

## The Author



**Jessica E. Ticar** is a Visiting Graduate Associate at the York Centre for Asian Research.

## Contact

For further information on this research, please contact: Jessica Ticar ([jticar@uwo.ca](mailto:jticar@uwo.ca))

## Multiple Experiences of Filipino Young Adults: Identity, Community and Social Justice

While it is important to redress forms of oppression such as racism and sexism, it is equally important to investigate the ways in which Filipino-Canadian young adults construct positive individual and collective identities. My Master's research in Counselling Psychology has explored the influences on identity development amongst first- and second-generation Filipino-Canadian young adults residing in Toronto.

Five themes emerged from my research:

### Migration patterns

Regardless of generation and class status, participants revealed that their families had moved to Canada to survive, and that family economic conditions have influenced participants' identities. Participants spoke of the ever-changing meanings attached to the construct 'Filipino': "When you talk about Filipino identity," one participant explained, "you are really constructing your identity yourself, and you are piecing together who you are, which is entirely different from someone else's view of what is Filipino." Young Filipino-Canadian adults are agents in their own identity construction as they navigate global migration experiences.

### Racism and discrimination

Racism and discrimination — both outside and within the Filipino-Canadian community — occurs on a regular basis. One participant described a situation in which she was bullied in school because she was a 'fob' ("fresh off the boat," the colloquial term for recent immigrants):

"This kid who I had class with, he would just spit on my hair for like no reason ... it was all because I was a 'fob.' Growing up just made me not really want to associate with 'fobby' Filipinos, and I wanted to be more with the second gens [generation]."

Discrimination within the Filipino community occurred more often amongst those who were of mixed-race; those who had recently arrived to Canada; those who came from different regions in the Philippines; and those who are socially and economically marginalized.

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Eighth Floor, Kaneff Tower  
4700 Keele St., Toronto  
Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3



## Gender roles and expectations

Participants voiced the importance of negotiating traditional and contemporary gender roles and expectations. While both males and females felt significant social and family pressures to succeed, females faced extra pressure to meet beauty standards and gender-specific family obligations (e.g., being dutiful daughters). Some participants, however, grew up with strong female role models who challenged traditional gender roles.

## Religion and spirituality

Young Filipino-Canadian adults indicated that religion and spirituality has both negatively and positively influenced their lives. Participants agreed, regardless of whether they identified as Catholic, that Catholicism has had an impact on Filipino identities. Many of the participants, interestingly, distinguished religion from spirituality, viewing spirituality as an important factor in community building and interconnectedness, while seeing religion as a potentially oppressive tool.

## Community organization

Community organizations helped to bridge gaps in knowledge about Filipino history and laid the foundation for building a sense of community, identity and social justice for first- and second-generation Filipino-Canadian young adults residing in Toronto. Several of the participants were engaged in advocating the rights of Filipino-Canadians facing systemic oppression, and their work facilitates the development of positive individual and collective identities.

## Recommendations

The results of my ethnographic study have given rise to several recommendations for anti-oppressive practices that would be of value to counsellors, particularly when working with transnational individual, groups and families. Counsellors should acknowledge the importance of the social, historical, political and cultural contexts of their clients' lives. Redressing oppression and marginalization in its complexity may unveil deeper issues that extend beyond the individual. Transnational clients may achieve strong individual and collective identities through a counsellor's referral to and collaboration with culturally-based organizations. Counsellors' attention to anti-oppressive practices would provide clients with greater possibilities as well as transformative spaces in which emotional, mental, spiritual, social and economic needs can be met.

## Acknowledgements

A full version of Jessica E. Ticar's research on first- and second-generation Filipino-Canadian young adults residing in Toronto is available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/3203>.