences in solo travelling influences the construction or re-affirmation of their identities as Filipina travellers.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

The Filipina solo traveller was the focus of this research. Due to a lack of research on this market, this study aimed to generate vital knowledge to add to the holistic viewpoints of Southeast Asian female travellers. By collecting data from Filipina travel blogs, this research aims to understand how Filipina travellers' identities are (re)constructed in the different stages of travel through a gender and socio-cultural lens. In order to reach this aim, the research answers the following questions:

Q1: How do Filipina travellers' experiences compare to Western female travellers?
How do they compare to those of other Asian female travellers?

Q2: How do these travellers negotiate gender and socio-cultural constraints and how do these affect their overall travel experiences?

By finding answers to these questions, the researcher can move into the deeper analysis to answer the main research question:

Q3: What meanings do Filipino women gain that help in constructing or reaffirming their gendered and racial identities?

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study investigated the experiences of Filipina travellers as they (re)construct their identities through their solo travels. The theoretical framework of the study followed an interpretivist paradigm supported by a relativist ontology (see Ritchie, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013) and subjectivist epistemology (see Scotland, 2012), which allowed an unstructured process of interpretation based on the Filipina travellers' experiences. It also used the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*

(see Enriquez, 1977) constructs to illuminate the nuances specific to Filipino values and how they played a role in their identity formation.

The research used the qualitative narrative analysis method, which has been a popular and proven way to collect relevant data from personal narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It features aspects of netnography, which is a form of ethnography adapted to study online communities (Kozinets, 2002) and has become popular with market researchers due to the unprecedented opportunities to access naturalistic online data about customers (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Data were collected from travel blogs, which are known for providing researchers key insights into tourist experiences because of their unbiased and unprompted nature (Chandralal, Rindfleish, & Valenzuela, 2015).

The data were from nine travel blogs, written by professional and semi-professional Filipina bloggers. The research focused on articles pertaining to the backgrounds of the bloggers and their solo travelling experiences. These articles provided thick descriptions that surrendered rich information. Thematic analysis was used to find common themes or patterns (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) and provide the flexibility needed to look for specific and global themes. These factors were analysed further as they connect to how the Filipinas experienced their travel and what this meant to their identities.

1.5. Importance of the Study

To begin I would like to state that I believe Chang's (2015) argument that Asian tourism must be understood in its own context and not through a Western gaze. As a Filipina traveller, I identify myself with this research's chosen subjects because of the cultural identity we all share. Due to the gap in knowledge of the Filipina market, I hoped to find some "truths" about this market. Based on the Philippine people's history as descendants of Ancient Malay traditions and Western colonial influences, the market may share similarities with neighbouring Asian countries, but still have its unique traits.

I know my position as Filipina can bring about some personal bias, however, it is because of this that I can bring more depth to the Filipino markets' cultural values and how these impact Filipina travellers because of our shared identity as a woman and as a Filipino. I also begin with the aim of discovering another perspective that travel brings to those who solo travel for longer periods. The way travel has impacted my identity may or may not be the same for these Filipina bloggers and discovering the various nuances may help me understand another side of my Filipino culture,

as well as contribute another layer to the current tourism research on what it means to be an Asian female traveller.

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in six chapters starting with this introduction that has set the scene of the research and its objectives and offers a short summary of the research's methodology. The second chapter contains background information on current related literature on travel as a means of identity formation and Asian female solo travellers, along with the known motivations and constraints. It also introduces the context of the Philippine culture and society. The third chapter showcases the methodology used in collecting and analysing the data collected from the travel blogs. It emphasises the use of thematic analysis where the findings are discussed in chapter four. There it enumerates the three global themes and 12 sub-themes that were the results of analysing the data. Chapter five then discusses the similarities and contrasts these findings have with the current related literature and other possible topics relevant to the findings. Finally, chapter six finishes with the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by setting the scene on how travel has been used as a means for (re)constructing identity. It further elaborates on how travel experiences create multiple identities for travellers and how this is continuously re-worked at every stage of travel. Interpersonal connections and risk-taking play key roles in a traveller's identity re/formation, which are intertwined with the gender and racial identities of the traveller. These two major themes are illustrated further in the next section.

Gender bias is acknowledged in the tourism space, where female travellers must negotiate through a "geography of fear" (Wilson & Little, 2008). This has done little to stop the growing number of female travellers, who use travel as a means of challenging gender norms and creating meaningful connections along the way. This ties into the Western bias that exists in the tourism space and the academy. A call for more critical Asian tourism research has led to the recognition that Asian female travellers face an additional constraint due to their socio-cultural identity. There are also arguments that the voices of the Southeast Asian market must be heard to give a more holistic view of the multi-faceted Asian market (Yang et al., 2017). The last section looks specifically at the Filipina market. Due to the scant amount of academic literature on the Filipina market, I searched the current tourism market and decided to take Chang's (2015) recommended approach by looking into the values and ideologies that are pervasive in Philippine society.

The synthesis of this literature review led to the creation of a conceptual framework based on three main themes: travel and identity, travel and gender identity, and travel and socio-cultural identity. These themes guided me on how I interpreted the data.

2.2. Identity (Re)Construction through Travel

Travel has long been discussed in the tourism literature as a mode of identity re/formation. Travellers have sought the act of travel as a means of self-realisation (Anderson & Erskine, 2014; Neumann, 1992) or a means to escape (Cohen, 2014) their current lifestyle. A common theme mentioned in various academies is the dynamic and reflexive nature of identity formation experienced in the tourism sphere (Desforges, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Cohen, 2010b), while for travellers whose main motive is self-realisation, the process of identity formation is a continuous process at every stage of the journey. In fact, Cohen (2010a) argued that the idea of a one true self is a problematic assumption that is essentialist in nature. Instead, he proposed that the self

is relational and situational, and there are multiple selves that can be attained through their travels. Therefore, instead of concentrating on just the result of self-realisation, it may be vital to understand how individuals create meaning through the various experiences they go through and the reflexive meanings they attribute to them. The formation of identity/ies through travel was best summarised by Lean, Staiff, and Waterton (2016):

One travels as an emotional and sensual being that has been travelling (albeit to varying degrees) physically, virtually, imaginatively and communicatively since, before any particular corporeal travel experience. These travels ensue an individual with unique, and complex subjectivities that may be triggered (or not) in all manner of ways throughout the journey. What is more, a traveler is not a static body moving through space. Just as “before” a journey, they continue to travel in ways that stretch well beyond physical movement, and all these mobilities feed into a continually changing “self”, shifting in different moments and spaces. (p. 12)

The continuous re/construction of self is influenced by a variety of factors during the different stages of a traveller’s journey. The fluidity of identity allows the traveller to create and maintain multiple identities that are reflexive towards the environment and the people they interact with.

An important factor in identity (re)construction is the experience of risk. Elsrud (2001) proposed that risk narratives are facilitators in expressing adventurous narratives that can still be narrated till homecoming. However, the impression of these narratives was different between men and women. For male travellers, upholding an adventurous identity was seen positively, while for female travellers, it was not perceived with the same level of enthusiasm due to its contradictory nature in relation to the socially accepted gendered role. This shows that there is greater importance in looking towards the dimension of constraints that provide risks in the traveller’s journey and how this can create a more meaningful experience for them. Crawford and Godbey (1987) classified constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. “Intrapersonal constraints involve the individual psychological states and attributes; interpersonal constraints reflect interpersonal interactions with the individual; structural constraints include physical and demographical factors that may intervene preference and participation” (as cited by Yang & Tung, 2018, p. 508). These constraints are interconnected, which can link to how personal identity and social identity are intertwined. All travellers have their own sets of unique personal attributes and beliefs. This is greatly magnified when looking at the traveller’s gendered identity, which may influence the type of constraints they will face. Another connected aspect is that

constraints do not only occur during the trip but may start at the pre-trip stage. This shows that negotiating constraints can happen at every stage of a traveller's journey, and connects to how formation of identity is an ongoing process (Cohen, 2010a). This sets up a greater argument: in order to understand the role of travel in identity formation, internal and external constraints at every stage of the journey must be examined. In looking at the root cause of these constraints and how the travellers negotiate them, deeper understandings can be generated about the identities Filipina travellers had to grapple with, and what identity they choose to create out of those constraints.

Interpersonal relationships also play a vital role in identity formation. The tourism space offers a dynamic set of social relations that fosters interaction and self-development (Wearing & Wearing, 1996). The sociocultural themes of a destination play an important role in the construction of collective identity (Noy, 2004). The connection the travellers feel with sociocultural themes, such as local practices and beliefs, allows travellers to create more meanings from experiences instead of just witnessing them as spectators. Anderson and Erskine (2014) argued that people who engage in long-haul travel, experience tropophilia, the need to move and be moved in relation to a place, and topophilia, the love of a place. The length of the traveller's stay is dependent on their connection to the place and its people. Engaging with locals presents itself as another opportunity for travellers to develop or alter their own identities to fit in with the local culture (Wearing & Wearing, 2001). This may be a temporary "self" that will allow them to integrate more with the local community or a more permanent "self" that they will maintain back home. Interpersonal relationships can also stem from their relationships at home. Close relationships, such as those with family and friends, have a major influence on the motivation or constraints a traveller will face. Some individuals are motivated to travel to maintain relationships, while others forfeit travel experiences because of their companions (Hibbert, Dickinson & Curtin, 2013). The level of influence of these interpersonal relationships varies according to the traveller's background. Gender and cultural ties (Yang et al., 2019) have been seen to play significant roles on how much influence these ties have on a traveller and the kinds of interaction they have during their travels. Looking closer at interpersonal relationships and how these influence the Filipina traveller, acting as an encourager or a hindrance (Crawford & Godbey, 1987) will provide a basis for a deeper understanding of the holistic process of identity (re)construction of a solo Filipina traveller.

2.3. Women Travellers and the Gendered Sphere

Female travellers are a major market in the tourism industry. They are the ones most inclined to travel for leisure. Even in solo travel, which has become a popular trend in contemporary tourism, women hold a strong presence, as they represent two-thirds of those who travel solo for leisure (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Despite this, women experience a considerable level of constraint that stems from their gendered and social identity as females (Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Jordan & Gibson, 2005). The history of the masculinised tourism space can be traced back to the rise of Western industrialisation. The practice of having a vacation was originally for working men to be given time off to recover from their work. Women in the past were not as highly mobile as they are now, especially solo women travellers, as the act of solo travel was perceived as indecent (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016; Bui, Wilkins, & Lee, 2004). Evidence of this can still be seen in niche markets such as backpacking, which have traditionally catered for male travellers (Elsrud, 2001) and women who partake in this type of travel, experience double standards (Teo & Leong, 2006). Wilson and Little (2005) claimed that women experience a “relative escape” when partaking in tourism activities. This means that even if they have “access to multiple locations, have a legislative right of freedom, and were provided with equity of opportunity, they were constrained by the social mores of home and destination” (p.169). This has not deterred women from being a strong market in leisure tourism. Researchers have suggested that the motivations and benefits that they gain from travel outweigh the constraints they encounter during their journey (e.g. Harris & Wilson, 2007; Jordan & Gibson, 2005).

The tourism space has been described as a “heterotopia,” where women can resist the gendered construct that is rooted in the “patriarchal system of domination” (Harris & Wilson, 2007, p. 239). While escape is also a major motivation for most travellers, the specificity for female travellers is to escape the “narrative of domesticity, dependence and confinement” (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006, p.61). Another gendered aspect that women must navigate is that of being involuntarily subjugated to the male sexual gaze, especially when they are seen travelling alone. However, rather than allow themselves to remain as victims, female travellers have developed methods of resistance against these acts (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). This has allowed them to become empowered and grow more confident in their own personal selves, adding to the benefits of travelling solo.

There are also interpersonal benefits gained from travel. Wilson and Harris (2006) proposed that meaningful travel centres on three key elements: search for self, self-empowerment, and a connectedness with others. While the first two benefits can be products from risk-taking, as

previously mentioned, the desire for connection can be seen as early as during the pre-trip stage. For some, the need for connection outside their social circle is a powerful motivator, as they want to surround themselves with individuals that share the same interest and that do not remind them of the constrictions of their day to day life. Even during the act of resistance, they create connection with other female travellers by helping to protect each other from unwanted sexual advances (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). These relationships, along with other benefits can be brought back home, show the appeal of leisure travel despite the gendered constraints.

Female travellers voluntarily accept risks and negotiate their gendered constraints. Through this process, female travellers manage to not only discover and (re)construct their personal identities, but also to reshape their gendered identities (Laurendeau, 2008; Yang et al., 2017; Kinnaird et al. 1994). However, many studies in gender tourism are written from Western women's perspectives. Wilson and Little (2008) noted the need to look at the experiences of women from host countries if they "intersect, overlap or differ from the experiences of Western women travellers" (p. 183). The Philippines fits the description of a host country in the Western context. Looking at travel through a gendered lens provides a relevant view on how identity is shaped. However, it does not provide a holistic understanding of how Filipina travellers negotiate these gendered risks, thus additional research on socio-cultural ties are needed.

2.4. Asian Female Travellers

In the past decade, Asia has become a major stakeholder in the global tourism industry. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNTWO) (2019), three of the top ten tourism receipts in 2018 were from Asia, namely Thailand, Japan and China. Additionally, two of the top ten tourism spenders were also from Asian countries, with the most coming from Chinese tourists for six years in a row. However, tourism academics continue to favour concepts conceived in the "historical, cultural, and social changes of Europe and North America" (Winter, Teo, Chang, 2009, p. 5). Researchers have acknowledged the need to address the imbalance that characterises current tourism scholarship, which needs more critical research into Asian tourism (Chang, 2015; Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016). Teo (2009) stated that the evolution of tourism in Asia is qualitatively different to that of the pathways followed in Europe or the USA. However, Teo also recognised that the geographical expansions of Asia's markets "reflects globally familiar patterns" (p. 9). Critical assessment is imperative for the deeper understanding of Asian tourism, in order to understand "whether today's Asian tourists are replicating patterns and impacts of their non-Asian peers decades earlier, or whether new processes, outcomes and challenges are materializing instead" (Chang, 2015, p. 86). This call for critical research makes it an opportune time to research

the way Asian solo female travellers create meaning through their travel experience, and to discover whether this follows or differs from the processes of their Western counterparts.

Religion and culture constitute important lenses through which to understand the travel experiences of Asian women. Confucianism and Islam are the two main ideologies that dominate this region and shape the patriarchal gender norms present in Asian society (Yang et al., 2017). Researchers have found that Asian female travellers must experience greater resistance to escaping because of their more collectivist culture that stems from patriarchal ideologies and values (Yang et al., 2019; Yang & Mura, 2016; Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016). Even in contemporary times, the act of solo travelling for Asian women is seen as an anomaly. These women face many cultural stigmas such as “gendered aloneness” (Yang et al., 2019) and being labelled as “unfilial” (Seow & Brown, 2018). Despite this, there is a steady growth of Asian women who want and continue to travel solo. Bui et al., (2014) offered another perspective - while Asian travellers are motivated to escape from societal pressure, they are still strongly committed to their home “through a sense of filial piety, an awareness of their identity and positive evaluation of home” (p. 126). Instead of looking at their socio-cultural backgrounds in a negative light, Asian travellers find more connection to their homelands by being away from them. These dual facets may prove an enlightening perspective as Asian female travellers have to overcome cultural constraints in a continuous process of negotiating their Asian identity.

