

The Experiences of Filipino Professionals in the Mental Health Field

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Participants and Data Collection

- * **One Focus Group:**
 - * Held on February 13, 2015
 - * Four participants
 - * Two Ph.D.'s
 - * One MFT
 - * One MFT Intern
- * **Four Individual Phone Interviews:**
 - * Held throughout the month of May
 - * Two LCSWs
 - * One Somatic Psychotherapist
 - * One MFT
- * Total participants= 8 (3 males and 5 females)



Participants were asked the following questions:

1. What made you interested in the mental health field?
2. What are the barriers to becoming a clinician?
3. What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?
4. Are you fluent in Tagalog?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being fluent in Tagalog? (only asked during individual interviews)
6. Thinking about your career, what would help you become more successful?

What made you interested in the mental health field?

- * 1st Theme:

- * **Personal experience**

- * 2 out of 8 (25%) people reported they went through therapy/counseling themselves
 - * “I was going through a depressed state of mind so I saw a therapist and during the second session, I told myself, ‘Wow, this actually works.’”
 - * “I wanted to know how to manage my emotions and help myself.”
 - * “I felt like it was a safe place to say it in front of the counselor and so since then I wanted to be a counselor just to provide a safe place for someone to talk to their parents.”



Depression in Filipinos

- * One study investigated the prevalence of depression with Filipino Americans (both immigrants and 2nd generation individuals), citing that 27% of the community sample had a major depressive episode or clinical depression of varying severity, which is significantly higher than the general US population, which is usually reported at 10-20% (Tompar-Tiu & Sustento-Seneriches, 1995).

What made you interested in the mental health field?

- * 2nd Theme:
 - * **Inspiration from another professional**
 - * 50% of the participants reported they were inspired by their school counselors or college professors
 - * “In college, I had to take a Psych 101 class and there was just this amazing instructor who just made psychology really interesting...”
 - * “One of my professors pointed out that I had a knack for listening and suggested going into therapy.”



What made you interested in the mental health field?

* 3rd Theme:

* **Shifting professions**

* 3 out of 8 (37.5%) people reported they started off in a field other than mental health and learned for themselves that their original professions were truly not their interest.

- * One person started off in nursing school and did not like it, so he/she shifted to social work and eventually counseling.
- * One person majored and graduated in engineering before moving into psychology.
- * One person initially thought of becoming a medical doctor.



What are the barriers to becoming a clinician?

- * 1st Theme:
 - * **Stigma against the mental health field within the Filipino culture**
- * Subthemes:
 - * **Uneducated about mental health= Negative view on therapy**
 - * **Lack of pride and prestige**
 - * **Lack of family support**
- * All 8 of the participants answered **stigma** to this question



**END THE
MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA**

Quotes

- * “My mom had said to me, ‘Why would you work with those people, you might get the same thing that they have.’”
- * “My family doesn’t know what mental health clinicians do.”
- * “Definitely a barrier would be they just don’t understand this work. I think to this day, they still say, ‘What is it that you do?’”
- * “They don’t think carefully about how it [therapy] might or might not work with their children or themselves.”
- * “If you work hard enough, you should be fine. If you’re not fine, you’re not working hard enough.”



Lack of Pride and Prestige

- * 50% of the participants reported lack of pride and/or prestige in becoming a mental health professional within the Filipino community
- * “The traditional way my family looks at jobs is either you’re a lawyer or a doctor.”
- * “It’s not prestigious for me culturally. You know it’s not prestigious in a way that you’re a doctor where you make money easily.”
- * “For me it’s hard when I first told my mom that I wanted to be a therapist, she said there’s no job for me out there because every Filipino woman becomes a nurse.”
- * “There’s not a lot of pride in it so to speak.”

Lack of Family Support



- * 50% of the participants reported lack of family support when they told their families they would like to pursue a career in the mental health field.
- * “My family asked me, ‘Why would you pursue that instead of law or medicine?’”
- * “There were family limitations in terms of family support while going through licensure.”



What are the barriers to becoming a clinician?

