

**Understanding Acculturation, Mental Health and Sexual Identity in Gay Filipino  
Canadians in the Diaspora**

by

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### Abstract

This research explores the psychological experiences of gay Filipino Canadians in the diaspora, focusing on how acculturation, cultural values, and systemic barriers shape these individual's mental health. The research examines the complex interplay between Filipino cultural expectations, Canadian societal norms, compounded by the pressured related to navigating sexuality within these communities. This Capstone highlights the impact of family separation, discrimination, and the challenges of maintaining cultural identity by drawing from research on migration patterns, bicultural stress, and indigenous Filipino psychology. Filipino cultural values such as *hiya* and *pakisisama* play a crucial role in shaping coping strategies and emotional well-being. The findings in this research emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive and identity-affirming approaches in mental health supports for the gay Filipino Canadians in the diaspora. This Capstone also argues that understanding the unique stressors that this population face is essential for developing more effective counselling interventions. This research aims to contribute to the growing field of culturally competent mental health care by addressing the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality, and immigration status.

*Keywords:* Gay Filipino Canadians, Filipino diaspora, acculturation, mental health, bicultural stress, Filipino cultural values, immigration, family separation, LGBTQ+, intersectionality, family reunification

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This Capstone aims to explore how gay Filipino Canadians navigate the complex intersection of the cultural expectations and societal norms that have shaped their identity development and their well-being. Being members of a diaspora, gay Filipino Canadians are often navigating two contrasting cultural perspectives. These two perspectives are the traditional, typically conservative values of Filipino heritage, and the more progressive, inclusive stance that Canadian society often has. This intersection creates many unique challenges for gay Filipino Canadians as they attempt to not only reconcile their sexual and gender identities but also do so within the frameworks of and interplay between both cultures.

Gay Filipino Canadians face a complex set of challenges that come from the intersection of acculturative stress, involving but is not limited to the minority stress that is associated with their sexual identity, and adapting to Canadian culture. The combination of stressors this population faces can create significant psychological pressures. These individuals can then feel pressured to reconcile their familial obligations that are embedded in Filipino cultural norms with their gay identities. Research has suggested that navigating these intersecting identities may lead to increased mental health issues that can include anxiety, depression, and identity conflict (Martinez et al., 2020).

Research has also suggested that internalized homophobia plays a central role in adding to the psychological distress experienced by gay Filipino Canadians (Alibudbud, 2023). This internalization is shaped by Filipino values such as *hiya* and strong familial obligations, which further deepens the sense of guilt and inadequacy that many face (Tuliao, 2014) and will be discussed further in the Chapter 2.

While there does seem to be a growing amount of literature on LGBTQ+ experiences and immigrant acculturation, there is still a significant gap in the literature that specifically addresses the experience of gay Filipinos in Canada. The lack of research on this topic for

this population implies that countless aspects remain underexplored, such as their resilience and the nuances of this population's challenges. This can have implications for identity affirmation and mental health support. Regardless, this gap in the literature will not hinder this Capstone's investigation but rather adopt a conceptual approach where this project will learn, draw from and apply parallel scholarship to gay Filipino Canadians.

This chapter also aims to provide an overview of the rationale for this Capstone's investigation, the theoretical frameworks used, and the significance of this topic. The psychological and social challenges that gay Filipino Canadians face will be investigated and explored by understanding the intersections among the varying factors of cultural identity, queerness, and migration. Exploring the existing and parallel literature and conceptually applying the theoretical frameworks will provide potential insight and hypotheses on how gay Filipino Canadians can navigate cultural conflicts, familial expectations, and identity formation in the social environments they are in. In this chapter, the research questions that will help guide the study will also be introduced and additionally, this Capstone's research will examine the broader socio-cultural and historical factors like religious influences, colonial legacies, and familial expectations that shape queer Filipino Canadian individual's realities.

### **Research Rationale and Purpose Statement**

There is a unique intersection of marginalized identities that gay Filipino Canadians represent. This population has experienced specific mental health challenges and identity struggles resulting from these multiple marginalizations. One of the marginalized identities they face is navigating the contrast of the conflicting expectations from their Filipino heritage and Canadian societal expectations. The other marginalized identity is being gay. Filipino culture is deeply rooted in Catholicism and traditional gender roles, which often views gender and sexuality more conservatively (Baring et al., 2024). These Filipino beliefs may create

significant barriers when it comes to accepting gay individuals. In contrast, Canadian culture typically offers an affirming space for queer individuals by having legal protections present and increasing social acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities (Sadika et al., 2020). In enunciating this, it is navigating the two cultures and sets of expectations that can make it difficult for gay Filipino Canadians to balance and can lead to feelings of isolation, internalized homophobia, or strained family relationships.

Many gay Filipino Canadians end up struggling with their identity development and mental health (Ortiz & Costigan, 2021). Some struggles they can face are fear of familial rejection and around self-acceptance, both of which can lead to heightened risks of depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues (Sofrona & Giannakopoulos, 2024). Given that Filipinos view family as such an integral and central part of their collectivistic and traditionally family-oriented culture, the possibility of familial rejection or even estrangement can be quite distressing. It is also worth noting that alongside family, the role of community acceptance, peer support and relationships, mentorship and external support networks play an essential role in identity development (Ho et al., 2022). This Capstone's research will thus examine how accessing affirming spaces that are both within and outside Filipino Canadian communities affects the psychological well-being of gay Filipino Canadians.

As mentioned earlier, there is an existing gap in understanding for this specific population, which increases the need for consciousness raising. Gay Filipino Canadians have unique needs, and due to the lack of synthesized knowledge on this topic, mental health professionals may not be fully aware of this population's needs, which could lead to failure in professional support systems to account for the complex cultural and familial dynamics that shape their experiences. As alluded to earlier, this Capstone aims to bridge that gap and to contribute to a broader understanding of the interplay between cultural influences, gender and sexual identity development, mental health, and social belonging by conceptually

investigating the available literature and examining parallel scholarship that could be applied to this population. With the growing Filipino diaspora in Canada, examination of this topic could contribute to culturally informed practical approaches in policy development and clinical practices. All of this is in hopes of fostering a more inclusive environment for gay Filipino Canadians.

### ***Research Questions***

The primary purpose of this Capstone is to understand how gay Filipinos in the Canadian diaspora navigate their environments and contend with their mental health while also balancing the complexities of working from two cultural frameworks. To explore this topic in a more meaningful way, it was clear that breaking it down into smaller, more manageable subtopics would provide opportunity for a deeper understanding and allow for a more thorough and nuanced exploration of the topic. The following questions allow for a deeper exploration of the topic and highlight its connections to related concepts:

1. In what ways do gay Filipino Canadians experience mental health issues that result from the cultural expectations from their Filipino cultural heritage and Canadian society at large?
2. Considering the psychological impacts of being Filipino, the psychological impacts of being gay, and while contending with the process of acculturation; what is the psychological experience that gay Filipino Canadians face?
3. How do gay Filipino Canadians experience the process of acculturation, and how does it affect their sense of identity?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The three theoretical frameworks this research is guided by are: Intersectionality Theory, Acculturation Theory, and Minority Stress Theory. Being gay, Filipino, and an immigrant requires this Capstone to employ these lenses as they collectively offer a

comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges that gay Filipino Canadians face. Intersectionality theory acknowledges how these intersecting identities shape an individual's experiences and highlights the overlapping discrimination and cultural pressures at play. Acculturation theory addresses the psychological impact of maintaining one's heritage culture, while navigating differing cultural expectations of another culture. For instance, maintaining Filipino values while navigating Canadian culture. Minority stress theory is equally as important, as it provides valuable insight into the stressors that come from marginalizing experiences, such as stigma, internalized homophobia, and discrimination. This offers a framework to understand mental health risks that gay Filipino Canadians face. Each framework provides a perspective which we can use to analyze and understand the experiences that gay Filipino Canadians have.

### ***Intersectionality Theory***

Crenshaw (2013) was the first to introduce and conceptualize the Intersectionality Theory. This framework examined how multiple identities, such as gender, race, sexuality, and many other social differences, intersect to create overlapping and interlocking systems of privilege and discrimination. The theory provides a framework this Capstone can use to understand how the intersection of multiple marginalized identities shapes an individual's experiences uniquely. Gay Filipino Canadians navigate a complex intersection of sexuality, race, immigrant status, and familial roles in shaping their identities and particular experiences. Using this framework is especially necessary when examining individuals who belong to more than one marginalized group and looking at the unique challenges that they face as it helps understand their experiences holistically instead of viewing it from a segmented fashion (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Using this lens allows us to analyze how systemic inequalities and social hierarchies can impact the daily lives of queer Filipino Canadians, and more specifically for this Capstone, Filipino Canadians who are also gay.

These can include microaggressions, discrimination, and exclusion from both within and outside this population's cultural communities. Intersectionality theory also highlights that one cannot fully understand the experiences that gay Filipino Canadians have unless there is a consideration made of the overlapping and interlocking layers of the oppression they face, like heteronormative cultural expectations, colonial histories, and immigration challenges.