Cultural identity has been noted to play a key role in the perception of risk that exists in the gendered space of tourism (Yang, 2017). According to Seow and Brown (2018), Asian travellers experience greater unwanted objectified attention rooted in the Asian stereotypes many Western-dominated tourism spaces endorse. Decades of racial gendered discrimination have stereotyped Asian women as meek and submissive (Wantono & McKercher, 2019). The irregularity of seeing Asian women travelling on their own also causes them to stand out, which makes them regular targets of men’s unwanted advances. These negative experiences impact the way Asian female travellers undergo their travel experience. Despite the gendered racial constraints, Asian female solo travellers have learned ways to adapt their behaviours, such as avoiding going out at night, and grouping with other females (Yang et al., 2017) as a form of resistance, just as their Western counterparts do (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008).

Southeast Asian travellers make a promising outbound market (UNWTO, 2018); a survey on TripAdvisor (2015) revealed that 79% of women from Southeast Asia planned to travel alone. Despite this growing market, Asian tourism studies have mainly focused on East Asians, which

paints an inaccurate picture of the Asian tourist identity. Tourism research on Southeast Asia has mostly looked at women from the production aspect instead of looking at them as a tourism market (Yang & Mura, 2016). This mirrors the views of Western travellers who mistake women who look like locals as sex workers, instead of travellers like themselves. Yang et al., (2017) argued that there has been a misconception that Southeast Asian female travellers are immobile participants of Western tourism. This may stem from their colonial history and the “cultural bubble” that domesticates women, due to entrenched religious practices and gender roles (Muzaini, 2006). Recent research on Malay Muslim women’s travel have countered this argument. Ratthanan and Selamat (2019) investigated the travel movements of Malay Muslim women and saw them negotiating socio-cultural restraints using technology. This empowered them to pursue travel while maintaining their Muslim identity. This is just one of many aspects that Southeast Asian female travellers experience through identity re/formation in travel. Due to the multi-faceted cultural ideologies and values that exist in Asia, using a socio-cultural lens offers a greater depth of understanding of Asian solo female market, specifically the Filipina market that remains unexplored in the tourism academy.

2.5. Philippine Culture and its Women

2.5.1. Filipino Values

“Present day Filipino culture can be defined as a hybrid of indigenous and colonial values, beliefs, customs and traditions” (Nadal, 2011, p. 36). Filipinos are descendants of Malay ancestry. Thousands of years before colonial rule, the Philippines was a country that consisted of multiple tribes known as “*barangays*”, led by a *datu* (leader). It was a collectivist society that believed that everyone in the *barangay* had to support the tribe. This was seen in the equal gender power given to both men and women. Though not given the title of *datu*, women were given equally important roles as a *babaylan* (spiritual leader) (Roces, 2000). Gender inequality only came to pass when the Spanish colonised the Philippines in the 1500s. Over 300 years of colonisation stripped women of their power and left them as caretakers of the home. Historians have said that the Spaniards used early pre-colonial cultures and twisted it with Catholicism to empower men and have women subjugated to become homemakers (Aquino, 2019). The Maria Clara image is an example of Spanish colonial influence that is still ingrained in contemporary Philippine society. Maria Clara is a heroine from the Philippine national epic *Noli me Tangere* written by Philippine national hero Jose Rizal in 1887. The character epitomises the ideal Filipina who is demure, modest, and obedient, and reflects the ideals of its colonisers. Even in the 21st century, many

Filipino families push the idea of keeping their daughters pure (i.e. virgins) till marriage, an idea that is reinforced by Catholic teachings (Roces & Roces, 2013).

Colonial influence also influenced how people viewed Filipino values. It was only the creation of the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology) by Enriquez (1977) that gave an accurate linguistic translation of the main virtue present in modern day Filipino culture. He claimed that Filipino values stemmed from the virtue of *kapwa* (a shared identity/solidarity with humanity) and *pakiramdam* (heightened awareness and sensitivity), which are pre-colonial indigenous virtues that prioritise community. These relate to other common Filipino values such as *hiya* (propriety), *utang na loob* (internal debt of gratitude), and *pakikisama* (social acceptance). These interpersonal beliefs are deep rooted in the Filipino culture, and from a young age are learnt and enforced by their kins (Miralao, 1997). These can also be seen in the travel behaviour of the Filipinos that generally travel in groups, such as on family trips or with *barkada* (close group of friends) (Church & Katigbak, 2000). The act of solo travel, in a sense, goes against these beliefs, which is why it is an oddity and sometimes looked down on. This is ever more present in the way locals perceive Filipinas who dare to act individually. Guthrie and Jacobs (1966) argued that Philippine society's value is not one of independence nor self-sufficiency. Instead, the heart of Filipino values is its importance of family and each family member's internal sense of reciprocity within the family. Children are taught at a young age to depend on one's kin and that their every action not only reflects on them but on the whole family as well. This understanding does not change the visible impacts colonial imperialism still have on Filipino society. One obvious symptom is that of the colonial mentality, the inculcated idea that everything Western is better and desirable (Aquino, 2019; David, 2013). This can be seen in the preference for Western products and the double standards Filipino people have towards whiter looking Filipinas. This also can be seen in the Philippine tourism space, where white tourists are given preferential treatment and may be why the Philippine tourism academy has mostly focused on the service aspects of Filipinos. These values and colonial influences are the bases that may shed light on the roles modern Filipina women face in Philippine society and how they impacts them as travellers, both positively and negatively.

2.5.2. Filipina Women

Compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Filipinas have a more egalitarian society in terms of education and career. Women are encouraged to gain an education. According to the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), women had a higher functional literacy rate (92%) compared to men (88.7%) and more women were gaining a higher

education (San Buenaventura, 2019). Women have played an active role in politics, as the Philippines hails itself as the only democratic nation that has had two female presidents. The Philippines is also the top country in Asia in terms of women in senior managing positions (at 37.36%), which is higher than the global average (29%) (Desiderio, 2019), and in 2015, the Family Income Expenditure Survey (FIES) showed that women earned a slightly higher annual income than did men (PSA, 2019). Despite all these factors that indicate the country's progressiveness, Filipino women are still subjected to the traditions of a bygone era.

The main roles of women in Philippine society are those of daughter, sister, wife, mother, *dalaga* (young woman), mistress, employer, etc. (Roces & Roces, 2013). Most of the common roles are entrenched in the deep traditions of the Filipino culture and their importance to family. Although there is an acceptance that women can aim to have a professional career, their main goal is perceived to be that of providing for the family. Once they graduate from higher education, Filipinas are generally expected to find a husband and start a family, since marital status remains integral to women's identity (Suzuki, 2015). While they are still single, they work to support their direct and extended family. It has become normal for women to be the breadwinners of the family. The majority of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are women who work as domestic helpers, being away from their family for years on end and sending the money they earn back home (Roces, 2000). This shows the importance of family obligations on a Filipina's life and how family is part of her identity.

As a daughter, it is expected that she must give back to the parents for all they have done for her (*Utang na loob*). This usually means helping with the house chores and taking care of the parents once she is working. This role is more specific when she is the eldest, because she is expected to provide for her younger siblings, even if that means giving up opportunities for higher education and going straight to work after high school (Roces & Roces, 2013). Therefore, it is expected for women to get a stable job and to support the family. This is not limited to her nuclear family, but to the extended family as well. Should she decide to opt for a more independent life, she will be perceived as an unfilial daughter who is *walang hiya* (shameless). This opposes the life of a solo traveller, as travel is considered a luxury for some and by choosing this path, she is foregoing her obligation to her family.

The role of *dalaga* is one that is completely controlled by the family, especially when the girls reach adolescence. Espiritu (2001) argued that Filipinas experience restriction from an early age. Compared to their male siblings, they are usually not allowed certain freedoms, such as being

able to sleep over in a friend's house or go out without permission. This largely stems from the Catholic influence, that women must remain pure until marriage. This tradition is so deeply rooted, even Filipino-Americans follow this tradition despite being in a society that is more liberal with its women. Parents that use Catholic morality as a justification for controlling the actions of their daughters restrict the "autonomy, mobility, and personal decision-making" (Espiritu, 2001, p. 435) of these young women. This tradition provides a deeper perspective of the mindset of Filipina travellers who make the decision to travel outside the realms of their family's influence and how they negotiate these socio-cultural constraints in order to do so.

Double standards are applied to women who do not conform with the valorised image of a Filipina. *Japayukis* (Japan-bound Filipinos) are a common type of OFW, where many of the Filipinas end up working as hostesses in bars. Work gives them the financial independence to afford a middle-class lifestyle while at the same time fulfilling their filial obligations to their family back in the Philippines. However, their job gives a negative image of them, as they are most commonly associated with prostitutes and labelled as "bad" Filipinas (Suzuki, 2015). Image is important for Filipinos and those who do not conform to Filipino society's ideal image of its women are disassociated from being a Filipina (Espiritu, 2001; Ignacio, 2000). Nonetheless, these modern Filipinas are not passive acceptors. Living in a globalised environment has empowered these Filipinas to resist socio-cultural domination and create their own meaning toward achieving their version of modern success (Suzuki, 2015). This transformation may parallel the experiences of solo Filipina travellers, especially when they do long-term travel. Global influences mixed with financial independence and lower airfares that increase mobilities have made it more accessible for some Filipinas to journey out of their hometowns. Although social-cultural influences, mainly family ties, form the basis of constraints for Filipina travellers, it is a vital aspect of their identity and must be evaluated carefully.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

Expanding on this literature review, the conceptual framework aims to offer a clearer portrayal of the concepts that I will be addressing in this research. Imenda (2014), defined a conceptual framework as "an end result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain or predict a given event, or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (p.189). Based on the literature, I have narrowed my research down to three main concepts that will be used as a guide to my interpretations and findings (see Figure 2).

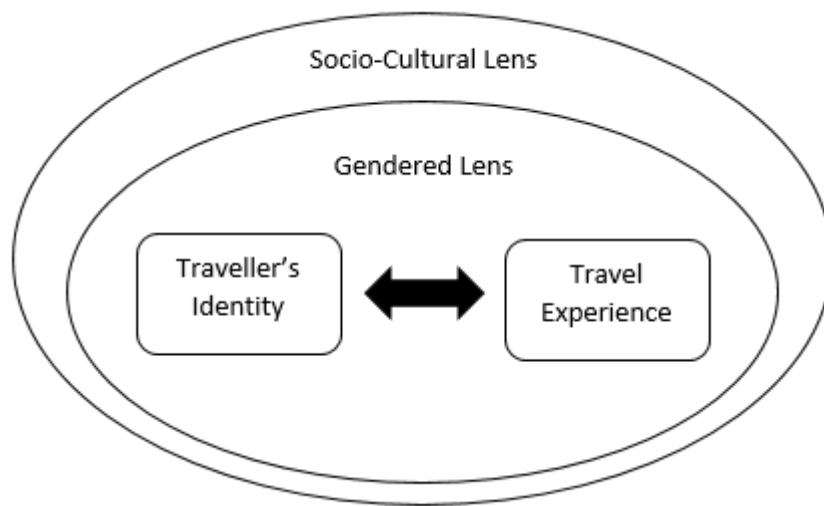


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for identity formation through travel

2.6.1. Travel and Identity

The influence of travel experience relations on the formation of travellers' identities has been a common research topic in the tourism field (Heinen, 2016; Lean et al., 2016; Noy, 2004). The (re)formation of identity is not limited to a single identity but can lead to a multiplicity of identities. According to Desforges (2000), identities or the “selves” are “constructed, modified and played out in interaction with other people, meaning rather than one fixed self, each individual has multiple selves that are permeable and contextually dependent” (p.34). They can arise in different stages of the traveller's journey and are influenced by the various factors they experience along the way (Cohen, 2010a). Factors that shape the formation of the travellers' identity are the risks and challenges they face and the interpersonal connections they have and make throughout their journey. These factors act as a catalyst to an array of problems and benefits. Navigating through various forms of challenges enriches the travellers' identities (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Myers 2017).

The concept of travel used as a transformational medium for identity (re)construction or (re)confirmation is highly contextual and heterogenous in nature (Cohen, 2014). Therefore, it is important to investigate the different aspects of the traveller's journey and see how these play a role in the identity formation of the traveller. This is the basis of my conceptual framework (see Figure 2) that I will use in this research, as it looks deeper into the factors that lead to identity formation, but also allows the freedom to contextualise each factor through two lenses, which is explained in the next section.

2.6.2. Travel and the Gendered Identity

The contemporary tourism sphere is gendered, and nuances of this can be seen in the various stages that construct the traveller's identity. Harris and Wilson (2007) argued "that motivations to travel are gendered, as they are constructed out of the social realities and contexts of the men and women who participate in tourism" (p. 236). Escaping domesticity has been a common motivator for women to engage in leisure tourism (Harris & Wilson, 2007). In most cultures, women are subjected to the role of homemaker and mother, and travel is used as way to break away from these socio-cultural expectations, mostly for a temporary timeframe. However, the female market faces constraints caused by the gendered tourism space. Research has suggested that female travellers experience more dangerous challenges than do men, such as sexual harassment or violence (Chiang & Jogorathnam, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2008). However, this has done little to stop women from continuing to be a dominant market in tourism. Perhaps by way of retaliation, women have developed various ways of self-protection as means to counter these issues (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008).

By interpreting my findings through a gendered lens, I contextualise the experiences of Filipina travellers that stem from their gender identity. This means that my research addresses the gendered bias that exists in the solo traveller's journey, which is greatly amplified by the traveller's ethnic identity. This is discussed next.

2.6.3. Travel and the Socio-cultural Identity

A wave of critical research has acknowledged the Western-dominated view of the tourism academia. Teo (2009) argued for the need for existing tourism theories and concepts to be reassessed with an Asian context. This can be seen in the racial/ethnic differences that affect the stages of the traveller's journey and identity formation. Research has suggested that solo travel provides a means of self-discovery, but the path is different for Asian women to that of Western women. Asian women construct the self by challenging the social expectations of being a woman (Yang, Yang, & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). Many Asian cultures are patriarchal societies that constrict the mobilities of their women. Often, this constriction specifically stems from family concerns, since family represents a critical influencer that can impact travel decisions (Yang & Tung, 2018). Research has also suggested that Asian women are more prone to sexual harassment due to racial stereotypes (Seow & Brown, 2018), so Asian travellers not only have to grapple with the by-products of their gender identity, but also with their racial/ethnic identity (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016).