- * 2nd Theme:
 - * **Issue of Money and Income**
 - * 5 out of 8 (62.5%) reported that they are not making the amount of money they themselves or their families hoped they would make.
 - * “My parents still worry for me in terms of money and income.”
 - * “Money being a barrier. Sometimes I feel like I’m not successful because I’m not making what I’m supposed to be making.”
 - * “While growing up, all I’ve heard my family talk about is how low the salary of a person is when they work in the mental health field.”



Other Barriers to Becoming a Clinician

- * “It’s not really promoted among Filipino American youth.”
- * Religious background of Filipinos
- * Competitiveness
 - * “It’s difficult because it’s competitive. In my experience, there is a lot of effort to look for clients, especially with the growing number of psychotherapists.”
- * Lack of resources to support Filipinos

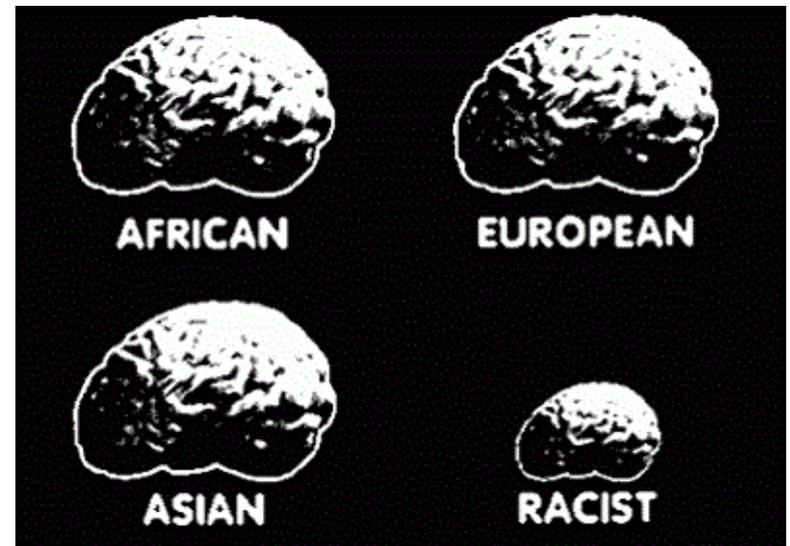
What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * Themes:

- * Oppression
- * Being a person of color
- * Prejudice
- * Lack of diversity
- * Lack of representation (Filipinos are a small group even within the Asian community)
- * Racism
- * Microaggressions

What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * All 8 of the participants mentioned some form of racism, microaggression, prejudice, or oppression in their answers to the question above.



What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * “During my time, I experienced **prejudice** during my oral exams for licensure. I failed. Two white men were in a room, one of them was not even listening to what I was saying, he was looking out the window. I failed a few points away from passing. I don’t know if that barrier still exists.”

What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * “Some of the challenges that I encounter is not just because I’m Filipino, but I’m a person of color. I’m not taken seriously simply because I’m brown. It feels like I have to work harder in order to get my point across.”

What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * “I was the only Filipino student in my cohort, it was mostly white. Since I graduated as a Filipino therapist, I feel I’m not as welcomed or competent as my white counterparts. I think there’s a lot of oppression.”

What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * “Whether being Filipino or being a non-White person in this field and I feel it a lot even actually being currently in private practice and it’s really really frustrating. There’s just a lot of microaggressions that I experience.”

What are the challenges of being a Filipino in this field?

- * “The reality is we’re living in a very Western context and we are sort of a small group even in the Asian community. I think for Filipinos this is such a new thing, such a novel idea and we’re trying to fit in the Asian community but also in the Euro-American community. In addition to the logistical concrete things that we have to deal with, it’s really proving ourselves in many levels. I feel like I’m successful in some ways, but I still feel very insecure compared to some of my colleagues. I think that’s just racism and racial and ethnic issues and microaggressions.”

Are you fluent in Tagalog?

- * 50% are fluent in Tagalog
- * 50% are not fluent in Tagalog
- * 2 people mentioned that Filipinos tend to speak English with one another even if they are fluent in Tagalog
 - * “Most Filipinos try really well to speak English even if they’re having a hard time. Part of the culture thinks we need to blend in. They try to downplay and not ask for help in terms of translating.”
 - * “I spoke with them in Tagalog, but they actually shied away from it and they wanted to speak English. I would speak to them in Tagalog and ask questions and they would answer in English even though I knew they were fluent in Tagalog.”