### ***Acculturation Theory***

Berry (2017) introduced acculturation theory, which explored how an individual can adapt to a new cultural environment while keeping some elements of their heritage culture. We can use this framework to explore how gay Filipino Canadians are able to maintain their Filipino heritage while adapting to Canadian cultural norms, particularly relating to LGBTQ+ acceptance. Acculturation not only takes on one form but can also look like assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration depending on how individuals view their host and heritage cultures. This Capstone aims to examine how queer Filipino Canadians in general, and more specifically gay Filipino Canadians balance navigating cultural adaptation while maintaining their authentic identities. It also aims to understand how this process influences their well-being and sense of belonging. Gaining an understanding of these dynamics will provide insight into whether gay Filipino Canadians struggle with feelings of alienation from both cultures or experience some sense of bicultural identity.

### ***Minority Stress Theory***

The Minority Stress Theory suggests that individuals who are part of marginalized communities experience unique stressors due to factors that include, but are not limited to, discrimination, social exclusion, and stigma (Frost & Meyer, 2023). When examining queer Filipino Canadians in general, these stressors can consist of cultural expectations, familial rejection, or experiencing racism and homophobia. Using the Minority Stress Model can aid in contextualizing and understanding the mental health challenges that queer Filipino

Canadians face, highlighting how both external and internalized stressors impact their well-being. This Capstone aims to bring awareness to the unique struggles that gay Filipino Canadians have, and this can be done by examining how minority stress and the resulting mental health manifests in their daily lives.

### **Methodology**

It is important to outline the process that informed the selection of research articles before undertaking the literature review. Chapter One allowed clarified this Capstone's research focus, particularly on the psychological experiences of gay Filipino Canadians navigating cultural expectations. This clarification guided the search strategy for this chapter, where it explores the intersection of Filipino cultural values, LGBTQ+ identity, and mental health outcomes.

A systematic approach was used to gather relevant literature. The method used for this Capstone included searching for research that explored the intersection of Filipino culture, Canadian culture, LGBTQ+ identity, and acculturation. Taylor & Francis Online and Google Scholar were two search engines utilized in this Capstone. Understanding that there is a lack of literature on the topic discussed in this Capstone and as suggested when working with one of the City University's librarians, the key terms were divided into parts and used in various combinations when searching on the databases mentioned above.

This Capstone also examined references from key texts to expand its understanding of existing research. Recognizing that the experiences of gay Filipino Canadians are under-researched, this Capstone then incorporated literature from adjacent fields, such as studies on LGBTQ+ individuals in other Asian diasporas, to provide potential applicable insights. The result was the following list of key search terms used for this literature review:

*Filipino + culture + LGBTQ,*

*Filipino + culture + gay,*

*Filipino + religion + LGBTQ,*

*Filipino + religion + gay,*

*Filipino + family + LGBTQ,*

*Filipino + family + gay,*

*Philippines + culture + queer,*

*Philippines + Acculturation,*

*Canada + culture + LGBTQ,*

*Canada + culture + gay,*

*Canada + religion + LGBTQ,*

*Canada + religion + gay,*

*Canada + family + LGBTQ,*

*Canada + family + gay,*

*Canada + culture + queer, and*

*Philippines + Canada + acculturation.*

Initially, the search for articles was for those published within the last five years to ensure that the research was current, which yielded 40 articles. Out of the 40 articles found, not all were suitable for the literature review as some were not relevant enough, which limited the investigation further, down to 22 articles. This necessitated expanding the range to include the last 10 years, which yielded an additional 47 articles.

As literature emerged in this search, the articles were grouped into themes for conceptual and organizational purposes. The themes were then organized based on the combination of key terms entered into the search engines. Additional research was found through networking with colleagues, where they shared articles they believed would be helpful and relevant to this Capstone's research, subsequently broadening the scope of literature reviewed. To focus the search further and identify core themes, I had meetings with

my Capstone supervisor who provided ongoing feedback on the drafts produced.

Collaboration and consultation were an essential part of the research process. Without other perspectives involved, this process would have been less engaging and more challenging.

### **Contribution to the Field**

This research aims to contribute to the field of counselling and psychology by addressing the gap in understanding the unique experiences of gay Filipino Canadian individuals. It will highlight the cultural expectations, family dynamics, the experiences of marginalization, and how these intersecting sociocultural factors influence identity development and the well-being of this population. While there does appear to be growing individual research on LGBTQ+ experiences and Filipino identity, there seems to be a lack of research completed in the intersection of those identities in the context of acculturation, and the impact it has on mental health. This Capstone will focus on the intersectionality, which aims to provide and synthesize valuable and comprehensive insights into gay Filipino Canadians' unique experiences, and adaptive coping strategies and resilience. It will also offer culturally sensitive practices to help mental health practitioners better understand and respond to the needs of this population. Overall, this research advocates for more inclusive mental health frameworks and fosters the mental health and well-being of gay Filipino Canadians.

### **Reflexivity and Positionality Statement**

In performing any type of investigation, it's important to position oneself. As such, I acknowledge that my background, identity, and lived experiences will inevitably shape the way I approach this study. Having these personal biases, cultural influences, and experiences will inform the questions I ask, the perspective I practice from, and the interpretations that I make. Because of that, I must practice self-reflexivity, where I critically self-examine the role

I have as a researcher, and recognize my positionality with the population I have chosen whose experiences this Capstone further explores – gay Filipino Canadian individuals.

I share a cultural background with the demographics of this study, being Filipino Canadian myself. This shared cultural background provides me with an insider perspective, which allows me to recognize the nuances of the collectivist-based nature of Filipino culture, including the family dynamics, the deep-rooted influence of Catholicism, and the expectations of traditional Filipino values. In articulating this, strictly because I do share this background, I can acknowledge that my experiences do not fully align with this population. By this, I mean that I am not a queer Filipino Canadian and I do not have lived experiences of navigating gender identity or sexual orientation. My lived experiences may also not fully align in terms of socioeconomic status, immigration history, and any other intersecting identities. While I can acknowledge that there is a shared cultural background that can facilitate connection and a sense of familiarity, it also puts me at the risk of assuming the challenges an individual faces rather than approaching them with curiosity and openness.

On a personal level, this topic deeply resonates with me as my brother is a gay Filipino Canadian. I have witnessed his experience in navigating the complexities of both his cultural identity as well as his sexual orientation. I have observed firsthand the challenges he faced in reconciling our Filipino cultural expectations with the more inclusive norms of our Canadian culture. Thus, I have a personal understanding of the struggles a gay Filipino Canadian can face, particularly when placed in family context, expectation, and cultural norms. This personal connection to the topic is the reason I want to have a better understanding of the challenges that gay Filipino Canadians face, especially in the context of their mental health and well-being.

Additionally, my personal experience with having a brother who is a gay Filipino Canadian has also undoubtedly shaped my perspective about this research. As mentioned

earlier, this topic may present a potential bias, as my positionality comes from personally witnessing experiences of what a gay Filipino Canadian could face. To counter this bias, I will actively avoid overgeneralizing or making assumptions based on the experiences I have had and will engage in continuous self-reflection to avoid having my background influence my interpretation. I will also utilize only peer-reviewed journals to ensure that the sources I use are credible and evidence-based. To further mitigate potential bias, I will present all relevant findings from studies I review, rather than selecting only those that align with my arguments. I will also continue to engage in regular supervision to ensure that I remain unbiased and critical through my research process. Another way I can mitigate the confirmatory bias that I have described is to intentionally seek out information that also challenges my existing beliefs and assumptions. By considering these alternative perspectives and intentionally looking for disconfirming evidence, I am able to develop a more balanced and objective understanding.

### **Definition of Terms**

Below is a list of key terms that aim to provide clarity to what will be discussed throughout the Capstone.

**Queer:** This is an inclusive and reclaimed term that refers to those individuals whose gender or sexual orientation does not align or conform to cisgender or traditional heterosexual norms (Ervin et al., 2023).

**Filipino Canadian:** An individual who resides in Canada and is of Filipino descent (Malek, 2021). This can include individuals of any degree of generation and individuals of varying mixed heritage.

**Acculturation:** A process of maintaining elements of one's original culture while adapting to a new cultural environment (Schumann et al., 2020).

**Intersectionality:** A framework that examines the interconnectedness of varying aspects of a person's identity, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability to create or shape one's experiences and opportunities (Bauer et al., 2021).

**Heteronormativity:** The stance or assumption that heterosexuality is the norm for sexual orientations, that is often reinforced through social, legal, and cultural structures (Pollitt et al., 2019).

**Diaspora:** A group of people with a migrant origin that still upholds sentimental or physical connection with their homeland (Abenes & Malibiran, 2020, p. 24).

**Colonial Mentality:** David and Okazaki (2006) described colonial mentality as “a form of internalized oppression among Filipinos and Filipino Americans” (p. 1).

**Resilience:** The capacity to withstand and recover from adverse outcomes (Denckla et al., 2020).

**Generational Differences:** The distinct characteristics and stereotypes associated with different age groups (Wang & Peng, 2015).

**Mental Health:** A person's ability to cope with the stresses of life and function productively (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020).

**Cultural Identity:** The cultural beliefs and practices an individual or group has that can be shaped by experiences in different contexts or countries (Hankir & Bhugra, 2015).

**Internalized Racial Oppression:** Gale et al. (2020) defined internalized racial oppression as “the acceptance of stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs that casts one's own racial group as inferior, less capable, and less intelligent than that of the racial majority group” (p. 499).