Due to the heterogenous values of each Asian country, researchers have suggested that studies should view Asian markets through a socio-cultural lens. Such a lens can bring another layer of context to the Filipina's travel experience. I must explicitly state that I agree with Chang's (2015) perspective that I do not assume that the Asian experience of tourism, specifically for Filipinos, is fundamentally different from the Western experience. However, there are cultural factors that are specific to Filipinos that play a role in their identity (re)confirmation. These realities can bring a greater understanding of the multi-faceted dimension of the Asian market.

2.7. Conclusion

The tourism space and academy are both gendered and highlight a Western bias. This has affected the way identity (re)formation of Asian female travellers is experienced and understood. From the literature, it is evident that experiencing risk and interpersonal connections are the most influential factors in identity (re)formation. These two factors link with the gender and socio-cultural identity of the traveller, as the type of risk and interpersonal connection is greatly dependent on these factors. Asian female travellers face greater constraints due to socio-cultural ties that are influenced by their religious beliefs and collectivist culture. There is still a lack of information that can give a more holistic overview of the multi-faceted culture of the Asian market, as current Asian tourism scholarship is more subjective towards the Eastern Asian market. Nonetheless, the call for critical tourism studies through the voices of local people has led me to look at the colonial history and the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* perspective in understanding the values and ideologies that exist in contemporary Philippine society, and how this dictates the role of Philippine women, and forms part of their identity. Through this deeper understanding and the conceptual framework created from the literature, I can connect this to the experiences of solo Filipina travellers – this is shown to be vital in my interpretations (see Chapter 5, Findings).

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The theoretical framework used is the philosophical stance that underpins my methodology. It provides a context in the process of how this research came to be and provides the basis of its logic (Crotty, 1998). The overarching framework for this research follows an interpretivism paradigm supported by a relativist ontology (see Ritchie et al., 2013) and subjectivist epistemology (see Scotland, 2012). The findings are illuminated further using the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* framework to bring the Filipino socio-cultural context into the findings. This chapter explains how each theory relates to my research, each of which underpins the conceptual framework and rationalises the methodology used.

3.2. Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being or existence. It is the researcher's understanding of what constitutes reality (Gray 2018; Lorraine, 2017; Scotland, 2012). In this research I take a relativist stance, which follows the belief that reality is known based on socially constructed meanings (Ritchie et al., 2013). The focus of this research is looking at how identity is (re)constructed throughout the travel experiences of Filipina travellers. Through the relativist stance I research the traveller's socio-cultural background and gendered identity and how these influence the way they give meaning to their interactions with a destination, its locals and its culture.

"Epistemology" refers to the theoretical perspective of how knowledge is acquired, constructed and communicated (Lorraine, 2017; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), and is the basis of how the research is constructed. According to Ritchie et al. (2013), the epistemology has three key issues that need to be addressed: 1) how knowledge is acquired, 2) "the relationship of the researcher and the researched and how this influences the connection of 'fact' and 'value'", and 3) "what it means to say a claim is accurate or 'true'" (p. 8). Based on my research epistemology, I view that knowledge is acquired inductively. This means I first observe my findings and based on the literature; I start building my inferences. I believe that because my research delves into social sciences, I cannot be objective in investigating my topic, but aim for empathetic neutrality. This means I am aware and make known any pre-conceived assumptions or biases I may have in relation to my research and continually reflect on how I acquire and interpret my findings. I also follow the coherence theory of truth (Cohen, 1978) in my claim that my findings are accurate.

3.3. Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen for this study because it places value on human interpretation. This theoretical perspective arose to help understand and explain human and social reality. It focuses on “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 62). It looks at meanings and interpretations that the researcher can construct based on the participants’ backgrounds. The research is considered largely inductive with interpretations grounded in data (see Ritchie et al., 2013) and how people make sense of these social realities (see Tuli, 2010). What this means for my research is that I must delve deeper than what is written in the data and investigates the participant’s social background, how it influences the traveller in her decision, how she navigates through challenges, and how she will construct /reconfirm her identity. Looking at other aspects such as gender, religion and personal beliefs brings different interpretations of their realities. Assumptions are expected, but they are welcomed in this paradigm, which encourages researchers to be fully engaged in their topic. I came to this research with my pre-conceived assumptions, but because I acknowledge it early, I am able to set out what aspects needed further research and what aspects are related to my subjective experiences. As a former solo traveller, I can relate to the experiences these Filipina travellers had, and find purposeful meaning from their narratives. My cultural background also helps form my interpretations, which are discussed next.

3.4. Sikolohiyang Pilipino

Enriquez (1977) identified and accurately translated two key values that make up the contemporary Filipino psychology. *Pakiramdam* (heightened awareness and sensitivity) and *kapwa* (a shared identity/solidarity with humanity) are pivotal values that trace back to the pre-colonisation era when indigenous Filipinos lived in a collectivist society and their women enjoyed greater egalitarian rights. They explain why other surface values such as *pakikisama* (togetherness), *hiya* (propriety), and *utang na loob* (internal debt) are so prevalent amongst Filipinos and how they impact their travel experience. Aquino (2018), argued that *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* can be used to explain issues and develop concepts in the Philippine tourism and hospitality industry, “within the intricacies of the Filipino socio-cultural context” (p. 81). This is vital, as past studies tended to highlight only their social-interaction manifestations and missed the deeper meanings and moral underpinnings (Miralao, 1997).

In the call for more critical research in Asian tourism, using the framework of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* helps illuminate the nuances in the subjects’ travel experiences and how these influence the (re)construction of their identity. Teo (2009) stated that the Asian market shows familiar global

tourism patterns, and by using the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* framework I can bring deeper insights on the qualitative differences in the evolution of tourism for the Filipino market. It could also suggest that other countries that were former colonies could investigate their deeply rooted values from pre-colonial time as a guide to decolonising their tourism sphere.

3.5 Axiology

This is the role of values that the research can provide to the public. It is based on my researcher's position, which involves two key roles. The first role is that of a native-culture bearer (Aquino, 2019). Being a Filipino born and raised in the Philippines, I understand and have been brought up with deep-rooted cultural values that form part of the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. This provides me with a better understanding of the travel experiences of my subjects and detect nuances that non-native researchers may not fully comprehend. The second role is that of *Pagka-Filipina* (being a Filipina). I understand and experience the ways socio-cultural expectations can constrain a Filipina's freedom to travel. These two key roles help me in identifying pertinent data related to the literature review, which can provide greater insights in my interpretations.

3.6. Qualitative Research

Based on the theoretical conceptual framework I am using for this research, I decided to use qualitative research as my main methodology because it allows the flexibility to look at subjects' tourism aspirations and challenges (see Veal, 2018), how they interpret their experiences, and what meanings they attribute to those experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research offers a wide array of methods that can suit the type of research I am conducting and the meanings I may find. In this research, travel blogs are the primary source of data because of the unobtrusive method used to collect data and the rich content they possess. Thematic analysis was used after collecting data from the narratives in the travel blogs. I explain how each part plays a significant role for my research then move on to detailed accounts of how the data were collected, the ethical boundaries the research had to abide with, and the limits of the methodology.

3.6.1. Narrative Analysis of Blogs

Narratives or storytelling are the oldest way humans have used to make sense of the world. In tourism academia, narratives are a popular source of data for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Most narratives arise during the post-trip stage, when as Clawson (1963) suggested, is the time when travellers recollect their journey. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) later added that there are various contextual events that shape this stage. This means that every single

travellers' recollection of a journey is personal and unique, and the different elements of the trip (from pre to post-trip stages) influence the way they narrate their story.

In the age of digital advancement, many travellers have used the internet as means to guide, communicate and prepare for their trips. This has popularised the use of netnography, which is a form of ethnography adapted to study online communities (Kozinets, 2002), in tourism research. However, most tourism researchers have investigated online review sites or forums primarily for market analysis. Online travel blogging has been a popular means of expression and communication for the contemporary traveller, yet it is still an under-utilised resource in tourism experience research. Blogging provides research with "rich insights on how tourists express the transformational effects of their experiences for the self" (Bosangit et al., 2015, p. 1). This works well with solo Filipina travellers who are forming a growing market and those who have travelled solo for some time have articulated their experiences through publicly accessible travel blogs. Blogging showcases an expressive phenomenon that, "if interpreted correctly, can be used in the creation of "meaningful knowledge about the self and society" (Wright, 2010, p. 119). It is a suitable source for understanding what specific parts of a traveller's journey held special meanings in relation to the experience. This methodology gives me the freedom to be specific on the sample used for data collection. By reading through their narratives, I can already make informed decisions about whether their narratives are suitable for the study or not.

3.6.2. Unobtrusive Method

In understanding a market, the unobtrusive method is suggested to be ideal because subjects may modify their answers when they are aware of the researcher's presence (Veal, 2018). Netnography does not require participant observation (Whalen, 2018) and using publicly accessible blogs for data collection has the advantage of being unobtrusive, which allows relevant data to be collected from travel bloggers without their knowledge. The advantage to this method is that the data collected are based on the bloggers' experiences, which is their personal choice of expression and mostly written when the experiences were still fresh in their mind. Although not being able to ask specific questions to the participants did sometimes make it difficult to get the most suitable answers for the research, through their digital narratives the bloggers all expressed insights from their journeys that revealed the nuances of being a native Filipino and being a woman from the Philippines, which were vital to the findings.

3.6.3. Data Collection

3.6.3.1. Blog selection

“Solo Filipina Travel Bloggers” were the main keywords used in the Google search engine to find suitable blogs for the research. Popular Filipina travel bloggers were the first to show, then a travel blogger (male), who listed his top “12 Female Travel Blogs for the Empowered Filipina.” I went through the list and the individual blogs that were listed from Google search to see if they included the first three key words: that is, they were written by a Filipina, travel was the main theme of the blog, and they wrote about their solo travel experience. I initially listed 27 blogs that went through a second round of filtering. The second phase was more repetitive as I needed to read one or two articles from each blog, then use the blog search systems or tags to see how many articles and details they had written about their solo experience. I excluded blogs whose articles were mainly itinerary-based, photo journals and focused more on other travel themes such as luxury and food. This reduced the list to the nine blogs listed her:

- <https://psimonmyway.com/about/>
- <https://backpackingwithabook.com/>
- <https://www.everywherewithfena.com/>
- <https://www.solitarywanderer.com/>
- <http://filipinamomad.com/>
- <https://www.escapesanddiaries.com/about-me/>
- <http://wordsandwanderlust.com/>
- <http://www.traveling-up.com/>
- <https://twomonkeystravelgroup.com/>

These blogs were all written by individual Filipina travellers, both professional and semi-professional bloggers. Since Filipinos are usually fluent in English, all were written in English with the occasional Filipino words and phrases written to convey a feeling or term that could only be communicated in their native language. The only exception was found in the “twomonkeytravelgroup”, which was hosted by a couple, but written by the female author about her experience as a solo traveller, which fulfilled the requirements and contained relevant insights about solo Filipina travels. The important element is that each of the bloggers wrote about personal experiences during and after their solo travel experience, providing data that could later be used for thematic analysis.

Table 1. Travel bloggers' demographic profile

Name	Age	Status	Country of residence (Homebase)	General travel destinations
Pia	Late 20s	Single	Mexico	Asia, South America, Eurasia
Becca	Early 30s	Single	Vietnam	Asia, Oceania, North America
Eva	Early 40s	Single	Philippines	Asia
Sarina	Late 30s	Single	Philippines	Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Oceania, Middle East
Frances	Late 20s	Single	Philippines	Asia
Ella	Early 30s	Married	Thailand	Asia
Ina	Early 30s	Married	Australia	Asia, Oceania
Tisha	Mid 30s	Married	Philippines	Asia, Oceania
Anna	Early 30s	Married	Bhutan	Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Oceania, Antarctica

The selected blogs were from nine Filipina travellers (Table 1); their real names were replaced with pseudonyms. They were aged between the late 20s to their early 40s, and just over half were single. About half of the bloggers' current home base was in the Philippines, while the others were living abroad. As travel bloggers, their home base is not permanent and some used words such as "currently in __," to show that their address changed from time to time. They were all still active bloggers, but the articles I chose for data collection dated back to 2011, as the date was not relevant to this research, which focuses on stories of solo travel experiences. All had travelled both domestically and internationally. The most common international destinations were in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. Due to the unobtrusive nature of this research, I had to rely on the information they wrote on their blog posts to inform me of their age ranges, whether they still travelled solo after being married, and the destinations they travelled solo to.

3.6.4. Data Analysis

In order to arrive at the answers to the research questions, thematic analysis was used in developing the findings. The six phases of thematic analysis, which are iterative and recursive, allowed enough flexibility to go back and forth in each phase when a new finding arose, or an adjustment was needed.

3.6.4.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis identifies common themes or patterns that are present in the collected data (Gray, 2018; Bricki & Green, 2007). Since the data were primarily text, this analysis method allowed me to interpret the meanings of my findings through the recurring themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) listed six phases of correctly analysing data into themes: the researcher's familiarisation with the data, the creation of initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and coining themes, and producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) also outlined the prevalent methods for determining the type of analysis I want to do. Based on the research topic and the conceptual framework I am using I decided to use a theoretical thematic analysis because this allowed me to code for specific questions and at the same time allow deeper analysis of the themes. It also leans towards latent thematic analysis, which identifies or examines "the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations - and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84). I am actively looking at themes that relate to my conceptual framework, but am aware that these can lead towards bias. The conceptual framework acts as my guide to get relevant data easier and purposefully.

Phase 1: Gaining familiarity

During the process of filtering the blogs for the second time, I familiarise myself further with the type of travel the bloggers experienced and the way they described their journeys. The "About" page was one of the first pages I look at for each blogger, as this provided details about why they started blogging, and usually contained details of their life before they started to travel and the reason they began to travel. I read about four to five articles from each blog, highlighting information that was relevant to the research question, or could lead to otherwise unexplored questions.

Phase 2: Coding repeated texts

During this phase, I listed repeated words and/or sentences that were relevant to the research questions. Information relevant to "motivation," "constraints," "benefits," and "identity" were actively sought out. Some information, such as that which some identified them as introverts, or how the love of travel was a by-product from individual passions, all brought new insights that were useful in the later phases. Similarities and differences from coded material were reviewed, until there was no more new relevant data that could be added to the data set.

Phase 3: Developing basic themes

This is the phase in which the basic themes began to emerge. From my data set I started categorising data into tables and determining if the codes had overarching themes. I stopped when I was sure there were no more codes to categorise and each had its own specific theme. Some were under sub-themes such as “supporting the family” and “family’s expectation to have a stable job” were put under the theme “Cultural Baggage”.

Phase 4: Consolidating into organised themes

This phase was done in two levels. The first was to check if all the collated extracts for each theme formed a coherent pattern. Once I saw the coherent patterns in the themes, I moved to the second level; checking to see “whether the themes ‘work’ in relation to the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). I re-coded data if I saw themes that may not have fit the rest of data in that theme. Re-coding was an ongoing process that allowed me to alter my themes whenever I needed to make changes.