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being fluent/not being fluent in Tagalog?

* Advantages of being fluent:

- * “I get paid more. Even without the language, I know the culture.”
- * “I can reach out to more of the underserved community.”
- * “Knowing the dynamics of Filipino families and how I can use it to help my clients get better.”

**yes, i am
filipino.
no, i don't speak
"filipino", i speak
tagalog.**

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being fluent/not being fluent in Tagalog?

- * **Disadvantages of not being fluent:**
 - * “Not being Filipino enough.”
 - * “I see myself differently when I’m doing my sessions in English rather than when I do my sessions in Tagalog. I have trouble translating.”
 - * “The trainings we receive are all in English. So how do I conduct therapy in Tagalog?”



Thinking about your career, what would help you become more successful?

* **Themes:**

- * Having a consultation group for Filipino professionals
- * Educating Filipino community about mental health
- * Being able to network
- * Having more Filipinos work as mental health professionals
- * Having more males work in the mental health field
- * Having more scientific research and articles of Filipino psychology

Thinking about your career, what would help you become more successful?

- * 50% of the participants said that they wanted some form of a consultation group for Filipino professionals within the mental health field.
- * 3 out of 8 (37.5%) participants said they would appreciate more networking opportunities.
- * 2 out of 8 (25%) participants said they would like to see more research and education about Filipino psychology



Moving Forward

- * Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE) and Filipino Mental Health Initiative (FMHI) to work together in creating:
 - * A consultation group for Filipino professionals in the field of mental health.
 - * A website that lists Filipino professionals within the county of San Mateo (for networking) and list of mental health resources (websites/links, locations, phone numbers of services, programs, agencies, etc.)



Thank you to FMHI



One participant found “the goal of FMHI and the work they do, which is continue to educate people and make them aware of what mental health field is and to reduce stigma” to be helpful in making his career more successful.

The **mission** of the Filipino Mental Health Initiative is to improve the well-being of Filipinos in San Mateo County by:

- Reducing the stigma of mental health and substance use
- Increasing access to services
- Further empowering the community through outreach and engagement

Counseling Filipino Americans

Multicultural Knowledge

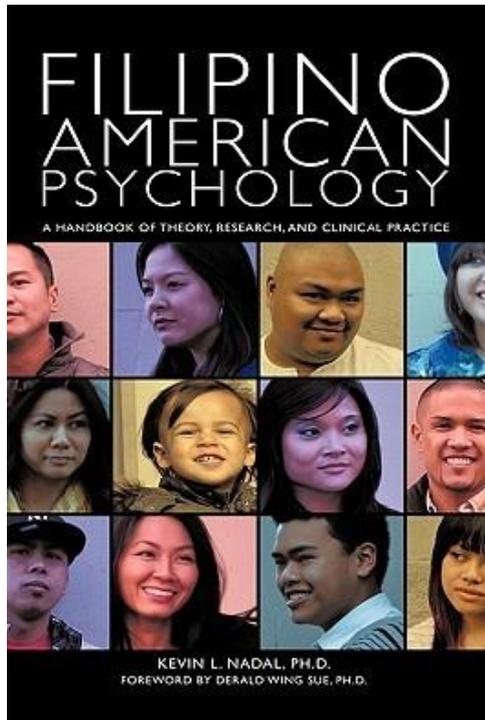
- * Maintaining a reasonable distance
- * Brief and frequent eye contact
- * Filipino American clients may be deferent to authority figures and sometimes may convey understanding or agreement to authority figures, when in fact they do not understand or do not agree (Sanchez & Gaw, 2007).

Counseling Filipinos Americans

Multicultural Skills

- * Personable
- * Be indirect in psychotherapy sessions (approach that uses informal and non-judgmental inquiries)
- * Therapist to be a blank slate: total state of ignorance allowing the client to share the entirety of his or her problems

References:



Sanchez, F., & Gaw, A. (2007). Mental health care of Filipino Americans. *Psychiatric Services*, 58(6), 810-815.

Tompar-Tiu, A., & Sustento-Seneriches, J. (1995). *Depression and other mental health issues: The Filipino American Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.