## Set of Values

Throughout this Capstone, there are several important Filipino cultural values that will be referenced to aid in deeper exploration of the lived experiences of gay Filipino Canadians. The following values are lived practices that continue to guide behaviours, expectations, and emotional experiences within the Filipino communities, both in the Philippines and the diaspora. The inclusion of these values is important as readers outside of the Filipino community may not be as familiar with the values that help shape how all Filipinos think, behave, and relate to one another. The goal of establishing a succinct understanding of these terms at the outset is to create a foundation that honours the cultural context of the individuals at the centre of this Capstone. The following short definitions of these values will serve as reference points throughout the following chapters as we examine how culture, migration, and identity intersect. Where appropriate this Capstone will also expand when a nuanced understand and contextualization is needed.

***Bayanihan***: communal unity (Ang, 1979)

***Pakikisama***: interpersonal relations/collectivist way of thinking (Enriquez, 1978)

***Utang na loob***: debt of gratitude (Kaut, 1961)

***Hiya***: shame (Bulatao, 1964)

***Pagtatanong-tanon***: unstructured questioning (Pe-Pua, 1989)

***Pakikipag-kwentuhan***: story telling (de Guzman, et al., 2024)

***Ginabayang talakayan***: group dialogue (Yacat, 2013)

***Sikolohiyang Pilipino***: Indigenous Filipino Psychology (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000)

## Outline of the Capstone Project

This chapter introduced the topic, explained the research purpose and problem statement, described the theoretical framework, defined the terms used throughout the

Capstone, and stated my positionality to the topic and research questions. Chapter 2 will explore and review the literature on acculturation among the Filipinos in the diaspora and its psychological impacts, psychological impacts of the Filipino identity and gay identity, the role of ethnic density and community dynamics, and the intersection of these factors. The literature review will also examine how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate cultural and familial expectations. Finally, Chapter 3 will discuss the implications of this Capstone's research, the gaps in the literature, and the direction for future research to continue exploring the intersection of gay Filipino Canadians.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores the unique experiences and psychological challenges faced by gay Filipino Canadians in the diaspora by first examining their Filipino identity and the psychological impact that this has on any individual within this broader cultural group. Next, this chapter will explore those Filipinos who immigrate to a host country, like Canada and their experiences with an investigation on their experience of acculturation and the impact that this has on their psychological stress, and cultural identity. For this Capstone, acculturation refers to the process of adapting to a new cultural environment while maintaining elements of one's original cultural identity (Ward & Szabó, 2023). For Filipino immigrants, this adaptation process is complex and influenced by systemic factors such as immigration policies, racism, and both in and out-group community dynamics. Finally, there will be an investigation and review of the psychological impacts of gay identity with a particular focus on the intersection of their sexual identity with their cultural background. Gay Filipino Canadians, navigating both their sexual identity and Filipino cultural heritage, face dual marginalization that significantly impacts their mental health and well-being. The psychological effects of being both a minority in terms of ethnicity and sexuality are compounded by cultural norms that prioritize heteronormativity and family obligations.

As outlined in the previous chapter, grounded in theoretical frameworks pertaining to acculturation, minority stress, and intersectionality, this current chapter aims to examine the challenges and resilience factors for gay Filipino Canadians within these lenses thereby providing a comprehensive foundation for understanding how these individuals balance their cultural and sexual identities. This research in this Capstone seeks to understand the intersection of Filipino cultural values and LGBTQ+ identity, focusing specifically on the psychological impact and challenges faced by gay Filipino Canadians as they navigate their identities within the context of the Canadian diaspora.

## **Influence of Filipino Cultural Norms on Mental Health: Psychological Impacts of Filipino Identity**

Filipino culture and identity are deeply rooted in collectivism, familial closeness and religion/faith (Capucao & Ponce, 2019). While these values can provide resilience for some, for others they can also create challenges especially when navigating intersecting identities. There are two sets of Filipino cultural norms that are of particular interest to this Capstone's research because of their direct impact on mental health. The first was highlighted by Tuliao (2014) who noted that cultural barriers, such as the stigma associated with mental illness and a preference for less formal support networks, which look like family and going to church, discourage Filipinos in general from seeking help for their mental health. The second was explained by Martinez et al. (2020) who discussed how concepts like *pakikisama* (interpersonal relations/collectivist way of thinking) and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) can create pressures to conform to collective expectations, which can lead to stress when individual identities conflict with traditional values. While recognizing that Filipinos on the whole are not a monolithic group, it is important to consider these cultural dynamics when evaluating the psychological well-being of Filipinos because of their hegemonic influence, including those individuals that are the subject of this Capstone. Martinez et al. observed that the expectation prioritizes family honour and communal harmony/unity which can lessen or suppress individual expression, contributing to internalized stress and mental health issues. Both of these sets of cultural norms and how they impact Filipino psychology will be discussed next.

## **Stigma and Help-Seeking Behaviours**

Social and self-stigmatizing attitudes toward mental health issues are significant barriers among all Filipinos seeking help. Tuliao (2014) studied the many barriers that Filipinos face when they seek mental health services. This was examined in both the

Philippines and among other communities in the diaspora in countries like Canada, Australia, and the U.S. Rather than collecting original data, Tuliao conducted a literature review on mental health help-seeking amongst Filipinos that synthesized findings from both quantitative and qualitative research to identify key cultural barriers. Along with the literature review, Tuliao reviewed cross-cultural comparisons, ethnographic accounts, and survey-based studies, which allowed a broad understanding of how Filipino cultural values influence help-seeking behaviour. The study found many factors that limited and discouraged help-seeking, such as cultural beliefs, economic barriers, and stigma. Tuliao highlighted in their study that due to *hiya*, many Filipinos will avoid formal support and instead turn to informal support like family, friends, church communities, and folk healers.

*Hiya* is a value deeply rooted in Filipino culture that often translates as “shame” or “sense of propriety,” governing the behaviour in relation to both community and family expectations, and discouraging actions that may bring embarrassment or dishonour (Tuliao, 2014). The belief is that having a mental illness is seen as a source of *hiya* that can greatly impact a family’s reputation. Turning to informal support is thus rooted in the collectivist values that Filipinos have, where mental health issues can be viewed as a matter that should be handled in private and with close community members as opposed to professional and those outside of the immediate community. These cultural dynamics come together to create a stigma surrounding mental illness and is thus embedded in Filipino culture.

This reliance on informal networks highlights the Filipino cultural emphasis on maintaining *hiya* and saving face, which can limit open discussions about mental health. In practice, these barriers can show up in delayed treatment-seeking and underapplication of available resources, which could worsen an individual’s mental well-being (Martinez et al., 2020). For example, for those individuals who face mental issues, they may show reluctance to formal help-seeking due to bringing shame or dishonour to themselves or their families. In

reality, this can then manifest into only seeking professional treatment when symptoms worsen or not seeking professional help altogether. Social stigma can then be observed when there are fears of negative perception by the Filipino community, which can ruin the family's reputation, or fear of social exclusion, discrimination, or disapproval by the community at large (Tuliao, 2014). This stigma often leads individuals to avoid formal mental health services, opting instead, as discussed earlier, for informal support networks like family and religious communities. However, Tuliao observed that these informal networks potentially lack the resources and expertise that address complex mental health issues, resulting in inadequate support for those in need.

### **Psychological and Identity Impacts of Collectivistic Culture on the Individual**

As noted earlier, Filipino culture is deeply rooted in collectivist values, emphasizing aspects such as family unity, social harmony, and communal responsibility (Capucac & Ponce, 2019). While these values can foster resilience and provide strong emotional support, they can also create internal conflict for individuals navigating personal identity development, particularly those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The concepts examined by Capucac and Ponce, such as *pakikisama* and *utang na loob*, are especially influential in shaping how Filipinos manage their personal identity in relation to group expectations.

*Pakikisama* encourages conformity, social harmony, and maintaining positive relationships, which often requires individuals to suppress personal feelings or opinions to avoid conflict (Martinez et al., 2020). While this can strengthen social ties, it can also create psychological strain for those whose identities do not align with traditional norms. A gay Filipino or gay Filipino Canadian for example, may feel pressured to hide their sexual orientation to maintain familial unity or avoid disrupting social expectations. The internal

tension present may contribute to anxiety, identity suppression, and feelings of isolation (Libiran et al., 2024).

Similarly, *utang na loob* creates a strong sense of obligation to mirror the support received from family members that can feel like pressure to adhere to traditional roles and values of Filipino culture (Casiño et al., 2025). This cultural expectation may lead individuals to sacrifice their personal goals or suppress their authentic identity to uphold familial obligations. If we take a the eldest child as an example, they may feel obligated to delay their own plans of advancing their career or their own plans for marriage in order to stay home and fulfill their familial obligation of taking care of their aging parents or to help raise or take care of their younger siblings, seeing this as a way to repay their parents' sacrifices.

The concepts of *pakikisama* and *utang na loob* can be particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ individuals who are navigating cultural values that emphasize conformity. This dynamic has the chance to delay identity exploration or push individuals to compartmentalize their sexual orientation to maintain acceptance within the family. What can happen over time is suppression, which can contribute to heightened psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Martinez et al., 2020). Understanding how these collectivist values shape identity development is important for providing culturally responsive mental health support to Filipinos, particularly those who face intersecting marginalization as members of both the Filipino and LGBTQ+ communities, and what this would look like for Filipinos residing in the Canadian diaspora, which will be discussed next.