Phase 5: Deriving global themes and network

This phase required me to define and further refine the themes that I present in the findings. It is at this point that I needed to identify the “essence” of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The refining reduced the results to three global themes: motivation, constraints, and benefits. These three global themes each had important elements that played a role in constructing the Filipina travellers’ identity, which is explained further in the Findings chapter.

3.7. Ethics

Research ethics are the moral principles guiding research (Gray, 2018). Many organisations around the world overview the research ethics in their field. At Auckland University of Technology (AUT), the AUT Ethics committee reads the researchers’ proposals and approves or declines them. The four main ethical principles of research are 1) to ensure the participants are fully informed about the purpose of the research and have given their consent, 2) the research respects the privacy of the participants, 3) the research does not cause harm to the participants, and 4) the research does not deceive participants (Gray, 2018). The methodology of this research follows an unobtrusive method, which meant I did not have contact with my participants. The blogs used were publicly accessible, but for participants’ privacy they were given pseudonyms during the development of the data set. According the AUT Ethics committee guide, this research was not required to apply for ethics approval. However, I was required to obtain copyright approval from

the bloggers in order to use direct quotes from their blog. A template of the permission letter for copyright for research is presented in the Appendix.

3.8. Limitation

This research aimed to fill a gap in understanding the Asian female market by focusing on Filipina solo travellers, a market that is yet to be explored by tourism academics. However, there are limitations in this research. One is the qualitative methodology that was used. Due to the freedom and flexibility of this method, bias can affect the results. Researchers assert their beliefs when they choose what to research, how to research, and how to interpret their data (Crotty, 1998). As a Filipina myself, I have my own subconscious bias about what I believe are the underlying meanings in the participants' data, but because I am a native culture-bearer and a female traveller, I can relate the findings to my own experience to add more value to the findings.

Another limitation is the small sample of travel bloggers used for the study and the motives of these participants, since they included semi-professional and professional bloggers. There is a possibility that their narratives were staged to attract more viewers. Nevertheless, the small sample gave me plenty of rich data to use and each blogger had her own unique story to tell, which agrees with Wright's (2010) suggestion that bloggers' narratives are an expressive phenomenon and offer a variety of interpretations for findings.

3.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter elaborates on how using the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* constructs through the interpretivist paradigm allowed me to delve into the deeper meanings of Filipino values and how that offered unique insights into these Filipina travellers' experiences. Using travel blogs as sources for the qualitative narrative analysis not only provided a rich source of unprompted data but also reflected contemporary tourism behaviours, as the majority of travellers view online personal travel stories as guides for future travels. Questions of authenticity of the travel bloggers' accounts are arguable, since most of them blog as a profession. However, their accounts offered a variety of rich data that led to significant findings using the thematic analysis technique. The findings included three global themes and 12 sub-themes, which are elaborated on in the next chapter.

4. Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the global themes constructed from the accounts of nine Filipina Travel Blogs using thematic analysis and a gendered and socio-cultural lens (See Figure 3). From their articles, three main global themes emerged: motivations, constraints, and benefits. These global themes reflect what Filipina travellers experience throughout their journey and how they (re)construct their identities the interaction, negotiation and internalisation of these experiences. These themes were further analysed into twelve subthemes that showed specific experiences that the Filipina travellers went through. The chapter begins with motivations listing five subthemes that illustrate the intrapersonal reasons for the Filipinas' decisions to travel solo. Next is the "constraints", listing four subthemes, which show a mix of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural factors. These sub-themes explain the risks and hindrances that may interfere with the traveller's decisions to pursue a solo trip or limit their experience during the journey. Lastly, the "benefits" lists three subthemes as a mix of intrapersonal and interpersonal elements. These benefits are acknowledged gains the travellers acquire throughout their journey and act as motivators to continue travelling solo. Each main theme is not constricted to the time of the traveller's journey but represent the meanings for the travellers due to their gender and socio-cultural identity.

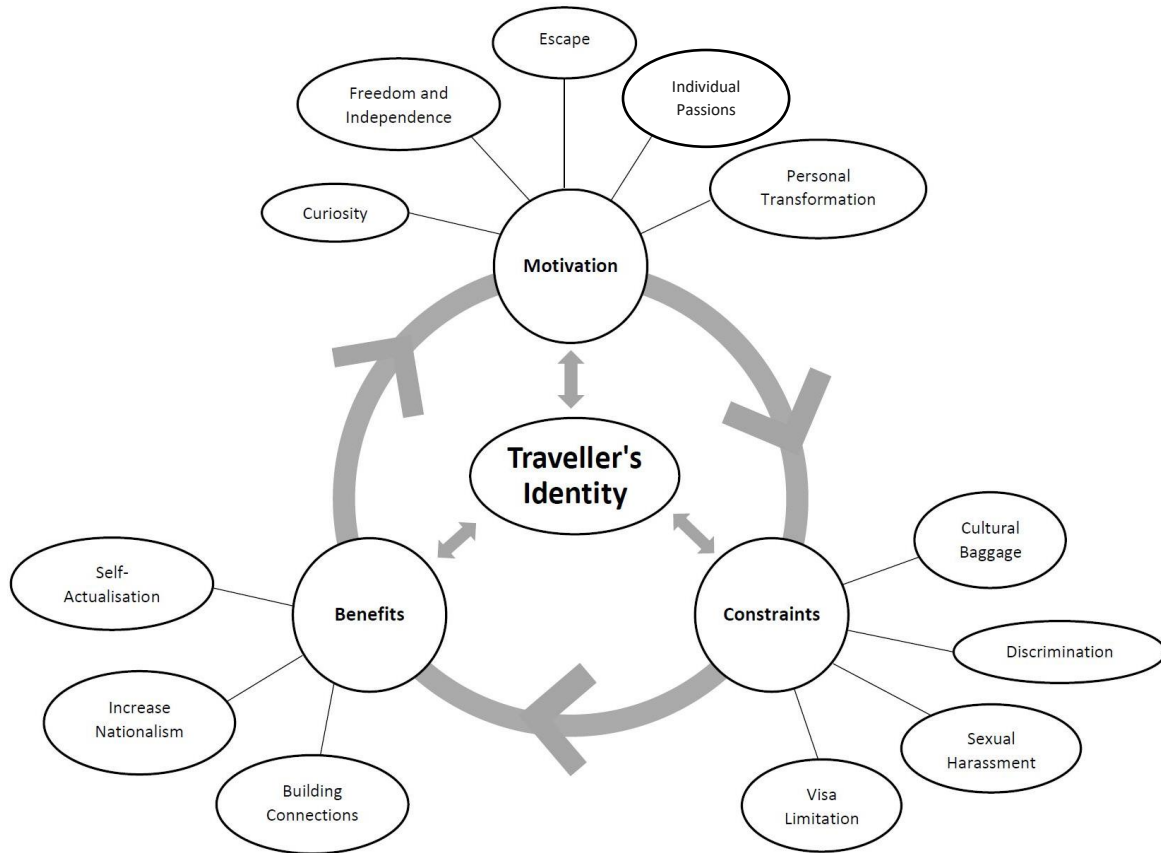


Figure 3. Identity (Re)construction - Thematic Framework

4.2. Motivations

The first major theme represents the motivational reasons these Filipina decided to pursue travelling solo. The main subthemes under this global theme were curiosity, freedom and independence, escape, individual passions, and personal transformation. All of them stemmed from intrapersonal desires that were influenced either by the society they lived in, the family they were raised by, or the lifestyle they had. While there were several other motivational factors the Filipina listed in their blogs (which are mentioned in the list of benefits), I wanted to concentrate on the initial reason they decided to pursue solo travelling, because of the deeper insights this could provide to their old “self” compared to their current “self”.

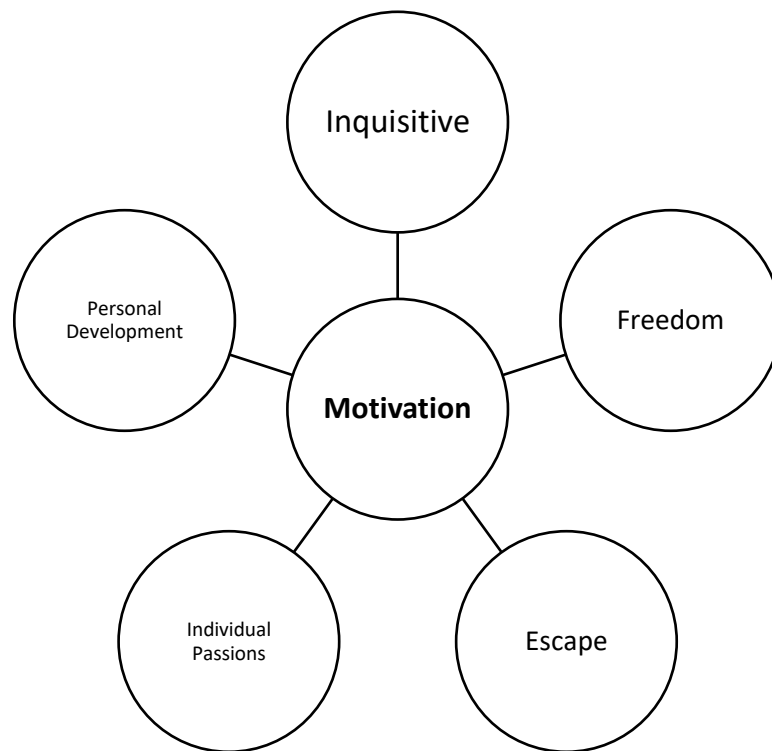


Figure 4. 1st Global Theme - Motivation

4.2.1. Curiosity

Curiosity to learn more about the Philippines and other countries was a common motivational theme for these Filipina travellers. Eva mentioned that her desire to get out of her hometown fuelled her desire to explore new places.

"It has inspired me to get out there and feel my feet step on the grounds of the towns and cities outside of mine, to explore the island where I grew up and it makes me eager to discover the life and culture outside of my homeland. " (Eva)

Eva specifically mentioned she was "shopping for experiences", although travel fuelled her desire to see different aspects of the Philippines and explore other cultures abroad. This motivation had been an ongoing cycle of gaining new experiences from the unknown, which is why she continued to keep on travelling.

Ina, who started travelling more when she was working abroad in New Zealand, mentioned that it was her trips to foreign countries that inspired her to "backpack" in the Philippines after doing so in other countries:

"Whilst I recognised how travelling to other countries afforded me perspectives that I wouldn't have otherwise felt in my own backyard, I also realised that I was exploring to find experiences that resembled the familiarity of home." (Ina)

Finding all the similar connections, made Ina want to reconnect with her motherland once she was able to return to the Philippines. This shows that these women were not content with living a routine life. Instead they engaged their personal curiosity to learn a different perspective of their home country and of other cultures to gain new experiences. This ingrained curiosity is what kept them continually travelling to different places.

4.2.2. Freedom and Independence

The main motivation to travel solo for most of these female travellers was the freedom to experience a trip according to their own terms and not restricted by the choices of other travel companions. Eva especially enjoyed her solo trips because they allowed her the flexibility to alter her itinerary according to how she connected with a place. When she was travelling around Thailand, she enjoyed the “non-touristy” nature of Krabi Town. Because this town offered a serene landscape and was off the beaten track, she extended her stay in that town. When she got to Bangkok, she already felt that the city was not appealing to her, so she shortened her stay in order to move on to another part of Thailand.

The liberty that comes with solo travel was also expressed in Sarina’s blog. She explained that her main reason for travelling solo was because she was able to do whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted:

"I travel solo not because I want to prove something. I travel alone because I want to, I need to and because I can." (Sarina)

This showed part of her identity as someone who had an integral need to travel by herself. This need was similar to the need Tisha expressed on her blog. Tisha usually travelled by motorcycle, which allowed her full control over her own journey. There were times when she craved “alone time”, and when she went on her solo journeys, she was personally more invested because she believed there were no limits except for her own personal limitations.

Frances was motivated by a different kind of freedom. She wrote that solo travel allowed her the freedom to meet people from different walks of life.

“I learn from them and am able to engage myself in their culture. It really feeds my soul. I am happy.” (Frances)

Frances was motivated to travel solo because of the learning she gained through her various interactions. This contrasted with the desire for alone time that the other travellers mentioned. Instead, Frances showed that she travelled solo not because she wanted to be alone, but to have the freedom to broaden her network, that in return, also contributed to her happiness.

All these forms of freedom were primary motivators for why these women chose to travel solo. Freedom appealed to their own individual identity and was form of empowerment, as they were independent in their travels and had full control over their own journey.

4.2.3. *Escape*

Escapism was another main motivational theme mentioned in several of the blogs. Anna wrote about her life before she became a successful travel blogger and the moment she decided to change her career and lifestyle.

“After graduating university in 2009, I worked in Kuwait, the Middle East, for 4 years where I worked up to the position of Quality Assurance Supervisor. I had a good job, my own car, a rented apartment, and an expensive gym membership. I went on holidays to 15 different countries and even bought a property in the Philippines. People who knew me saw me as successful and my parents were happy. I was winning, or at least I thought I was. It wasn't until I moved to Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, for a new job that I began to question things. I had a higher salary, more benefits and most importantly great friends. But there was something missing inside that couldn't be filled by any of those things. I began to realise that what I really wanted was to travel, to be completely free of work and schedules. To know that I could go anywhere in the world and not just survive, but thrive.” (Anna)

She yearned for a change in lifestyle that was not limited to the expectation of Filipino society, but one that was independently hers. Similar motivations were also expressed by Eva.

“Having grown up in a small town where most people prefer not to go anywhere – where leaving the community was the hardest for them to do nor do they want to transfer and live elsewhere. I made the decision to break the mold.” (Eva)

Filipino societies are collectivist and for a woman to choose to travel away from the city out of personal choice rather than necessity shows her independence and her desire not to conform to societal pressures.

In Pia's case, what strengthened her decision to continue travelling solo was the realisation that her lifestyle in the Philippine fashion industry was exhausting her.

"It just happened. Most people who reach that point on their career go on and on regardless of how tired they become. I don't want to belong to that group. I wanted to be different. "You left your life in the fashion industry to travel? What for?" So what. I didn't want to be one of those people who are still doing something they don't like because people might say this, might say that, etc." (Pia)

Making a career from travel suited her better; she never felt the need to stop travelling.

All these women wanted to escape a lifestyle dictated by family and Filipino society. Travel was initially used as a means of self-reflection, while they tried to work out what lifestyle suited them best as an individual.

4.2.4. Individual Passions

According to some of the data, the motivation to start or continue travelling was a by-product of individual passions. Several travel bloggers mentioned how travel started or reignited their passion for storytelling and writing.

Despite being married, Ina continued to travel solo because she thought of travel as her muse. As a long-time creative writer, she found that in her journeys her inner poet came out. Sometimes her trips were too rough for her husband's taste. She explained that her husband encouraged her to have own her individuality and understood her need to have the occasional journey that inspired her. This also highlighted that even her marital status did not limit her ability to pursue her passions.

Other examples were provided by Tisha who was a motorbike enthusiast and gamer; both passions fuelled her love for travel.

"I got inspired to travel because of video games and consider travel as a way to earn EXP points in real life." (Tisha)

Tisha travelled mostly around the Philippines, where she could ride her motorbike for long stretches, especially as being further away from the main cities allowed her more freedom to travel at the speed she wanted to, without other vehicles disturbing her.

Similar experiences were expressed by Pia who wrote about her love of football that had led to a life of travel.

“My love for football also encouraged me to travel more. Three years ago, Liverpool FC (Football club) and Arsenal had an Asian Tour. I followed every match and stalked them wherever they were. I booked expensive tickets, got hungry but still, I was able to see them play live. That was an eye opener for me to see more places.” (Pia)

All these passions were already part of the travellers' lives before they made travel their lifestyles. Their passions acted as encouragements to keep pursuing a life of travel as read in Ina's and Tisha's stories. Passions act as a gateway to a life of travel in Pia's experience. Each of their passions reflects their individual self, but also how that self did not conform to traditional roles for Filipina women.

4.2.5. Personal Transformation

For others, part of their motivation to start their first solo journey was because they wanted to experience personal transformation. Frances wrote about how she grew up in a strict conservative family, which led her to grow up being sheltered, resulting in a fear of being alone. When she started earning her own money, she wanted the opportunity to grow out of her sheltered life. She decided to travel alone, with the belief that this was what her God wanted her to do, and that He would protect her along the way. In a way, it was her Catholic belief that played a role in motivating her journey, but this was used as a justification for wanting a journey of self-change.

In Ella's case, her motivation for personal transformation came from a recent relationship break-up.

“Two years ago, my long-distance relationship ended in the worst possible way. I was upset. I devoted my time to work and isolated myself from friends. Out of nowhere, I booked a solo flight to Kuala Lumpur and Bali.” (Ella)

Ella was looking for a change of scenery for self-reflection. Both Frances and Ella were motivated by the way travel could distance them from the familiar and from reminders of painful experiences.

Travel allowed them space to find out something new about themselves, which may have been one of the reasons they were still motivated to continue travelling and strive to become their better self that was not controlled by families or ex-lovers.

4.3. Constraints

Constraints were hindrances or interferences mentioned by travellers that limited or temporarily negatively impacted their overall journey. Subthemes were: visa limitation, discrimination, sexual harassment, and cultural baggage. These constraints showed a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural elements that were specific to their gender and socio-cultural identity. Although initially seen as a negative factor, the travellers managed to negotiate through these constraints that led to benefits that are explained in the next part.

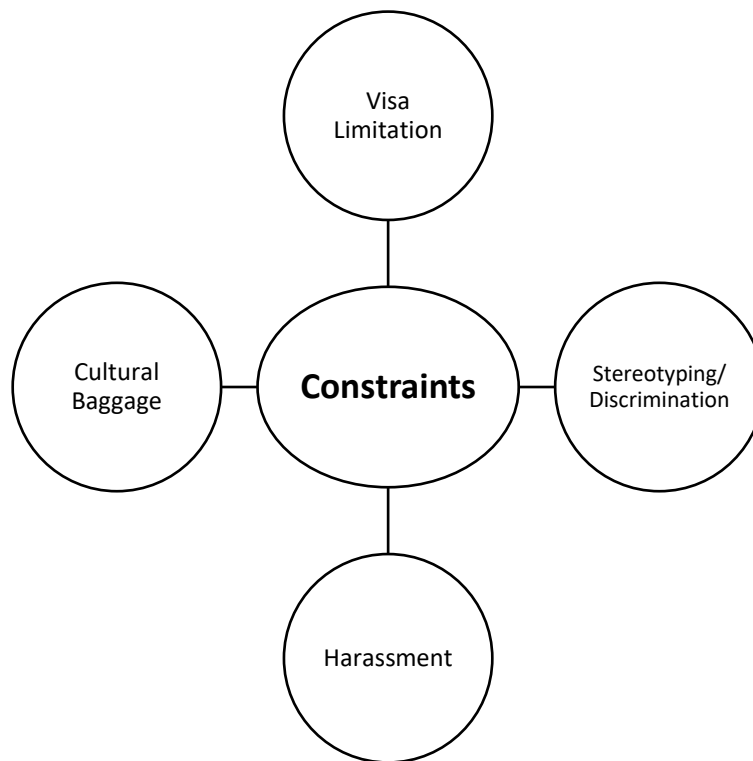


Figure 5. 2nd Global Theme - Constraints

4.3.1. Visa Limitation

A significant constraint specific to these Filipinas' citizenship was the limitation of their visa. The Filipino passport allows visa free visits to only 63 countries. Some of the bloggers commented on how the visa limitation had affected their journey of being a lifestyle traveller. For Becca, it was a constant reminder of her limitation as a Filipino traveller:

"The strength of our passport sadly determines our identity when we face an immigration officer." (Becca)

Becca explained that as a Filipina visiting another country, she needed to provide several proofs that she would return to the Philippines and that she had enough money to fund her trip. The difference in the requirements she had to meet, compared to those for white Western visitors, was one of the reasons she never considered selling her amateur photos for travelling funds, which was a common trend amongst white backpackers. Instead, she acknowledged the privilege of being able to travel from country to country and make a career as a travel blogger, despite the limitations of the Philippine passport.

Pia also wrote a detailed article about how she was denied a Spanish and US (United States of America) visa but created this into an opportunity. Despite having already travelled around South America for three years and being able to speak fluent Spanish to qualify her to take up further studies in Spanish literature in Madrid, the Spanish Embassy still denied her a visa because there was not enough proof that she would return. A few months later she was invited to a three month expenses paid trip around the US to write a travel guide for travellers like her. Again, she was denied, despite the invitation and the funding.

"Being denied visas shows the constraint of being a single, childless, "houseless", Filipina but that doesn't have to stop them from being able to travel." (Pia)

Instead of allowing those experiences to deter her, she continued to backpack around the Philippines and use her time to make plans to travel in countries that did not require her to have a visa. This did not detract from her identity and citizenship as a Filipino, but instead was used positively by her to keep travelling to new locations.

Many of these Filipina travellers wrote articles on how to prepare for visa applications, for readers with a Philippine passport. They acknowledged the difficulties and bureaucracy that came with acquiring a visa, but encouraged their readers, especially solo Filipina travellers who may face visa difficulties, not let this deter them from pursuing their travels.

4.3.2. Discrimination

A common constraint faced by the bloggers was the discrimination they faced due to their gender, race or both. This was explained in detail by Eva during her solo travels around the Philippines.

She would usually experience being questioned by locals about her marital status or why she was travelling alone:

"The concern word I received that day – "it's lonely to travel solo" challenged me mentally before heading to Nacpan beach. Although I've been traveling myself in the country, Thailand and Myanmar included, that I obviously am accustomed to hearing, it still made me think and feel so curious if is it really lonely? Well, those questions stemmed up my positivity and excitement Advice: Be patient and understanding – Most Filipinos will question why you are traveling alone. It is unconventional to travel alone especially for a woman. Best to learn to not let the constant questions get to you and view it as a form of them expressing concern. " (Eva)

She used the constant questions and comments about how it could be lonely to travel solo, as a motivator to keep on going. Instead of letting it upset her, she just excused it as Filipinos being concerned about the unusual phenomenon of seeing a Filipina travel solo.

Tisha also had similar experiences during her solo trip around the Philippines. One time she was questioned by a local female tourist travelling with friends. After explaining her reasons for solo travel, she bonded with that tourist and gained a temporary travel companion out of it.

These travellers tended to experience more questions about travelling solo from locals while they were travelling around the Philippines. This may have been due to ease of communication due to their common language, and increased sense of comfort when questioning a fellow Filipino about their non-compliance with the traditional female roles Filipinos are accustomed to. However, not all experiences of being a woman were negative. Pia wrote how her gender was a benefit during her solo travel in Mexico.

"In my experience traveling the whole of Latin America, when they see a woman traveling alone, men become more protective and caring. They always warn the women, "don't go there, it's not safe." Women are always given assistance whenever they ask for it. But if you're a man, they will never tell you where to go and where not to go. Often, there are almost zero conversations about safety. Men who are traveling by themselves do not receive these warnings because, hmmm. gender. I guess in this case, being a woman is not a curse." (Pia)

She acknowledged that she was warned by several people about how dangerous it was for a woman to travel solo, but her experiences contradicted the things she was told, especially by the news media. Instead, she encouraged other female travellers travelling in Mexico or other places labelled unsafe, to share their experience of travelling in those countries, to give a more authentic account of how it really is for female travellers, rather than the hyper-sensationalised image that the media portrayed.

Another common form of discrimination was the stereotyping in relation to their brown skin colour. Frances mentioned how she stayed in a hostel and befriended a group of Caucasian backpackers. They went out to eat and on their return to the hostel she was the only one stopped by the guard. She experienced this again in the markets where vendors targeted customers based on the colour of their skin. She was also subjected to a lot of judgement whenever she was alone with a white male companion. She explained that people hold a stereotypical view that Southeast Asian women marry foreigners for their money. The judgmental stares she experienced made her feel uncomfortable when standing next to white male friends.

Anna wrote about similar experiences she had, when she started dating her husband. As a way of clearing up these misconceptions, she wrote a long article to counter the claims that she married her white husband for money and citizenship. She continued to keep her Filipino citizenship as that had not deterred her from travelling to numerous other countries, and she always made it clear she was financially successful long before she had met him.

None of these discriminatory attitudes affected the bloggers' love for travel. Instead, the participants navigated around the constraints in a way that produced positive effects in their lives. Frances started to love her naturally brown skin more because of the different perspective she was gained from the foreigners she met. Anna empowered other women to go ahead and date whoever they wanted, despite any discrimination, since the only opinion that should matter was their own.

4.3.3. Sexual Harassment

Several the travel bloggers mentioned warnings or concerns from people about how dangerous it was for a woman to travel solo, which led to some of the discrimination they experienced. Sexual harassment is a real problem that can be experienced in the gendered tourism space. Sarina wrote about two notable incidents when she was backpacking; the first one happened in Berlin. Normally very careful of her surroundings, she was still healing from a relationship break-up when

she was approached by a white man who asked to pay her for sexual favours. As a journalist, she was curious to know why she had been targeted and agreed to have coffee with him at a café. There she discovered that she was targeted because of her gender and because "she looked like a backpacker and backpackers always need money." This incident reminded her again that she must always be vigilant and wary of some people.

The second incident happened while she was travelling in the holy city of Varanasi, India.

"I have traveled to 18 countries and over 50 cities in Asia and Europe, and I walked around by myself at all hours of the day and night. I had never felt unsafe anywhere except in India. Feeling unsafe was a pretty new experience for me. I have started traveling by myself since I was 11 years old, and I had always relied on the kindness of strangers without feeling that they were out to get me. Prior to my India trip, I had never felt scared as a solo female traveler." (Sarina)

Sarina experienced her worst sexual harassment from local Indian men who grouped together and groped any part of her body they could reach, in an act they call "eve teasing." This made her feel disillusioned with India and she was almost convinced to end her trip early. It was having a great experience in another city that redeemed the country for her.

These two incidents showed the dangerous situations female solo travellers can face due to their gender and the cultural values of people in the locations they visited. This did not deter Sarina from travelling solo. These encounters however, were rare, and did not detract from other enriching experiences and people she had met over many years as a solo traveller.

"Knowing what I know now about what it's like to travel alone there, I think I would be able to take care of myself better." (Sarina)

Sarina did not allow these incidents to define her as a victim. Instead she used them as important life lessons that made her become a better version of herself.

4.3.4. Cultural Baggage

Filipino society and family expectation are vital influences in every Filipino's life. Becca wrote about her experience of having to overcome the cultural baggage that constrained her from pursuing a travel lifestyle. The first experience was the expectation that she had to support her sibling's education. The majority of the Filipino people do not have the financial stability to support

their family and rely on relatives to help financially. Second, which is related to the first, was the expectation for her to be in a financially secure job. For Filipinos this often means having to work abroad. Becca made the decision to break with these old traditions to pursue the lifestyle she wanted.

“I am frowned upon by neighbors and relatives for having this stand. It is wrong, it is simply wrong, it is against the very essence of a poor Filipino family: I should not waste my money on trips. Instead, I should finish building the family house, make it as beautiful as possible. I should continue supporting my aging parents financially.”
(Becca)

She continued to explain that the situation differed according to the Filipina's family background. Those from middle class families do not always have the burden of having to support their parents when they grow old. Becca knew that she would be unfairly labelled unfilial by her neighbours and be met with disappointment with her family, but she continued to pursue her travel lifestyle because it was the life she desperately wanted.

“Because there is our case. Poor yet ambitious to travel abroad. And for those who are in the same boat with me, there is only one suggestion I can give: talk to your family. Tell them you have the ache to go somewhere. Tell them, you are addicted to traveling. Accept the truth that what you are going to do is rather very selfish. Talk to them. Tell them you will not be able to extend help financially. It will be hard. For you. For them. Guilt will creep in. After all, you are breaking generations-old traditions here. There they are, your family, who would try to make ends meet while there you are somewhere in Southeast Asia trying to make ends meet” (Becca)

Becca acknowledged that not everyone can live a life of travel, as some cultural baggage was too great to set aside. She encouraged communication and the acceptance that there will always be many things travellers have to give up to pursue a life outside tradition.

Anna also faced similar experiences. The socio-cultural expectation was to finish university, get a good job, and then settle down. This was an ideology enforced by her friends, colleagues and family members. When she decided she had had enough of that routine lifestyle, she left her job and sold her possessions to make sure she could not change her mind. This caused a rift in her relationship with her father; as she explained, “I was disowned by my father.”

Breaking the Filipino tradition was a needed obstacle for these Filipina travellers, as making a career out of travel was not a stable career and still carried a stigma for the older Filipino generation. by navigating through it they became resolved in their decision to keep pursuing a travelling lifestyle and empowering other Filipina travellers that this lifestyle would not make them any less of a filial daughter. They mentioned that only in time and through communication would a family learn to accept their way of life.

4.4. Benefits

The “benefits” theme emerged from the data from Filipina travellers; benefits were increased nationalism, self-actualisation, and building connection. These benefits can be categorised as intrapersonal and interpersonal. They acted as motivators for some, as they offered personal justifications for continuing to travel solo. There were a variety of benefits, and those listed in the benefits theme, did not fully account for the range of benefits the travellers mentioned in their blogs. The findings were filtered through the gender and socio-cultural lens referred to in the conceptual framework. The list of benefits was not simply an general list, but one specifically related to the travellers’ Filipina identity.