### **Filipinos in Diaspora and Their Acculturation**

Before this Capstone can fully explore the experiences of gay Filipinos living and residing within Canada, it is important to first explore their experience of acculturation. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, acculturation is the complex process of adapting to a new culture while retaining one's cultural heritage and thus shapes Filipino immigrants

and their experiences (Ward & Szabó, 2023). To understand the acculturation that Filipinos in the diaspora experience, it is important to first understand and examine the historical factors that contributed to Filipino migration. The migration of Filipinos has been significantly influenced by globalization and various historical factors over thousands of years that have shaped the experiences of Filipino immigrants across the world. More recently, the migration patterns of Filipinos are heavily influenced by colonization, economic shifts, and globalization (Larena et al., 2021). Larena et al. highlighted the ways that the Spanish colonization of the Philippines that happened between 1565-1898, and following that the American occupation between 1898-1946, both introduced Western culture and transformed the Philippines into a source of caring labour for global markets. This led to economic instability and political unrest, which further contributed to Filipino emigration, particularly to countries such as the United States, Canada, and parts of the Middle East.

Globalization, as mentioned before, also played a significant role in shaping the migration patterns of Filipinos. As there became a greater demand for healthcare, domestic labour, and skilled workers globally, the Philippines filled that need by creating a sending regime where Filipinos became key contributors to overseas workers (Larena et al., 2021). In the late 20th century, Canada in particular experienced a rise in Filipino immigration. This was driven, Larena et al. noted, by recruitment programs and family verification policies.

### **Systemic Factors and Policy Barriers**

Amid the historical backdrop just discussed assists in setting the stage for highlighting how Filipino immigrants often face systemic barriers that hinder their full integration into Canadian society and invariably impacting the acculturation process for Filipinos immigrating to Canada. In recent decades, many have entered Canada through policies where caregiver or healthcare worker programs are provided economic opportunities, but such policies are deeply gendered and introduce vulnerabilities such as family separation (Johnson

et al., 2019). To illustrate, it is common for Filipino women to leave their family in the Philippines while they work as live-in caregivers (traditionally considered feminine and emotional labour) in another country for years at a time before they can apply for citizenship and family reunification visas. Johnson et al. observed that such labour and immigration policies place pressure and strain, as a result, on transnational family relationships. The separation that these families experience can lead to feelings of guilt, isolation, and cultural disconnection. All of which are factors that can affect or shape mental health experiences of Filipino migrants. These systemic inequities and gendered policies significantly shape the acculturation process and the mental health of Filipino immigrants. Understanding these systemic challenges is important to recognizing the broader context in which Filipino immigrants in Canada navigate their cultural identity and mental health.

There is existing research that has demonstrated how these systemic barriers manifest and impact Filipino immigrants. Zhuang and Lok (2023) examined the well-being of migrants in smaller Canadian cities to allow for a sample of lived experiences from various geographic regions. They highlighted how these racialized immigrants, including Filipino immigrants, frequently encounter employment instability, social isolation, and challenges accessing mental health support. The study employed qualitative semi-structured interviews with 17 immigrants, including Filipino migrants, who landed in Canada at the age of 18 years or older, limiting these findings to adult migrants. Zhuang and Lok identified that limited social networks, discrimination in professional settings, and lack of culturally sensitive mental health resources contributed to heightened stress and psychological vulnerability. Participants reported feelings of alienation due to barriers in forming meaningful social connections, which were often exacerbated by employment-related stress and cultural displacement. This study illustrated how some Filipino immigrants' psychological well-being was shaped not only by personal and cultural struggles but also by structural inequities that

limit opportunities for social mobility. Structural barriers, such as underemployment and lack of recognition for foreign qualifications, contribute to feelings of marginalization and limit social mobility (Tan, 2024). These barriers create ongoing stress and complicate the acculturation process for Filipino immigrants.

As alluded to earlier with respect to family reunification issues, there is also a need to understand how immigration pathways influence families, economic stability, and overall mental health outcomes for Filipino immigrants (see the Appendix for a more detailed discussion). This need arises from the unique structural realities that Filipino migrants face, which include aspects like transnational parenting, long-term separation from partners and children, as well as the emotional burden of being both financial and cultural anchors from abroad. These systemic challenges have lasting implications on family dynamics, belonging, identity, and personal well-being, especially for those who are navigating multiple marginalities, like being a gay Filipino Canadian. Immigration policies that prioritize family unity and improve labour market access for immigrants could facilitate smoother acculturation and promote better mental health outcomes.

A study by Tsuchiya et al. (2023) examined how visa types and financial strain influence depressive symptoms among Filipino migrants to the United States. The research revealed that Filipino migration into the diaspora often occurs through individual immigration through temporary work visas, rather than through family-based immigration. This often results in a family member, typically the female parent, who will migrate first and send money back home while the rest of the family waits to be reunited, leading to prolonged family separation with the uncertainty of eventual family reunification. The separation, combined with unstable employment conditions leads to experiencing higher levels of psychological distress among migrants (see the Appendix for a more detailed discussion). This research found that Filipino immigrants are at greater risk for mental health issues when

the immigration process creates economic instability and family disconnection. In contrast, immigration routes that are more stable and prioritize family reunification/family migration and provide better economic security can lead to smoother acculturation and improve mental health outcomes (Bunn et al., 2022).

### **Acculturation Frameworks Applied to Filipino Immigrants**

Immigration of Filipinos into the diaspora are influenced by historical and political factors, as outlined above and go onto influence their acculturation in the diaspora. To better understand their acculturation, it's helpful to examine the application of the acculturation frameworks that exist. There are two that are of specific interest to this Capstone. The first is a study by Berry and Hou (2020), which highlighted four strategies based on Berry's (1997) original acculturation model (discussed further below) and the degree to which individuals maintain their heritage culture and engage with the host society. The four strategies are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Berry and Hou's (2020) study measured whether immigrants and their descendants feel connected to both their heritage and province of residence and Canada (integration), only one of the two (assimilation or separation), or neither (marginalization). Their research found that individuals who have a strong sense of belonging to both their province and Canada were the ones who generally experienced better mental health and life satisfaction.

Berry and Hou's (2020) study also highlighted the influence that societal-level acculturation frameworks have. Multiculturalism in Canada promotes the preservation of diverse cultural identities along with national identity, which imply that such a political policy fosters integration. This contrasts with the interculturalism that is present in Quebec that this study mainly investigated where Quebec encouraged and still encourages cultural exchange but prioritizes integration into a French-speaking provincial identity. This explained the higher prevalence of "Province only" that belongs to later generations there. Berry and

Hou highlighted the fostering of dual belonging despite these policy differences, whether through multiculturalism or interculturalism adaptations. This dual sense of belonging was found to enhance well-being and contribute to positive acculturation outcomes.

While Berry and Hou's (2020) study provided valuable insights into the acculturation framework and the societal approaches to multiculturalism and interculturalism, with its possible application to Filipino immigrants, it fell short of fully addressing inclusivity and intersectionality. Berry and Hou's model simplified the complex identities into how much one can keep their original culture and how much one can acculturate to a new one. However, their analysis overlooked how intersectionality such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation shape acculturation experiences. Likewise, multiculturalism in Canada can occasionally reinforce cultural separation, which then fails to address systemic inequalities that hinder any real inclusion. While interculturalism and cultural exchange are present and promoted in Quebec, the priorities lie in the provincial identity, which potentially marginalizes those who do not align with the dominant norms. Both the frameworks discussed lacked nuance in addressing the overlapping, diverse challenges that multi-marginalized identity individuals face.

In contrast and more specifically to the Filipino experience of immigration, Liboro's (2018) framework described a community-focused acculturation framework that incorporates elements from community psychology, focusing on inclusivity and intersectionality. This approach highlighted the importance of group-specific settings and community-level analysis. Liboro developed this framework by first summarizing the fundamental concepts from Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, then merged it with the concepts, theories, and perspectives from both sub-disciplines to create the new community-focused acculturation framework that allowed for a more critical examination of racial minority immigrant acculturation. Liboro (2018) then utilized their new framework to conduct qualitative

research with Filipino immigrants in Canada, utilizing interviews and focus groups to explore their settlement experiences. Through this method, Liboro examined sociocultural resources, sociopolitical forces, and grassroots organizations that influenced Filipino immigrants' integration. This methodological approach allowed Liboro to identify systemic barriers and institutional power dynamics that shape the immigrant experience. When the framework was applied to Filipino immigrants in Canada, it contextualized their acculturation within their historical and sociopolitical narratives, such as colonial legacy and migration patterns, influencing their integration and identity. The broader perspective that Liboro's framework provided was a more responsive and inclusive way of understanding the intersecting impact on Filipino immigrants and elucidating the unique challenges that they may possess.

Liboro's (2018) community-focused framework highlighted the importance of familial and communal support in the Canadian context, where values such as *bayanihan* (i.e., communal unity) are key in guiding adjustment and explored more further in the next section. However, suffice it to say, Filipino immigrants often drew personal strength from their communities, utilizing shared cultural practices as they navigated the challenges of settling into a new culture. This process of acculturation-specific practice was not only to uphold the past, but it was also dynamic and syncretic, as Filipino immigrants adapted old traditions to fit their new realities. Additionally, the degree of acculturation can vary widely depending on the individual's social context, with factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and employment influencing how much one integrates into Canadian society (Berry & Hou, 2020). However, the literature raises interesting points that require further research.