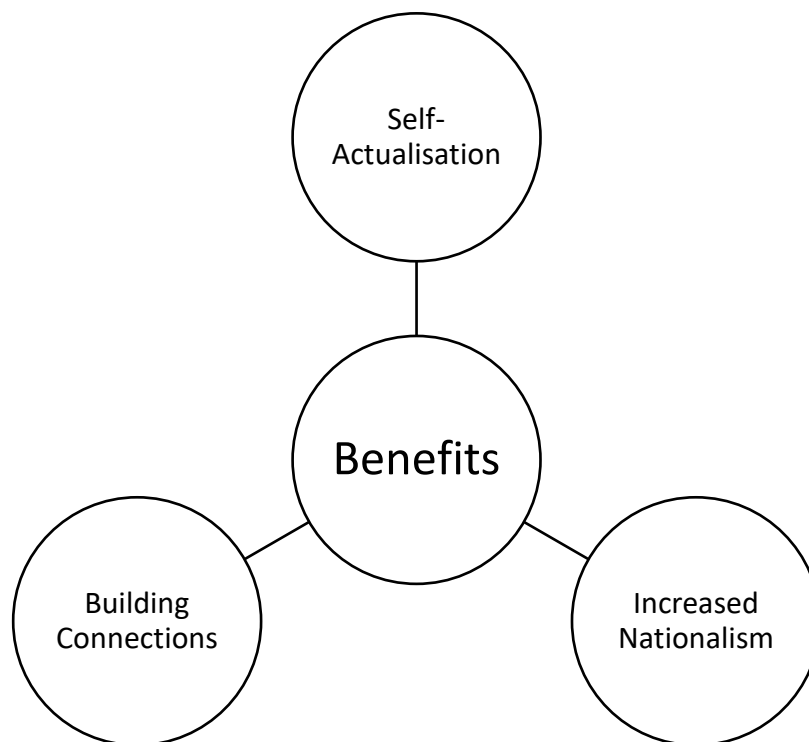


Figure 6. 3rd Global Theme - Benefits

4.4.1. Increased Nationalism

A common theme seen from their lists of benefits or memorable experiences they had through travel was increased nationalism or pride for their country and Filipino culture. They experienced this through domestic and international travels. For Becca, it was through her solo travels around the Philippines that experienced things that were reminiscent of her childhood, but was able to see them in a new light. One example was travelling through Haganoy Island in San Augustin, Mindanao. She toured around with local fishermen and joined them while they hunted for sea urchins to eat. Being a fisherman's daughter, she was familiar with the different varieties of sea urchins they found, but never wanted to try them until this trip. Through that experience she understood why it was common for these Filipino fishermen to bring vinegar and salt with them when they scavenged the shore for sea urchins.

Another enlightening encounter occurred when she was staying in El Nido Palawan and observed a foreigner asking one of the hotel staff for a Filipino breakfast. What was served was an inferior version of a Western breakfast, and in that moment she started to wonder what an authentic Filipino breakfast was? After contemplating this, she realised that a traditional breakfast in the Philippines was varied and sometimes interchangeable with lunch or dinner.

"Because the Filipinoness of our food depends on where you are rooted. The more I traveled around the Philippines, the more I realised how vague and how limiting we define our cuisine." (Becca)

Becca then started to compare the Filipino street food with the street food of neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. While other foods were tantalising and attractive because of the way they were cooked and presented, Becca described Philippine street food as that which was "meant to be eaten and enjoyed unapologetically." She continued to say that to eat what was considered local may have been uncomfortable for foreigners but was normal for everyday Filipino. Looking at the day to day life of a local Filipino and the Filipino cuisine from a different angle allowed Becca to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of her Filipino culture.

"Sometimes we fail to appreciate something that we are familiarly exposed to. Such beauty requires certain distance and strangeness in order to appreciate it. Just as the uninitiated find the poor exotic and photographable." (Becca)

Similar experiences were mentioned by Ina, who acted as a guide for a foreign backpacker friend travelling around the Philippines. Even though she had never really explored many areas in the Philippines, she wanted to make sure that her companion saw all the sights the country had to offer and have a great time.

"From the eyes of a foreigner, I saw the Philippines again for the first time. It was beautiful." (Ina)

Her actions meant she was compelled to show Filipino hospitality to this outsider. By doing so, she gained a better appreciation of her country.

Going abroad also reconnected Ina to the Philippines. When Ina travelled in Vietnam, several sites reminded her of home. During her trip to New Caledonia, many aspects of the island culture resonated with her. She particularly felt a genuine connection with the local people because of this familiarity. Reminiscing about home was always written in a positive light and made their experiences abroad more memorable.

4.4.2. Self-actualisation

A major benefit that was seen in many different forms, was the process of self-actualisation. Through their travels, the bloggers developed personally in ways that helped them realise what kind of lifestyle suited them as individuals and as travellers.

For Tisha, travelling allowed her to combine her individual passions, such as motorbiking and video gaming. She realised that she did not travel to do touristic things but to experience and appreciate the simple things that could not be experienced back in her city.

"Just because it's the most popular activity does not automatically make it THE only thing you can do there. Just like playing video games, it's always more satisfying figuring out things for yourself instead of following detailed step-by-step walkthrough."
(Tisha)

Travel gave Tisha the freedom to control her own path, while also learning to accept factors that she could not control. Due this, she is more invested in the travel experience because she believes there are no limits except her own personal limits.

Similar realisations were evident in the stories of Becca and Eva. Becca wrote about how over the years she had learnt to embrace the unplanned nomadic style of travelling.

"For the past two years, I found it tedious to prepare itineraries. I mostly rely on the kindness of strangers. I know more stupidities are waiting for me. Because, really, beautiful, storied moments are mostly accidents, accidental, not itineraried." (Becca)

For Becca, it was the unplanned moments mixed with mistakes and random acts of kindness by strangers that made the travel experience memorable and kept her coming back for more.

Eva's article about her journey around Nacpan, El Nido, told about being brought to a nearby beach by a trike driver, when it started raining profusely.

"Most of the vans stuck at the main road as they had a hard time getting in. But tricycle drivers braved themselves the very difficult road to manipulate which, unfortunately, I can feel the painful slightly hoarse noise of the tricycle. It took us about 20 minutes to finally arrived in Nacpan from the start of the muddy road. There has been continuous rain during that ride, it never showed some signal that it will slow down. Regardless of the heavy rain, I witnessed the green and beautiful nature along the road, I saw green huge paddies which I fell in love with, obviously, it did feed my heart with awesomeness again" (Eva)

Despite the discomfort, she did not allow this to deter her from her trip and when she got to the beach, she enjoyed having alone time, eating local food and conversing with local children. She enjoyed the unpredictable nature of solo travelling, which made the trip more meaningful for her, and motivated her to continue solo travelling.

Anna mentioned how she was able to break with society's expectations and become her version of success. This stemmed from her family's pressure on her to have a financially stable job, since that was expected in Filipino society.

"Do I have any regrets about leaving my stable corporate job for an unpredictable travelling lifestyle? Never! I may not have the same luxury and security I had before, but now I have something far more fulfilling – the freedom and inner happiness I was searching for all those years ago. So, to my fellow women, Filipinos or backpackers...Yes, you can have the travelling life you want, earn money and be

successful at the same time. You just need your own definition of success, outside of the norms of society and culture.” (Anna)

However, by leaving her job and making a leap into travel and rediscover herself, she was able to meet her future husband, realise that she wanted a lifestyle that allowed flexibility, and build her now successful luxury travel blog and other businesses by following this path.

Other stories of rebelling against traditional Filipino values or norms could be seen in Frances’, Sarina’s and Ella’s experiences. Frances mentioned that she went through a lot of personal growth on her solo travel. One self-realisation was that travel allowed her to be her real “crazy” self, which she felt she had to hide because of the conservative Catholic culture that dictated the way she had to act at home. Sarina mentioned that she came to realise that she could not fully settle down, and if she ever fell into a committed relationship, her partner would need to respect the idea that she would sometimes need to be alone. Although she did not say so explicitly, this sentiment rebelled against the collectivist nature of Filipino society. Lastly, for Ella, her first solo travel opened opportunities to express her passion as a storyteller. Ever since then, she has been infected with the travel-bug.

"You know when you've been constantly on the road and you're stuck in your flat, you feel like you're overstaying and your routine is getting monotonous. You want to book that flight or buy that bus ticker right away!" (Ella)

Through travel, Ella felt she was not subjected to the rules of society and could live as her genuine self.

Pia also narrated about how her first few travels around Europe made her realise that she did not want to stay in the fashion industry in the Philippines anymore. She found more meaning in being able to live like a local in her long-haul trips. However, she also acknowledged the things she had to give up because of her nomadic lifestyle, such as not being able to maintain a long-term relationship due to distance and other external factors.

Not all travel bloggers followed the nomadic style of lifestyle blogging. Tisha wrote about how she came to terms with the realisation that lifestyle travel was not the path suited for her.

"I love travelling more than anything else in the world. But I cannot afford to hold back on life, however trivial whilst saving to travel long-term." (Tisha)

She wrote about how she had responsibilities and luxuries she could let go to be able to travel long term. Some of them were financial obligations and family she needed to support. Other reasons were to do with city life luxuries such as good food, make-up and gadgets that she did not want to give up. This showed that although she sometimes enjoyed being an unconventional Filipina, she abided by the Filipino values on family. She enjoyed travelling the way most Filipinos would, limited, and for holiday purposes. She got thrilled thinking there would be a next time and that “the process of bounded travel mirrors the very beauty of mortality.” For her, the idea that travel had an end reflected how life would also one day end, and that was what made each moment of the journey more meaningful. It was during her last solo travel in Buscalan, Kalinga, that she realised that she had reached the end of her growth as a wayfarer.

"I was able to live out cliches: found myself, followed my dreams. But on the same tightrope, I have also learnt to discern which freedom to take, and which to let go."
(Tisha)

While travelling remained her passion, the way of travelling that she once thought insatiable finally found its closure. This showed the multiple identities a person can re/construct for themselves through continuing acts of travel.

4.4.3. Building Connection

Creating new connections was a common benefit experienced by all the travel bloggers. The interactions with locals, international and fellow Filipinos during their travels in the Philippines and abroad helped them gain more understanding about the world abroad and greater appreciation of their life.

“Being solo means looking for other people to hang with: mingling with roommates and posting on social media about what you’re planning to do and who is game to join in” (Eva)

For Eva, solo travel was not about being alone but being able to broaden her network. She mentioned that as a solo traveller, she would join group trips not only to save on money but also as an opportunity to meet new people.

Ina also wrote of similar experiences. Although she considered herself an introvert and was not generally good with social interactions, when she travelled, she felt less pressured and had meaningful conversations with like-minded people.

“On the road, I am able to breathe with less pressure attached to name, stature, and the expectation of long-term comradeships. As a result, I get to relish in conversations with people of like minds without necessitating small talk such as dipping a finger on a neighbours’ business.” (Ina)

This may mean she did not feel pressure to act in a certain way or converse with everyone. Instead she had the freedom to choose the type of people she interacted with, and create genuine connections with those with whom she could converse on a deeper level.

Pia specifically chose to build connections with local people in the cities and towns that she travelled to. She chose to travel long-term, with a minimum duration of a month per area. She believed that in order to fully understand the locals and their cultures, she needed to live as a local. This way of travel made her become a global citizen, as she did not travel just to see the tourist areas, but to learn what it meant to live like a local.

Other meaningful connections the bloggers mentioned were the connections they made with fellow Filipinos, both in the Philippines and elsewhere. Frances wrote about her experience during her last days in Bali. She met a fellow Filipina traveller who had just been robbed by a pick pocketer, losing all her valuables including her passport and wallet. Frances felt compelled to help this Filipina with the limited budget she had and kept in touch with her when she had to fly back to the Philippines, to make sure that she was alright. This showed she was compelled to help her fellow countrywomen, maybe more than someone of another nationality.

Social media also played a big part in building connections while travelling. Eva mentioned earlier that she would post her plans on social media as an open invitation to other fellow travellers in the area to join in. This platform also helped Eva become acquainted with a Filipina who was working in Mae Sot. This Filipina toured with Eva, demonstrating Filipino hospitality even in areas that were not their home country.

Local hospitality was mentioned as well in Ina’s narrative on her backpacking trip through El Nido, Palawan. There she befriended French bartenders that made the Philippines their home and the local Filipinos that showed grand displays of hospitality. It could be said that through the process of creating social connection, they were becoming increasingly aware of the values that linked them to their Filipino nature. The women then used this awareness to build connections, not only with fellow Filipinos, but with outsiders as well.

4.5. Conclusion

The narratives of the nine travel bloggers showed how they (re)constructed their identity through the various stages of their travel experiences. The motivational themes reflected intrapersonal factors that all dealt with the need to satisfy a personal desire. Constraints included intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers that they had to negotiate due to their identity as women and as Filipina. The benefits they gained showed they were able to reach their personal goals, gaining an increased sense of nationalism, and creating social connections that supported their newfound lifestyle. A highlight of the benefits was that they were motivational factors for the travel bloggers to continue pursuing a travel lifestyle.

Filipino culture played a significant role in all three themes, as it served as a motivation for some to escape and a barrier to overcome. However, the increased nationalistic-self evident in the narratives, highlighted that the women looked at their socio-cultural identity in a more positive light. The women were finding ways to navigate through old Filipino traditions, while maintaining their Filipino values in a modern era. These findings are elaborated on and compared with the literature in the following discussion chapter.

5. Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter synthesises the findings with the related literature discussed in previous chapters. The discussion is based on the thematic framework (see Figure 3) looking at identity formation through a gendered lens, socio-cultural lens and overall identity formation. Using a gendered lens, I discuss how their motives, constraints, and benefits were reflections of their female identity. Highlighted through this lens was the gendered discrimination that exists in the tourism space and how these travellers actively negotiated this. Next, the socio-cultural lens is discussed in two parts: experiences based on the bloggers' Asian identity and those based on their Filipina identity. The first part evaluates their experiences as Asian women and the socio-cultural bias they may experience in the tourism space. The second part looks closer into their Filipina identity and how they negotiated their traditional roles while maintaining their Filipino identity. The last part looks at the overall role travel had on identity (re)construction. Emphasis is put on how interpersonal relationships and risk-taking were integral factors in the continuous construction of multiple selves (see Cohen, 2010a).

5.2. Identity Formation Through a Gendered Lens

The Filipina travellers in this study were conscious of Filipino society's expectation that they would one day get married and settle down. Instead of allowing themselves to follow that traditional role, they used travel to find a suitable lifestyle constructed from their own individual choices. These findings echo those of Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006), that women use travel to escape the gendered narratives that relate to domesticity, dependence and confinement. They do not let their family or friends dictate what kind of path they should follow. Sarina made the statement that she needed a partner who understood that she could not settle, showing that she valued her independent lifestyle and would not settle for a traditional role as a woman dependent on her husband. Even if they were to get married, many of the bloggers made it clear that they would not let that stop them from travelling, as seen in the case of Ina.

Despite these feminist motives, the women still experienced gender-based discrimination consistent with the "geography of fear" (Jordan & Gibson, 2005) that many destinations indirectly support. Questions such as "why are you alone?" or "where is your husband/boyfriend" reveal the gender constructs of a tourism space (see Tan & Abu Bakar, 2007) implying that a woman should not travel without a male companion. This reflects outdated traditions dating back to when women needed chaperones to go out, and when being seen without one was considered scandalous. In

this light, the Filipina travel experience affirms the “relative escape” Wilson and Little (2005) claimed female travellers go through. Their view was that women are restricted in their travel experience because of the gender bias at the destination, as seen in Sarina’s case, or the gender stereotype Frances faced when she socialised with male foreigners. Sometimes the women were forced to alter their normal travel behaviour to protect themselves from unwanted sexual advances (see Jordan & Gibson, 2005). However, many of their narratives showed how they negotiated these gender biases in order to pursue and later allow their experiences to empower them to continue travelling solo. This was seen in Pia’s story of her trip in Mexico, where she did not heed the exaggerated negative news about the country and its treatment of women, and Sarina’s experience with online victim blaming, which motivated her to continue travelling and empower other women to pursue travelling solo. This validates Harris and Wilson’s (2007) argument that the tourism space is a heterotopia, where the Filipinas could resist the gender construction by not allowing the social norms of their countrymen and foreign locals to dissuade them from travelling solo, and by empowering other female travellers to try solo travelling, through the insights and tips they wrote on their blogs.

As women, these Filipina mentioned the positive personal transformation they gained through their journey that related to the themes of independence and self-empowerment. These were consistent with the notion proposed by Wilson and Harris (2006) of making travel experiences more meaningful for women. Search of self can be seen when these travellers discovered the path that suited their individualistic self was not dependent on their gender. Self-empowerment emerged from the risks and trials they had to go through alone in a foreign place and the ways they overcame these problems and learnt from them. Trisha showed that she did not want to depend on a man to solve her problems with the bike she rented, because she did not want to submit to the stereotype that women should rely on men. Aleah travelled to many cities and although she had experienced a lot of mistakes of her own, she did not allow misguided claims that travelling solo for a woman is dangerous, to stop her from pursuing her journeying.

An important benefit that all these Filipinas mentioned was the connections they built along the way. This finding is consistent with Wilson and Harris’s (2006) argument on the importance of connectedness, as travellers in this study mentioned that travel is extra meaningful because of the wide variety of people from different backgrounds they met along the way. For Ina, it was meeting like-minded individuals who support her travel lifestyle. For Frances, it was the connections that empowers her individual and nationalistic self being a Filipina, and for Pia, it was

the genuine kindness from different locals that continues to motivate her to undertake long-haul travel to really get to know a country and its people.

Taking up Wilson and Little's (2008) suggestion to look at the experiences of women from typical host tourism countries, it was noted that the women in this study went through the "geography of fear", as they experienced different forms of gender discrimination imposed by the cultural patriarchal system of the destinations and from their home (see Jordan & Gibson, 2005). However, they were not passive acceptors as they showed different ways of negotiating these constraints in order to impose their right to travel in the same ways that males travel. The findings address the gender-bias arguments that plague tourism academia by revealing the similarity of experiences for both Filipina travellers and Western women. However, viewing this solely through a gendered lens provides an incomplete picture, as many of the gendered norms that constrained the Filipina travellers stemmed from their socio-cultural background as Asian and Filipino women. The next section delves deeper into these two identities and offers a more holistic viewpoint of the identity (re)formation of the solo Filipina traveller.

5.3. Identity Formation Through the Socio-Cultural Lens

5.3.1. Asian Lens

Based on the findings, it is evident that religion and culture played an important role in the travel experiences of the Filipina travellers. Although the Philippines does not follow the main religions that shape patriarchal gender norms in most Asian societies (Yang et al., 2017), Catholic ideologies have shaped the way Filipino families control their daughters and instil the expectation that they must get married and start a family of their own. These ideologies were evident in Frances' story of growing up in a conservative family, unsure of her own capabilities until she started to travel solo. Similar sentiments were expressed by Anna who was dictated to by her family and society with the expectation that once she graduated from university, she would look for a partner to settle down.

These ideologies also contributed to stigmas Filipinas had to endure when travelling. The women felt "gendered aloneness" (Yang et al., 2019) when they were asked why they were alone or where their boyfriend/husband was during their travels. This question was asked more in their home country, revealing the unusualness of a Filipina travelling without companions. Eva mentioned that these constant questions made her question whether it really was lonely to travel solo, which echoes Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Arcodia's (2018) suggestion that women are

concerned about how their solo presence is perceived by the people around them. This was further problematised when the Filipinas were seen interacting with foreign men during their trips. There is a stereotype, as mentioned by Anna, that Filipinas are perceived as gold-diggers if they are seen with a white man. Frances mentioned how this affected her initially when she was side-by-side with the white male friends she met during her trip. The opposite viewpoint is also true, in which some foreigners mistake Filipina travellers as sex workers. Frances wrote about this when she travelled to Bangkok. Due to the similarity of her skin colour with that of the local Thai women, older men on the streets would proposition her for sexual favours. Sarina's experience with the man who propositioned her in Europe was because of her gender, but asking if she was Chinese may have also showed that he regarded her ethnicity a factor in his choice to proposition her. This shows a global problem, that there is a misconception that women from third world countries are seen not as a group that engages in tourism for leisure, but more as those who service the tourism industry (Yang et al., 2017).

Another stigma Filipinas faced when deciding to pursue a travel lifestyle was being perceived as unfilial. However, unlike Seow and Brown's (2018) examples of unfilial daughters in Chinese society, Filipinas are labelled not solely according to their gender, but also for deciding to pursue a lifestyle that benefits their "self" instead of one that supports their family. This difference reflects the foundations of the Filipino's collectivist culture (Church & Katigbak, 2000). While most Asian societies stem from patriarchal ideologies and values (Yang et al., 2019; Yang & Mura; Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016), Filipino values on community stemming from pre-colonial times, shape most of the expectations Filipina are influenced by. This was explicit in Becca's account of cultural baggage, when she explained that Filipinos from families with limited means were expected to support their family once they started earning money. Choosing a travel lifestyle that did not offer a stable income, was Becca's decision to choose a path for her individual benefit instead of one for her family.

This does not mean that Filipina travellers who chose a full-time travel lifestyle rejected their Filipino identity. Increased nationalism was a major benefit mentioned by all the Filipina travellers in this study. This reflects Bui et al.'s (2014) notion that travel experiences for Asian travellers intertwine both the need to escape from their society and the sense of connection to their homeland. For some of the Filipinas, when travelling abroad, it was the cultural and geographic reminders they experienced that made the journey memorable. For others, it was the interaction with other local Filipinos and seeing their country through a foreigner's eyes that let them feel a

deeper sense of appreciation for being Filipino. Many of these appreciations stemmed from Filipino cultural ties, that are further explained in the next section.

5.3.2. Filipina Lens

In terms of the deeper psychology underpinning Filipino sociocultural values, the findings showed that the Filipina travellers had to negotiate through the gendered bias that Catholicism has instilled into the Filipino culture, and the community mind-set that stemmed from pre-colonial values. The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country, which has influenced the way women should behave and dress. The family's role is to make sure their daughters remain pure and virtuous, following the Maria Clara image. This was evident in Frances' account of being raised in a strict family that limited her freedom. Aquino (2019) observed that Spanish Catholicism twisted pre-colonial values. This is why the Filipino value of *hiya*, which can be translated as "propriety," also means "shame," as a way to instil fear on Filipinas if they choose to not uphold society's expectation. Ella mentioned how liberating it was to dress the way she wanted when travelling abroad, as she would be told to dress more conservatively if she were back in her hometown. Society's pressure limited her individual expression down to her clothing preference.

Most of the constraints were most likely due to the Filipinas' going against one of the main Filipino values of *pakikisama* (to be part of). Enriquez' (1986) *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* explained that contemporary Filipino values stem from the pre-colonial value of *kapwa* (solidarity). This explains the collectivist culture of Filipino society and why the majority of travels are either with family or friends (Church & Katigbak, 2000). The survey conducted by Amadeus (2018) showed that most Filipinos said recommendations from their family, friends and colleagues were the major influences on decisions made for their trips. However, most of the Filipina travellers in this study were not subject to this mind-set. Becca mentioned that she stopped creating itineraries as it was the unplanned trips that were the most memorable, and Pia travelled to experience what the locals of her destination experienced and popular tourist destinations were just an addition if she got to them.

Family is a very important principle in a Filipinos' life; many of the common Filipina roles place importance on family. Therefore, most of the major constraints the Filipina travellers experienced, dealt with going against their family's wishes. Becca wrote about cultural baggage and how she was expected to provide not only for her nuclear family, but also for her extended family. *Utang na loob* (internal debt) is an important factor in cultural baggage, because Filipino children are expected to pay back their parents and all connected family indefinitely. Hence, choosing a travel

career with no guarantees of a stable salary means making a choice for personal benefit instead of one for their family. This contradicts Guthrie and Jacobs's (1966) statement about the Philippine's ideal being based on family sufficiency and a sense of reciprocity.

Another contradiction was found in the choice to pursue solo travelling, which contradicts the Filipino value of *pakikisama*. Travellers like Sarina and Tisha chose to travel solo because they enjoyed the alone time. Other women looked forward to solo travel because it offered them the chance to join different groups. What all these bloggers had in common was the importance they placed on Filipino hospitality, which was mentioned numerous times. This reflected on their ingrained value of *kapwa*, the deeply rooted desire to make people, whether local or foreign, feel that they belong to the community. They experienced this from Filipinos both in the Philippines and abroad, and even demonstrated it to the foreigners they met. Although, the act of travelling solo is still not a popular choice for most Filipino travellers (Aceron et al., 2018), the Filipinas in this study still exhibited Filipino values, albeit, in a different way from the accepted norms.

Overall, the findings showed that the travellers negotiated their identity as Filipina by both defying their family's and Filipino society's expectations of them, but also by demonstrating the deep-seated values in relation to what made them Filipino. There are also external factors that may have influenced them to be able to make rebellious decisions, that are related to a more globalised world. This can be seen with how the bloggers used technology as a tool for empowerment, while also becoming empowered by other female travellers (see Weatherby & Vidon, 2018). Their higher education and increased mobility due to having a career that provides financial independence, could act as another factor that empowered them to pursue a non-traditional path. At their core, these women still uphold the pre-colonial values that positively identified them as Filipinos. However, they are not constricted by traditional roles, which supports Suzuki's (2015) claims that modern Filipinas resist socio-cultural domination and create their own version of modern success.

5.4. Overall Identity Formation

The findings suggest that the self the Filipina traveller constructs is relational and situational, confirming Cohen's (2010a) claim that the process of identity formation in travel is continuous and constructs multiple selves. This was portrayed in Ina's journey, which she started as an eager traveller to finally reach her end as a solo wayfarer. Each stage of her travel represented her "self" at a specific time. In her more recent blog post, she mentioned reaching a point where she still enjoyed travel but would rather choose a less adventurous lifestyle together with her husband.

This shows how the tourism space can rework the self due to the numerous internal and external elements (Wearing, Stevenson & Young, 2010).

For several of the women, the main motive to engage with solo travel was to escape their current self. This motive agrees with Cohen's (2010b) claim that travellers are escaping from a conformist society that shapes their current identity. This is confirmed in Pia and Anna's accounts in which they showed how they followed the expected route in society of graduating from a renowned university and getting a stable job. They both were not happy with their current lifestyle, which motivated them to try solo travelling in order to have space to reflect on what to do next. They later realised that the travel lifestyle was what suited them. However, the decision to pursue a travel lifestyle did not happen in one trip. It took multiple journeys and experiences that lead them on to a continuous process of reconstructing their identity. This validates Lean, Staiff and Waterton's (2016) argument that mobilities feed into the continually changing self. In every new place, these women travelled to gain new perspectives. Eva wrote about this when she mentioned that travel is shopping for experiences. Every new experience can create a new self which was also explained in Frances' account of how she felt transformed, the more she travelled. She now considers herself a more confident and independent version of herself compared to how she was in the past.

Interpersonal relationships played an integral role in the bloggers' identity formation (see Wearing & Wearing, 1996; 2001); the people they met influenced them to become confident in their own selves, as in the case of Frances, or learned to believe in the good in people, as seen in Sarina and Becca's accounts. Relationships at home also played an influential role (see Hibbert et al., 2013) as highlighted in Ina's statement that having a home and a husband kept her grounded and motivated to continue pursuing what she was passionate about. Familial relationships also played a negative role, as most traditional Filipino families expected their daughters to either stay in a stable job or get married (Roces, 2000; Suzuki, 2015). The Filipinas in this study had to rebel against those societal expectations, which initially discouraged them but later solidified their ambitions to pursue lifestyle travel.

Noy (2004) claimed that sociocultural themes played an important role in the construction of a collective identity which was mirrored in the accounts of Ina and Becca, with similar cultural reminders of the Philippines helping them bond with locals in a foreign destination. The meanings they placed on these journeys allowed them to surpass being a spectator, and instead formed their individual identities through the experiences that they personally found memorable.

Experiencing risk (Elsrud, 2001) also played an integral part in the travellers' identity (re)formation. The women not only had to negotiate gendered constraints but also socio-cultural constraints. This confirms the importance of evaluating experiences, especially constraints, through a gender and culture lens (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016; Yang et al., 2019). Through the process of negotiating these layered constraints they not only became a more confident and matured self, but through their travel blogs, they also empowered other Filipina travellers to do the same.

Overall, the findings suggest that while these Filipina travellers aimed to reconstruct a new self through travel, the factors they experience (i.e. interpersonal relationship, socio-cultural themes, and experiencing risk) contributed to creating multiple selves. These identities were a combination of their gender and socio-cultural background, which suggests that the travellers grappled with reconstructing their personal identity, intertwined with their social identity (see Yang & Tung, 2018). However, the travellers neither allowed their gender identity nor their socio-cultural identity to become a deterrent from pursuing their individual path. By pursuing their individual passions (i.e. travelling, writing, motorcycling, etc.) they actively expressed their individual identity, while also acknowledging their identity as a woman, as a Filipina, as a daughter and for some, as a wife.

5.5. Conclusion

To conclude, there is evidence in the findings that support Cohen's (2010a) argument that identity (re)formation through travel is continuous and can create multiple selves. These selves are products of internal and external elements forged by experiencing risk and the interpersonal relationships of the traveller. To address the gendered and Western biases that plague tourism academia and the tourism space (Winter et al., 2009; Harris & Wilson, 2007), evaluating the Filipina travellers' experiences through the gender and socio-cultural lens has led to deep insights. Through the gendered lens, there was evidence of gendered constraints influenced by the patriarchal system of the destination and sociocultural beliefs from home that promote female domesticity. Despite these constraining factors, the Filipina travellers learnt to navigate and overcome these hurdles to pursue their unrestricted lifestyle.