While Berry and Hou (2020) emphasized the role of family and community in cultural retention, there is a need to further explore how Filipino immigrants navigate the balancing act between maintaining their heritage and adapting to Western cultural norms. It remains unclear as to how this tension impacts long-term identity development and psychological

well-being for Filipino Canadians. The challenge lies in understanding the specific ways in which immigrants preserve traditional values while integrating into Canadian society, particularly within the multicultural framework of Canada. The tension between cultural retention of immigrant heritage and acculturation is not a simple dichotomy, but a dynamic process that shapes individual identity and affects social integration over time (Kunst & Mesoudi, 2024).

### **Bicultural Identity: Stress, Conflict and Opportunities**

Presumably, the result of acculturation is some form of a bicultural identity and while the previous section described how the acculturation process is far from simple and categorical, it has an impact on the individual. The integration of two cultural frameworks and the attempt to create a bicultural identity can also lead to internal conflict, particularly when traditional Filipino values, such as *pakikisama* (interpersonal relations/collectivist way of thinking), clash with individual aspirations or Western expectations (Martinez et al., 2020). The challenge lies in understanding how bicultural individuals manage the stress and tension between these conflicting norms, especially in educational and employment contexts, as these environments often demand behaviours that may contrast with Filipino cultural values. Martinez et al. noted that this tension can exaggerate the psychological strain experienced, particularly when individuals are expected to either suppress emotional distress or avoid seeking help due to the cultural expectations around self-reliance and continuing to honour the family. The intersection between maintaining traditional Filipino values and adapting to Western societal norms can result in feelings of stress and alienation. Martinez et al.'s research showed that such bicultural individuals, including gay Filipino men, may experience higher levels of anxiety and depression due to the pressures of balancing these intersecting identities. There have been many studies that have emphasized this concept which will be discussed below.

Lilgendahl et al. (2018) explored how bicultural individuals create their identities through memories. Using a narrative approach that involved in-depth interviews and written reflections, the researchers found that better integrating both cultural identities was tied to positive resolutions of bicultural conflicts, which highlighted the psychological stress that can arise from unresolved identity conflicts. Lilgendahl et al.'s study included 135 participants, which consisted of both college students and second-generation adults. The older participants showed fewer conflicts, as they had more time and life experience to process and reconcile the dual cultural identities that they have. This suggested that with age comes that ability to develop more coherent narratives about oneself, especially regarding cultural backgrounds. However, the study relied on self-reported data, which limited its generalizability.

In another study, Comănaru et al. (2017) examined 300 young adults from families who had immigrated to Canada and studied their bicultural identities. Through surveys, the researchers found that first-generation immigrants reported having more conflicted identities compared to second-generation individuals who showed more integrated identities. The survey that Comănaru et al. used in the study was the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale (BIIS), which measured the degree to which individuals perceive their cultural identities as either compatible or in conflict. The study suggested that generational differences can influence bicultural identity development and their experience of stress. A limitation of this study was that it did not address the intersectionality of other factors that may affect conflicts. For example, factors such as socioeconomic status, gender identity, and experiences of discrimination could further shape how bicultural individuals experience identity conflict.

Altogether, these studies emphasized the complexity of bicultural identity and the toll it can take. The abovementioned studies alluded to how conflict arising out of bicultural identity can contribute to many mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, especially when values from the host and heritage cultures are conflicting. Family dynamics,

generational differences, and societal factors like discrimination can thus play significant roles in determining how individuals will navigate and resolve their identity conflicts.

Tran's et al.'s (2024) research suggested how bicultural individuals might resolve their identity conflict. The researchers observed that bicultural individuals may experience both resilience and stress as they navigate the demands of fitting into two cultural systems. Tran et al. came to this finding after surveying online 147 bicultural Canadian adults who utilized standardized self-report measures and open-ended questions. Through regression analysis, the researchers found that higher levels of bicultural stress were significantly associated with factors such as challenges in managing ethnic identity, pressures from family cultural socialization, perceived discrimination, and generational status. This study's bicultural identity framework emphasized the role of social factors in contributing to the experience of bicultural stress and the importance of family and community support that fosters positive bicultural experiences. A few limitations of the study, however, were a larger female sample, the mean sample age being 20.72 (both limiting generalizability to older people and men), the reliance on self-reported data, and a potential bias in participant self-selection. Nevertheless, the study demonstrated the journey of first realizing their bicultural identity, then learning how to navigate their stress, and then eventually appreciating their dual cultures. Tran et al. emphasized the importance of having and creating environments that reduce discrimination and support cultural exploration, all of which enable bicultural individuals to thrive.

Berry's (1997) original Acculturation Model is also a useful lens to understand individuals experiencing stress and struggling to become bicultural. It describes how individuals can navigate between their heritage and host cultures, and how to adopt strategies of integration, separation, assimilation, or marginalization. According to Berry's model, perceived discrimination, familial expectations, and stigma surrounding mental health can

then complicate the process that Filipino immigrants face as they often lean towards integration and balancing cultural retention with adaptation to Western norms, which can lead to stress or feelings of inadequacy (Martinez et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of fostering environments that support cultural expression, individual growth, and the need for culturally informed interventions to mitigate stress and promote positive bicultural development.

In other words, bicultural identity can be viewed as a strength which can enable Filipino immigrants to adapt and thrive in a new cultural environment (Wei et al., 2019). A study by Wei et al., which involved 310 Asian American college students, examined these college students and explored factors like bicultural stress, cognitive flexibility, and finding meaning in adversity like self-efficacy and compassion in themselves. Wei et al. used the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS) and the Meaning in Adversity Scale (MAS) to assess these factors. The study found that finding meaning in adversity helped make sense of and mediate the relationship between bicultural stress and positive outcomes. Wei et al. found that cognitive flexibility influenced this effect, as individuals who showed higher flexibility consistently experienced more positive outcomes despite also experiencing bicultural stress. In contrast, individuals with lower flexibility were more affected but found growth by positively reframing challenges. The study provided useful insights, but its focus on college students limited its generalizability. However, the study still highlighted the importance of cognitive flexibility in the ability to manage bicultural identity. The study also emphasized how Filipino immigrants can use adaptability to navigate dual cultural expectations.

Martinez et al.'s (2020) research reviewed 15 studies across seven countries to examine Filipino help-seeking behaviours for mental health issues. A bicultural identity framework was applied to the participants and those individuals who preferred informal support from friends and family due to barriers like financial constraints, the stigma of formal

support, and the lack of access to formal support in the Philippines, which echoed what was discussed previously in this chapter, were less likely to seek help. In contrast, Martinez et al. found that factors such as strong social support, higher levels of distress, and positive experiences with formal support encouraged help-seeking. A limitation of the study was the overgeneralization across the host countries, the reliance on qualitative data and not examining factors like socioeconomic status and gender. Nevertheless, a key finding of the study was that social support could either encourage or discourage formal help-seeking depending on the family's attitudes towards it. The dual role of social support highlighted the need for not only promoting help-seeking within those who ought to seek help, but culturally sensitive interventions like psychoeducation for families to reduce the stigma and promote formal and professional care. Martinez et al.'s research also highlighted the importance of addressing both cultural and systemic barriers in hopes of increasing access to mental health services, the importance of bicultural identity, and the experience of stress, and help seeking.

### **Community Networks: Protective or Restrictive?**

To buffer and receive support for immigrants navigating acculturation, those coming from a collectivist society may rely on community networks already established in the diaspora. To explain, a collectivist society emphasizes interdependence, family cohesion, and prioritizing the greater good over individual preference, and Filipinos possess such cultural values and have been rooted in centuries of social structure, shared history, and survival (Datu & Mateo, 2020). The emphasis on collectivism, for Filipinos, stems from the *bayanihan* spirit, explained earlier, which again highlights the idea of communal unity and mutual support (Tanaka et al., 2018). The idea of communal unity and mutual support encourages individuals to prioritize familial and community relationships to bring a shared purpose and a sense of belonging. This orientation considers the family and community as cornerstones of Filipino identity, which is meant to serve as a source of unconditional

support, and a moral guide. For many, it also provides comfort and lessens feelings of isolation. According to Tanaka et al., this collectivist orientation also includes having shared values and traditions, all of which create a sense of shared cultural continuity identity, which help individuals maintain connections to their heritage even while living in a new environment. These factors strengthen the community, which provides a support system for immigrants navigating acculturation and the psychological complexities of bicultural identity within the Canadian diaspora.