Through the socio-cultural lens, religion and culture (Yang et al., 2017) played an integral role in influencing their Asian identity and the types of constraints they experienced. The findings showed similarities in the motivation of the bloggers and other Asian travellers in their pursuit to escape their society, while paradoxically also experiencing an increased sense of connection with their

homeland (see Bui et al., 2014). However, the Filipina travellers' sociocultural constraints did not stem from a patriarchal system, as was the case for Chinese travellers (see Seow & Brown, 2018), but from the deeply rooted Filipinos cultural value of community and family.

The use of the socio-cultural lens addressed Chang's (2015) criticism of Asian tourism, by showing that the Filipinas were pursuing liberal lifestyles like their Western counterparts but faced challenges that stemmed from their collectivist socio-cultural backgrounds. Using the Filipino lens, it was discovered that the Filipina travellers had openly rejected the traditional roles laid out by their families and Filipino society. However, this does not mean that they disassociated themselves from their Filipino identity. Instead they found new ways to interpret the pre-colonial values that represented their identities as Filipina.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research was to discover how travel was used by Filipina travellers to reconstruct or create their gender, socio-cultural and personal identities through solo travel. This chapter revisits the initial aims and objectives of the research, offers theoretical and practical implications of the study, addresses its limitations, and provides an overall conclusion and recommendations for the ways future research can expand further on this and similar topics. I also include my personal reflection, as I believe this will give future researchers a deeper insight into my stance on this chosen topic and stimulate more conversations about gender and diversity in the tourism space.

6.2. Aims and Objectives Revisited

The aim for this research was to understand how identity is (re)constructed in the different stages of travel, by viewing this through a gender and socio-cultural lens. Insights drawn from the Filipina travel bloggers' experiences showed the following:

- Critically assessing the Asian female market, looking at their experiences through a socio-cultural and gender lens, can provide multi-dimensional insights into the construction of “selves”.
- Socio-cultural values and traditions of the community, specifically the importance of family, create severe constraints for Filipina travellers.
- Higher mobilities and greater financial independence empower Filipina travellers to pursue solo travels. These elements reflect global trends that modern women are experiencing when compared to older generations.
- The use of technology plays a role in empowering women to rebel against traditional roles of domesticity and family expectations.
- Benefits of solo travel include allowing for self-actualisation to occur where Filipina travellers can create their own personal identity, not completely bounded by gender and socio-cultural identities.
- Travel is a paradox that Filipinas can use to escape their family and societal pressures but also experience a deeper connection with their homeland and increased national identity.

These insights were instrumental in answering the following research question of the study:

Q1: How do Filipina travellers' experiences compare to Western female travellers? How do they compare to those of other Asian female travellers?

In the themes that arose from the findings, the motivation, constraints and benefits contained similarities to global themes, such as their motivations to escape from the traditional roles of domesticity (see Harris & Wilson, 2007; Myers, 2017), the gendered discrimination they experienced in the tourism space (see Yang, 2017; Wilson & Little, 2005), and the personal growth and broadening connections they made throughout their travel experiences (see Wearing & Wearing, 1996). This suggests that there are global patterns that the female market conform to at different stages of their journey. The benefits are of significance, as self-actualisation stays with them even when the journey has ended. The Filipina travellers came to realise their own individual capabilities through travel, which is why they continued travelling. Through their travel blogs they become spokespeople for other female travellers, as they used their online platform to empower not just fellow Filipinas, but other female travellers that may have had personal and societal constraints impeding them. These are forms of encouragement that are consistent with Harris and Wilson's (2007) suggestion that women become encouragers for other women, after they complete their solo journeys.

There are also several similarities between the Filipinas' experiences and those of other Asian travellers, such as sources of motivation, and constraints stemming from their cultural and religious values (see Yang & Mura, 2016). Many of the Filipinas were motivated by a desire to escape from their current lifestyle dictated by family and societal expectations. Paradoxically, travel also increased their connection to their homeland. However, in contrast to Bui et al.'s (2014) study in which Asian travellers realised they wanted to continue with their life back in their own society, most of these Filipina travellers chose to continue their nomadic lifestyles. Lastly, while gender plays a major role in constraining Asian female travellers due to the influence of their patriarchal society (Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2017), the Philippines has a more egalitarian society. While marriage is still expected of Filipinas (Suzuki, 2015), greater pressure is placed on supporting the family, whether it be the nuclear family or an extended one. This pressure stems from Philippine value of *kapwa* (solidarity), so Filipinas who choose to pursue a lifestyle that puts their own interest over their family or community will be greatly looked down on. This shows that for Filipina, socio-cultural values and expectations play a greater role in impeding their lifestyle travel pursuits but are also integral to the (re)construction of their identities.

Q2: How do these travellers negotiate gender and socio-cultural constraints and how do these affect their overall travel experience?

Gender and racial discrimination are significant constraints women face in their travels. These constraints affect their perception of a destination, as evidenced by Sarina's account of being disillusioned in India after becoming a victim of a local misogynistic tradition called "eve teasing." These constraints also affected their self-esteem, as seen by Frances and Anna's accounts when they were misjudged as sex workers or gold digger due to the colour of their skin. Nonetheless, these Filipinas showed great resilience in learning from their experiences to become smarter travellers in future destinations and not allowing themselves to be defined as victims. It was also through travel, that they came to embrace their Filipina features as part of their unique identity and demonstrate that they could travel the same way as their non-Asian and male counterparts, by thinking of their gender and socio-cultural backgrounds not as a liability, but as an asset. This was clearly evidenced in their travel blogs, which they used as a platform to warn but also empower women to not let other people's opinions define the type of travel they want to do.

Q3: What meanings do Filipino women gain that help in constructing or reaffirming their gendered and racial identities?

The Filipina travellers placed great importance on their socio-cultural background and what it means to be a Filipino woman. From their motivations, the common themes showed their drive to improve themselves and their dissatisfaction with the lifestyle they had previously. As mentioned in the accounts of Anna and Pia, they had been following the path that their family expected of them. It was only through travel that they were able to discover another side of themselves and a non-traditional lifestyle that suited them. These women wrestled with their gender and socio-cultural identities when confronted with different constraints, such as discrimination, sexual harassment and cultural baggage. They faced the constant question of why they were not travelling with a partner and comments about travelling solo not being safe for women. They also experienced uncomfortable encounters with ignorant locals and misogynistic men. However, these encounters were not the focus of their whole travel story; instead they used these encounters as learning experiences. Eva's account showed she saw the constant questioning from locals as their way of showing concern, as they are not used to seeing Filipina travelling solo. Pia wrote about the benefits of being a female in some communities because some locals tended to give important safety advice to female travellers about places to avoid and what to watch out for. Even the sexual harassment and racial discrimination experiences did not define

their overall travel, as it is mentioned in many of their accounts that they mostly experienced the kindness of strangers and created genuine connections with like-minded individuals. Francis even mentioned that it was through travel that she learned to love her brown skin. This shows that instead of allowing these infrequent incidents to portray them as victims, they were hurdles to be endured in order to learn to love their “selves” more.

Cultural baggage stems from family and Filipino society’s expectations. The women’s struggles to re-affirm their Filipina identity echoes Yang et al.’s (2019) argument that Asian female travellers face identity crises because they are “caught in between their self and social identities and how the perception of others (e.g. parents and home societies) contributed to that struggle” (p. 1054). In the early stages of their travels, the women had to confront many internal and external doubts about their decisions to pursue long-term travel, as this was not considered a stable lifestyle that would support a family. However, their accounts showed that they came to terms with not following the traditional roles set up by Filipino society, but still reaffirmed their Filipina identity, placing emphasis on the encounters that reminded them of Philippine culture, specifically Filipino hospitality, which they took pride in demonstrating and experiencing. This highlights that travel helped them shape their own individual identity by giving weight to and embracing their identity as Filipina, to suit their non-traditional lifestyle.

6.3. Implications

6.3.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings and discussion about this research support the use of the gender and socio-cultural lens as a valuable means of gaining insights into the Asian female travel market. To address Teo’s (2009) concern about the need to eliminate Western bias, a researcher must have deep understandings, and ideally come from the same socio-cultural group as the participants, in order to provide accurate and discerning conclusions about the deeper intrapersonal experiences of Asian female travellers. By using the *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* constructs to illuminate the experiences of the Filipina travellers through the Filipino perspective. This shows the importance of looking closer at a market’s socio-cultural values as a holistic approach in order to understanding the psychological and sociological factors of that market. This also addresses initial concerns about overgeneralising the Asian market (see Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016), as the heterogeneous qualities Asian countries show they each have their own unique traits and should not be given one homogenous identity.

6.3.2. Practical Implications

Based on the findings, looking at the motivations, constraints and benefits of travellers' experiences can offer deeper insights into their market. Using the gender and socio-cultural lens shed light on the nuances that were distinctive to each market. With the steady popularity of solo tourism and the significant presence of the female market this can be a valuable research tool for tourism industries looking to capture potential growing markets.

Another practical implication for tourism industries and other government bodies wanting to grow their tourism is the importance of addressing the constraints that can dissuade solo female travellers from travelling. Pia wrote about the bad publicity that surrounds travelling in Mexico. Although, there are genuine safety issues that surround the city, Pia's experiences showed that not only was her stay different from what the hyper-sensationalised news media outlets publish, but was similar to her other experiences in countries in such as Brazil or Sri Lanka. Improving the destination image and encouraging more tourism industry stakeholders to create products that address the safety concerns of female travellers would be possible actions to work on. Additionally, travel blogs have proven to be valuable tools for tourism industries to capitalise on, as they offer deeper insights into a market that has potential to grow in the future. The blogs showed their ability to influence when used as a platform by women to empower themselves in their pursuit for an individual identity. Working with travel bloggers may help destination marketers reach not just solo female markets but their networks as well.

6.4. Personal Reflection

Looking back at my own personal history, I chose this topic because I too have experienced solo travelling while identifying as a young woman and as a Filipina. In a way, this research was a personal reflection of what travel meant for me, especially during those transformative years after completing my bachelor's degree. Reading the stories of these brave Filipinas who defied family and friends' expectations in order to discover themselves, shows a lot about their character and the heavy weight they had to carry, especially since Filipino values are centred around community and family. There are similarities with what these Filipina travellers went through and the experiences mentioned in academic journals about other female Asian and non-Asian travellers. However, being a Filipina myself, I felt a deep connection with their motivations and struggles, and their desire to break away from tradition but at the same time stay true to and embrace their Filipino identity in every destination their travel takes them to.

Travel offers a space to look back at life from another perspective; it does not have to be international travel, as domestic travel is still a popular and more accessible means of travel for the Filipino market. I experienced a number of similar constraints to those experienced by the travel bloggers, such as constantly being questioned by local Filipinos about why I was travelling alone and feeling unsafe due to the unwarranted sexualised gazes and catcalls from men. Their stories also made me appreciative of certain privileges that I sometimes take for granted. Becca and Frances wrote informative accounts about the sacrifices that needed to be made if one was not born in a middle-class family, and the double standards they experienced based on the colour of their skin. In a country where most of the people are from lower-income families, travelling for leisure remains a privilege and those that are able to do it have *morena* (dark-skin) features, so are still subject to racial stereotypes. There are also structural constraints of visa limitations. Having a Philippine passport places limitations on the destinations. Filipinos can travel to, and the proofs needed (e.g. financial security and strong ties to the Philippines), are hurdles that those who are more fortunate, may never truly understand. However, this research does not focus on the negative aspects of travel, but on the strong wills of contemporary Filipinas that defied social and structural constraints in establishing their own individual identity.

6.5. Limitations

This study had several limitations that have impacted on the results. One notable limitation is the small sample I was able to derive my data from and the use of professional to semi-professional blogs that may include inauthentic depictions of the bloggers' travels. However, after careful readings and filtering, the blogs and articles that were chosen for data collection provided a variety of well-articulated profound insights into the experiences of these Filipina travellers. However, each blogger had her own unique way in writing about her travel biography, and the varying stories they told assured me that the research was not limited to specific questions and lacking in rich data.

Another limitation was in the chosen subjects of the research. Professional and semi-professional bloggers do not represent the whole Filipina traveller market, as by their trade they are more of a niche market. Nonetheless, this group has provided insightful grounds in understanding the Filipina market in contemporary times, especially since there has been a lack of academic data regarding the Filipina market in general.

6.6. Overall Conclusion and Future Research

The Filipina traveller perspective reflected the changing role of women in this contemporary globalised world. The gender and socio-cultural lens offered a holistic perspective of Filipina identity (re)construction, which showed similar, yet contradictory patterns to those of non-Asian and other Asian markets. This addresses Chang's (2015) recommendation to discover whether today's Asian travellers show similar patterns and impacts to those of their non-Asian counterparts. Escaping from traditional roles of domesticity and social-cultural expectations is a major theme Filipina traveller share with other female travellers, as well as experiencing gendered constraints in the masculinised tourism space. However, cultural constraints were the most significant constraints for the Filipina travellers, as they had to navigate family and Filipino's society's expectations while realising their own individual identity. Travel offered them a heterotopic space (Harris & Wilson, 2007) where they could resist both gender and socio-cultural constructs, which allowed them to construct their individual identity. Paradoxically, it also reconnected them with their heritage (see Bui et al., 2014), when they experienced local cultural values that reminded them of home. This suggests that an array of identities that these Filipina travellers (re)constructed, where gender and socio-cultural background were not seen as elements that confined their individual identity but offered unique opportunities to expand it.

Many significant findings arose from looking into the accounts of these Filipina travel bloggers and has shed some light on certain perspectives of this unresearched Filipina market. However, this research concentrated on looking at intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that affect the travel experiences of Filipina travellers. Future research should look at other external factors that enable Filipina travellers to pursue leisure travels such as their age, education, family and work background. It might also be interesting to look at Filipina travellers that have tried solo travelling but chose to return to the more traditional roles, to give another perspective on what travel means to them. Lastly, other future research could look at Filipinas who already have children of their own and continue to travel. In the global market, many solo female travellers are women nearing retirement age who no longer have children to take care of but have enough financial security to pursue more leisure activities (Booking.com, 2018). This data, however, concentrates more on Western women. It would be interesting to investigate older Filipina mothers, as well as other Asian women who are in a similar situation to these Western women. Such a comparison may provide further insights into whether the Asian market is indeed showing globally similar patterns.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Copyright for Research Permission Form



Cheska Lacson
50 Sackville St., Grey Lynn, Auckland
New Zealand, 1021
28/10/2019

(Blogger's Name)

(Blogger's Email)

Dear (Blogger),

I am a Masters student at Auckland University of Technology and am writing a dissertation on how travel is used by solo Filipina travellers in the (re)construction of their identity/ies for my Masters in International Tourism Management.

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Cheska

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