However, while many Filipino immigrants can rely on established Filipino communities in the diaspora, it raises the question of what the experience might look like for those who do not have access to the same or similar supports. The study by Gumiran et al. (2021) explored this question by examining the acculturation of Filipino immigrants in Canada who face the challenge of “double discrimination,” which occurs when individuals experience exclusion from both their Filipino community in the Philippines (e.g., an overseas Filipino worker mother – expected to financially provide for her family, yet criticized for being absent and failing to meet traditional caregiving roles) and Canadian society due to perceived deviations from cultural norms. Gumiran et al. used qualitative methods, which included 20 in-depth interviews for three focus groups that were made of 35 participants. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data, identifying key themes related to community networks and the role they had in shaping the experiences of immigrants. The study highlighted the protective aspects of the networks involved, like providing emotional support or developing cultural retention, but it also critiqued the restrictive nature of it. Gumiran et al. found that the pressures felt by the community to conform to traditional norms can suppress individuality, especially for those who are navigating new cultural identities. This study was limited, however, in the sample used, as it was both small and regionally concentrated, and thus was specific to who it sampled as opposed to being generalizable. A

key takeaway from this study, however, was how Filipino community networks need to evolve to allow individuals to reconcile their intersecting identities without having to fear they will be excluded. This could be achieved by balancing cultural preservation with inclusivity. While the close-knit nature of Filipino communities offers emotional support and facilitates cultural retention, Gumiran et al. observed that these networks can also impose pressures to conform to traditional norms, creating conflict for individuals whose personal goals or identities diverge from these expectations.

### **Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Acculturative Stress**

Acculturation and the associated stress can also manifest across generations and not just those who have recently immigrated. Filipino immigrant families often face tensions between generations, with younger members prioritizing Western values while older generations maintain more traditional customs (de Guzman et al., 2024). A study by de Guzman et al. examined the shifts and stability in the beliefs and practices of Filipino migrant parenting in four communities of varying co-ethnic densities in the United States. This study consisted of 41 self-identified Filipino/Filipino American migrant mothers between the ages of 28 and 52, each of them with at least one child between the ages of 3 to 16 years old. De Guzman et al. recruited participants from four communities in the United States. Two of the communities had higher than average Filipino populations (San Bernardino, CA, and Reno, NV) and two had lower than average Filipino populations (Lincoln, NE, and an area around Flint, MI). The recruitment process was done through local Filipino organization newsletters, cultural event announcements, and snowball sampling.

De Guzman et al. (2024) used *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Indigenous Filipino psychology) methods, which incorporated culturally grounded approaches to the data collection process. The researchers found that while parenting practices adapted to fit new cultural norms, their core parenting goals stayed the same. The themes found in de Guzman et al.'s research that

reflected the previous argument, which included but were not limited to socialization goals that reflect parents' natal culture, and parenting practices from "back home." Migrant parents had reported experiencing significant stress when they attempted to balance the conflicting childrearing norms. These parents used various strategies, such as blending Filipino and Western disciplinary practices or relying on extended family, for support to manage these challenges. One of the strengths found in the study was its use of culturally specific research methods, which offered detailed insights into these experiences. An example of methods used included *pagtatanong-tanong* (unstructured questioning), *pakikipag-kwentuhan* (story telling), and *ginabayang talakayan* (group dialogue). These methods focused on informal conversation, emphasized equal researcher-participant status, and highlighted the use of participants' preferred languages, which reduced potential stress and promoted participant comfort.

However, de Guzman et al.'s (2024) study did not fully examine the emotional and psychological aspects of intergenerational relationships that are affected by these parenting struggles. A key finding in the study was the flexibility of parenting practices, which showcased the resilience of Filipino parents. However, the deeper emotional impact of these tensions (how they contribute to acculturative stress) remained less understood. Younger individuals may often feel the pressure of balancing their changing identities with their parents' expectations, which highlights the need to foster intergenerational understanding.

### **Religion and Cultural Integration: Navigating Internal Conflict**

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of Filipino immigrants, often serving as both a source of resilience and a point of tension during acculturation (Alviar & del Prado, 2022). The prominence of religion in Filipino culture, specifically Catholicism, can be dated back to the Spanish colonial period (Macaranas, 2021). Ferdinand Magellan's voyage and his accompaniment by missionaries began the widespread conversion to Catholicism when he

arrived in the Philippine Archipelago in 1521. The voyage sparked what would be known as the beginning of Spanish colonization and Catholic missionary imperialism occurring amongst the Filipino people. As the four centuries passed, Catholicism became deeply embedded in Filipino culture and identity, with nearly 80% of Filipinos identifying as Roman Catholic (Barry, 2018). The foundation of religion provided a sense of community and continuity in new environments to the people of the Philippines while leaving a legacy of traditional and conservative beliefs ingrained in the culture (Macaranas, 2021). As such, the potential for internal conflicts becomes evident, especially if the religious beliefs counter cultural norms in host countries. For example, if the host country has more heteronormative societal attitudes towards issues like gender roles and sexuality, a Filipino immigrant who has a more traditional religious attitude may struggle to reconcile with those values, which leads to acculturative stress. Understanding the historical and cultural context of religion becomes key for understanding the dual role it may play for Filipino immigrants as a support system and a potential source of internal conflict.

To summarize, religion holds a complex position for Filipino immigrants. While it can offer a strong sense of comfort and belonging in unfamiliar cultural environments, it can also reinforce traditional beliefs that conflict with progressive social values. This tension is particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ Filipino immigrants, who may feel torn between maintaining those familial and cultural connections while seeking affirming spaces. Understanding this nuanced dynamic is important for practitioners supporting this population, as it allows for more culturally responsive approaches that respect both spiritual and personal identities.

### **Psychological Impacts of Gay Identity**

Up until this point, this Capstone has mostly been focused on the influence and impact that cultural heritage (which may sometimes include faith-based values) and

acculturation to the diaspora has on gay Filipino Canadians. This next part of the Capstone can now focus on the impact their sexual identity might have on them. However, before diving further, this Capstone must first discuss what minority stress is, the broader psychological impact it has and its application to sexual identity. The Minority Stress Theory suggests that marginalized individuals, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, experience unique stressors that contribute to mental health issues (Spencer et al., 2021). These stressors are categorized as external (discrimination, microaggressions, and victimization) and internal (internalized homophobia, shame, and concealment of identity). Together, these stressors can result in chronic psychological distress.

Frost and Meyer (2023) expanded on the Minority Stress Theory by emphasizing its continued relevance in understanding LGBTQ+ mental health. Their enterprise of research highlighted that minority stress can often lead to depressive symptoms, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, especially when individuals lack protective factors such as social support or access to affirming spaces. Their review also emphasized that resilience strategies, which include identity pride, community connection, and coping mechanisms, can mitigate some of the negative impacts of minority stress.

Similarly, Hoy-Ellis (2021) explored the long-term effects of minority stress across one's lifespan. Their findings emphasized that minority stress can manifest in both immediate emotional distress and long-term mental health concerns. For example, they found that LGBTQ+ youth were more vulnerable to isolation, identity confusion, and suicidal ideation, while older LGBTQ+ adults may experience loneliness, grief, and barriers to healthcare access. Hoy-Ellis emphasized that these challenges are often enhanced by intersecting identities, such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status making these findings potentially applicable to gay Filipino Canadians. These insights highlighted that while minority stress is a significant risk factor for LGBTQ+ individuals, fostering supportive environments and

strengthening social connections can improve psychological well-being. Understanding these broader psychological impacts offers valuable context for exploring the unique experiences of gay Filipinos navigating both cultural expectations and sexual identity.

These dynamics, as outlined in the literature above, highlighted the applicability of Minority Stress Theory which suggests that stigmatization, internalized homophobia, and discrimination (which gay Filipinos face, as discussed earlier) contribute to mental health issues for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community at large (Spencer et al., 2021). The literature has examined how external stressors, such as discrimination and microaggressions, and internalized stressors, like internalized homophobia and shame, act together and result in psychological distress in marginalized groups. Spencer et al. suggested that these stressors change depending on an individual's developmental stage, access to community resources, and sociocultural context. For example, LGBTQ+ youth may deal with more acute identity conflicts while they are an adolescent compared to adults who may encounter stressors relating to workplace discrimination or family rejection.

The psychological challenges faced by gay individuals are also complex, emerging from being situated within a heteronormative society (van der Toorn et al., 2020). Van der Toorn et al. conducted a review of existing literature to examine how heteronormativity influences societal institutions and individual well-being. Their study used a theoretical analysis framework, synthesizing research from psychology, sociology, and gender studies to explore the pervasive effects of heteronormative ideologies. Through this method, Van der Toorn et al. highlighted how binary gender roles and the normalization of heterosexuality are reinforced through socialization processes across various domains, including family dynamics, educational systems, and workplace structures. The researchers argued that these heteronormativity influences contributed to the marginalization of sexual minorities, resulting in stress, identity concealment, and internalized homophobia. It is not hard to imagine how

gay Filipino men (both in the Philippines and in the diaspora) may face similar dynamics as their cultural heritage, as outlined above, can sometimes be rooted in heteronormative values.

Van der Toorn et al. (2020) integrated insights from multiple disciplines, which provided a comprehensive understanding of how heteronormativity remains deeply embedded in societal norms and continues to affect the mental health of individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. This theory suggested that normalization of heterosexuality and binary gender roles are reinforced through socialization processes across various domains, which affect both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals as it often shapes their beliefs about themselves. Van der Toorn et al. suggested that a negative reaction to a non-heteronormative behaviour would contribute to or reinforce these beliefs, which can create a cycle that impacts mental health negatively. Being aware of these dynamics is critical to understanding the experiences of gay Filipino men as they most likely navigate the same difficulty and thus experience the triple pressures of their cultural community, the broader Canadian society and the perception by these communities of their sexuality.

To summarize, minority stress, as a psychological construct, explains how stigmatization, discrimination, and internalized homophobia adversely affect mental health outcomes for the majority of LGBTQ+ individuals (Spencer et al., 2021). These stressors, however, are not fixed but vary depending on the developmental stage and sociocultural context. For Filipino gay men, these stressors are compounded by cultural norms that privilege heteronormativity and familial obligations, which further complicate the process of identity formation and psychological well-being. This intersectional experience, where one's sexual identity clashes with familial and cultural expectations, has been shown to produce heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and identity conflict, and will be discussed next (Martinez et al., 2020).

### **Minority Stress and Filipino Cultural Norms**

Internalized homophobia plays a central role in the Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 1995). This can be further intensified when Filipino cultural values such as *hiya* (shame) and familial obligation are applied (Manalansan, 2022). *Hiya*, as explained earlier, is more than an emotion. It is a social process that fosters harmony, protects and maintains relationships, and also encourages adherence to cultural norms. Like Catholic guilt, *hiya* is also a mechanism that reinforces humility and morality. While it can encourage prosocial behaviour and strengthen community bonds, *hiya* can also lead to psychological distress when it is overly internalized, especially when individuals suppress aspects of their identity to maintain social harmony.

Manalansan's (2022) study further explicated *hiya* by noting it as a complex and versatile construct that balances shame with the potential to promote community unity and social perceptiveness. The study used a qualitative ethnographic design to explore *hiya* and its implications for Filipino identity and mental well-being. Rather than conducting traditional empirical research with participants, Manalansan (2022) engaged in a theoretical analysis that drew upon existing sociological, anthropological, and psychological studies, as well as popular texts from both the Philippines and the United States. This approach allowed him to examine how *hiya* functions as a multifaceted and sometimes contradictory emotional category, used to explain both social shortcomings and positive attributes within Filipino communities. Manalansan explored cultural practices, social interactions, and family dynamics to understand how *hiya* operates as both a protective factor for social cohesion and a contributor to psychological distress, especially when individuals experience tension between personal authenticity and cultural expectations.

To add to its complexity, *hiya* for gay Filipino men can often become a barrier to self-expression. This is due to cultural and familial expectations that may demand one to suppress

one's sexual identity so that one's family honour can be upheld (Liboro, 2018). This belief can easily lead to or include internalized shame, intensifying internalized homophobia, and can also contribute to significant mental health issues (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016). While *hiya* has the potential to strengthen community cohesion, if misused and misapplied, it can also foster feelings of guilt and unworthiness (Martinez, 2019). Addressing how *hiya* shapes identity and mental health through culturally responsive interventions can create space and help LGBTQ+ Filipinos navigate their cultural values with self-acceptance and familial understanding.

As mentioned earlier, *hiya* is deeply ingrained in Filipino culture because maintaining harmony and avoiding disgrace is prioritized culturally. While this value can contribute to social cohesion and a sense of respect and care for others, it can also make self-stigma particularly pressing for gay Filipino men, as they internalize feelings of shame related to their sexual identity (Manalansan, 2022; Martinez, 2019). Liboro (2018) noted that one's family's (and to some extent cultural) expectations to suppress or hide one's sexual identity to protect family honour increase this struggle. The suppression of authentic self-expression, although intended to protect familial reputation, may often lead to significant psychological distress. For gay Filipino men (both in the diaspora and in the Philippines), *hiya* often serves as a barrier to openly expressing their true selves, thus exacerbating internalized homophobia (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016).

The idea of familial obligation, as alluded to earlier, is another basis of Filipino cultural identity, and it often places significant pressure on individuals to prioritize family over personal desires. For gay Filipino men in the diaspora, this pressure manifests in the expectation to fulfill traditional roles, such as marrying and having children, which contradicts their sexual identity and personal goals (Martinez et al., 2020). This creates an internal conflict as individuals navigate the tension between fulfilling personal needs and

meeting familial obligations. Martinez et al.'s research showed that conflicts such as these can lead to mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and chronic stress. Being aware of these conflicts within the broader context of cultural adaptation is key to understanding the psychological effects of balancing conflicting cultural expectations. For gay Filipino men in the diaspora, this can mean having to navigate traditional family roles while simultaneously living in an individualistic society not appreciating their struggles.

### **Navigating Dual Marginalization**

The intersection of racial, sexual, and cultural identities magnifies the minority stress experienced by Filipino gay men (Liboro, 2018). It highlights the unique challenges faced by immigrant LGBTQ+ individuals, who integrate their identities within two cultural contexts that can be often conflicting. Liboro described this dual marginalization as a form of “cultural dissonance,” which significantly heightens the psychological stress and creates a sense of alienation and not belonging. Participants in Liboro’s study (which was described earlier) demonstrated a continuous need to choose between their Filipino and LGBTQ+ identities, as these individuals did not feel fully accepted by either of these communities.

### ***Experiencing Sexual Racism Within the LGBTQ+ Community***

Canada is often perceived as a country that is progressive and inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals; however, this inclusivity is not equally experienced by all. Gay Filipino Canadians are part of the broader group of gay Asian Canadians, who often encounter sexual racism within spaces that claim to be accepting and safe. Sexual racism talks about the exclusion, fetishization, or the devaluation of an individual based on their ethnic or racial identity in romantic and sexual contexts (Stacey & Forbes, 2021). Stacey and Forbes highlighted that this experience is particularly known in the gay dating spaces, where the standards are catered more towards white, Eurocentric beauty standards, and where Asian men are more frequently stereotyped as submissive, undesirable, or only have appeal due to

being “exotic”. This form of racism has also manifested through dating app filters that are racially coded to say “no Asians” (Nguyễn and Han, 2024). As Lim and Anderson (2021) suggested, this has resulted in gay Asian men to view themselves as less desirable, which reinforces Eurocentric beauty standards and contributes to diminished self-worth.

The racism in this context contributes to a sense of invisibility and dislocation, even within the LGBTQ+ community. This then results in gay Filipino Canadians feeling neither fully accepted by mainstream Canadian society, nor in predominately white queer spaces. Adeyeba et al. (2025) highlighted that these experiences of sexual racism reinforce feelings of marginalization, which negatively impact self-esteem, and complicates identity development. Phan and Le (2025), using a quantitative survey-based methodology from 493 queer Asian American men through online questionnaires, found that sexual racism is strongly correlated with increased rates of depression and dangerous alcohol use amongst that demographic. They analyzed the relationship between experiences of sexual racism, hazardous drinking, and depression using hierarchical linear regression models. Due to this experience, many individuals find it difficult to separate their racial identity from their sexual identity, and the combination of cultural dissonance and sexual exclusion create deep psychological stress.

Relating this concept back to Filipino culture, there still is an expectation to uphold *hiya* and maintain *pakikisama*, which can discourage individuals from speaking out against the racism they experience, further silencing their experiences. This contributes to the silencing of gay Filipino voices in both dominant queer discourse and Filipino cultural spaces, resulting in alienation from both the host society (Canada) and one’s cultural community (Philippines), with limited representation or visibility in either.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has synthesized the research on Filipino identity, acculturation and minority stress, in order to highlight the complexities faced by gay Filipino Canadians in navigating the multiple marginalizations they face. To understand the psychological impact on gay Filipinos in the diaspora (particularly in Canada), one should first explore the psychological effects of being Filipino. Central to Filipino identity are many values, including collectivism, community cohesion, cultural traditions, deep roots in religion, and an emphasis on close-knit family bonds. These values can provide emotional security and resilience and be a source of comfort. However, they can also foster expectations to conform, which creates tension for those whose identities or aspirations stray away from traditional expectations or norms. Filipino immigrants who are navigating acculturation often face the challenge of preserving their cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to the demands of Western society. What this can do is lead to identity conflicts, internalized cultural dissonance, and mental health concerns, particularly when there is discrimination against ethnic minorities at play.

To complicate matters further, layering the psychological impacts of being gay onto these experiences create further issues. Heteronormative ideals are embedded in Filipino culture, often resulting in stigmatization of LGBTQ+ identities. This is especially seen within family systems, where that sense of acceptance is critical. The dual pressures that gay Filipino men face in aligning with cultural values and finding affirmation for their sexuality can lead to significant feelings of stress, depression, or even alienation. In addition, rejection may also happen in areas outside of LGBTQ+ spaces, where cultural nuances can make inclusion challenging. In the context of the diaspora, these intersecting identities can intensify vulnerability to mental health challenges. Gay Filipino men are challenged to learn to

simultaneously navigate acculturation stress, familial expectations, and societal discrimination, all while striving to reconcile their cultural and sexual identities.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices**

As covered in the first two chapters, gay Filipino Canadians face many unique stressors, including psychological, social or cultural stressors that arise from their intersectional identities. Chapter 3 will present a discussion around these stressors, the research questions explored, and practical approaches to the findings that emerged from the literature review, with a focus on the implications for mental health interventions.

#### **Discussion**

In this section, the various stressors faced by gay Filipino Canadians will be broken down into smaller, more focused sections. Each subsection will explain how the factors intersect with mental health and identity development of gay Filipino Canadians. This section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the unique experiences of this demographic and how future research can offer insights into how mental health interventions can be designed to address these challenges more effectively.

#### ***Implications for Mental Health Services With Respect to Filipino Identity***

Addressing these challenges requires culturally aware mental health services that acknowledge and integrate Filipino cultural values. Mental health professionals should be trained to understand the cultural context of their clients, including the significance of family dynamics, religious beliefs, and community expectations. By incorporating these cultural elements into therapeutic interventions, practitioners can build trust and rapport with their Filipino clients, which can facilitate more effective treatment outcomes.

Additionally, it is important to increase access to support networks and have community-based interventions that reduce stigma around help-seeking. This can help promote mental health awareness within Filipino communities and can empower individuals to seek help and utilize available resources. Collaborative efforts between mental health professionals and community leaders can bridge the gap between formal mental health

services and traditional support systems, which fosters a more holistic approach to mental health care.

In summary, while Filipino cultural values provide a strong foundation for resilience, they can also present unique challenges in the context of mental health. Therapists' understanding and addressing these cultural nuances is important for developing effective mental health interventions that resonate with Filipino individuals and communities.

### ***Intersectionality in Mental Health Interventions***

Approaching therapy from an intersectional framework may be key for mental health interventions to be effective for gay Filipino Canadians. This approach should not only acknowledge the cultural influences that shape an individual's experience, as outlined above, but it should also recognize the unique stresses related to being a minority within a dominant culture and sexual identity. It would be beneficial if therapists integrated cultural competence with an understanding of minority stress to allow and help clients navigate the complexities and intersectionality among their Filipino cultural values, Canadian context and sexual identity (Etengoff, 2020). Creating safe and affirming spaces where clients can express and explore these multiple identities is essential. Interventions grounded in this intersectional understanding can help such individuals blend familial expectations with personal values, which can lead to greater self-acceptance and psychological resilience.

Additionally, adopting anti-racist and anti-oppressive therapeutic frameworks can also be important in addressing the structural and societal factors that can disproportionately affect gay Filipino Canadians. Interventions that recognize these systemic barriers while fostering inclusivity within therapy can significantly improve mental health outcomes. Models that can be particularly beneficial are family-based therapeutic models, which consider the generational and cultural gaps that can influence the identity development and mental health of an individual. These models can help with the understanding of the client's LGBTQ+

identity and family's expectations, which can ultimately reduce the acculturative stress and encourage resilience within the family system. This can include addressing issues like sexual and internalized racism, which uniquely impacts the mental health of gay Filipino Canadians by compounding feelings of rejection and marginalization (Phan & Le, 2025).

Filipino immigrants, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+, frequently face internal conflict when reconciling not only their cultural beliefs along with their religious beliefs, but with more heteronormative Canadian norms (Liboro, 2018). Religion can provide a sense of community and identity, but it can also perpetuate stigma and internalized homophobia, particularly in more conservative environments (Westwood, 2022). Westwood's research conducted a scoping review of 70 studies from 25 countries and explored religious-based negative attitudes that influenced professional practices in healthcare, social work, and social care. The four key themes highlighted in this study were the link between religious affiliation and negative attitudes towards individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, the role of religiosity, the influence of educators' religious beliefs on the curriculum, and the resistance from highly religious students towards LGBTQ+ inclusive education. The patterns found in this study raised ethical concerns for mental health professionals and highlight how LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly ones who are part of religious immigrant communities, may experience further marginalization when they seek support. This highlights the importance of Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples, the calling of psychologists to recognize and protect the inherent worth of all individuals, including those from intersecting marginalized identities (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). This is the reason that these dynamics should be given more attention to better culturally responsive mental health interventions.

### *The Role of Ethnic Density and Community Dynamics*

The concept of perceived ethnic density, where there is a high concentration of people from the same cultural background that live in a geographical area, can serve as both a protective and a risk factor for gay Filipino Canadians. While living in communities with a strong Filipino presence can provide a sense of belonging and lessen feelings of isolation, these same communities have the potential to reinforce heteronormative values and conservative social norms that marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals. Gay Filipino Canadians have reported feeling conflicted about the comfort of familiar ethnic considerations and the restrictive social norms that come with them (Baumann et al., 2020).

For example, this conflict can develop because ethnic communities can provide a sense of belonging. While that sense of belonging is present, cultural values like collectivism, family importance, and expectations of conformity can create tension for individuals who are gay and who feel their sexual identities oppose those of traditional norms. In these communities, there may be pressure that gay Filipino-Canadians may feel to either suppress their sexual orientation or present in a way that is more socially acceptable, strictly to maintain familial and social cohesion (Baumann et al., 2020). The pressure of these cultural expectations can be especially challenging when the environment has limited understanding or acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. At the same time, the familiar social network can also offer support and connection, which makes it more difficult for individuals to completely accept an identity that possibly challenges community norms.

For example, the tension can be further complicated by the fear of social exclusion or rejection from not only one's family but also the wider Filipino community, which may often uphold traditional values. To summarize, conflict can arise or is driven by the need for both personal authenticity and community acceptance. Gay Filipino Canadians who are navigating these environments may find it difficult to balance their want to be accepted within their

ethnic community with the need to remain true to their sexual identity. This duality creates a paradox where the cultural ties that offer an individual a sense of community and safety can also be the source of significant social and personal constraints for LGBTQ+ individuals.

### ***Limitations and Key Questions for Further Research***

This section will further explore several limitations that remain in the current literature discussed in Chapter 2. These limitations are what hinder a comprehensive understanding of queer Filipino Canadian individuals' experiences. As of present, a majority of the existing literature limited cultural specificity by grouping Filipino individuals within broader pan-Asian or pan-LGBTQ+ categories. Another limitation was the lack of Canadian-based studies that examined the interaction between Filipino cultural values and sexual identity, particularly among different generations. Further, there was little representation of qualitative studies that highlighted the lived experiences of individuals, the community resilience, and internal conflicts, as quantitative studies dominated the field. Lastly, there the roles of colonial history, religion, and family dynamics should be further examined in diaspora contexts. This next section will discuss these limitations that future research should address in order to better support the mental health and identity development of queer Filipino Canadians.

Future research should explore several key areas to deepen the understanding of the unique experiences of gay Filipino Canadians. One significant area to investigate is how familial expectations and cultural norms shape the mental health outcomes of this population. Research should explore the tensions between maintaining cultural traditions and the need for LGBTQ+ acceptance within Filipino families. Additionally, more should be explored on what protective factors, such as community support or perceived ethnic density, can help mitigate the impacts of intersecting marginalization. Identifying such factors could inform targeted interventions that can help instil resilience among gay Filipino Canadians.

Another area future research can explore is the development of culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions tailored to this population's unique needs. Understanding how these interventions can effectively address the complex intersection of cultural and sexual identities is essential in improving mental health outcomes. Additionally, there would be a benefit in exploring what role systemic barriers have, such as workplace discrimination and limited access to mental health services, in exacerbating minority stress among gay Filipino Canadians. The hope for investigating how these barriers impact mental health is to provide valuable insights into the broader socio-political challenges faced by this community.

Another area for future research is deepening the definition of acculturation, particularly its influence on the intersection of cultural and sexual identities. Research should also investigate how these processes evolve, especially cross-generationally, as it is likely that first-generation immigrants will experience these intersections differently than 1.5 or second-generation individuals.

Future research should also adopt longitudinal and mixed-modal approaches to better understand the experiences of gay Filipino Canadians. The hope is that these research methodologies will provide insights into how individuals navigate their dual identities across different life stages and how they evolve. Additionally, future research can explore comparative studies that examine the experiences of Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals in Canada versus the Philippines. This could offer valuable context on the sociocultural differences that shape mental health outcomes in these two environments.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is another approach that could enhance the depth and relevance of research (Duke, 2020). By involving gay Filipino Canadians in the research process, CBPR can ensure that studies are culturally responsive and tailored to the actual needs and concerns of the population. This approach can foster greater trust between the researchers and the participants, which enables more natural discussions

about sensitive issues like internalized stigma and familial rejection that can often go unaddressed in traditional research methods.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Policy changes aimed at reducing systemic discrimination and improving access to mental health services are important for supporting gay Filipino Canadians. For example, mental health practitioners should receive specific training on Filipino cultural values, such as *hiya* and familial obligation, to understand the nuances of their clients' experiences. This training can help providers approach therapy in a culturally sensitive manner, ultimately improving the quality of care for this population.

Promoting inclusive policies within both public and private sectors, such as anti-discrimination laws and workplace diversity initiatives, can help lessen some of the external stressors faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. Policies that actively combat discrimination in workplaces and healthcare settings can contribute to a more supportive environment for this population.

Enhancing community resources can also be beneficial. Establishing support groups within Filipino communities can provide safe spaces where individuals can share their experiences and build resilience in hopes of reducing the isolation that many individuals feel in their personal and social lives. Finally, governments and organizations should prioritize funding research and interventions focused on the intersection of cultural and sexual identities. By investing in this area, policymakers and mental health professionals can recognize and help create environments where gay Filipino Canadians feel supported and empowered to navigate their unique challenges, which can help improve their overall well-being.

### **Applied Learning**

The sections below discuss how to apply the insights from the research discussed earlier into practice. My goal is to provide a more culturally sensitive and holistic approach to therapy, allowing clients to feel more heard, validated, and supported in the intersections they are navigating.

### ***Culturally Responsive Counselling***

Through the research and analysis I have done with the intersection of Filipino identity and LGBTQ+ experiences in the diaspora, I have deepened my understanding of the challenges that gay Filipino Canadians face. Understanding these values for any future therapist or psychologist is essential to provide culturally sensitive care that respects the unique ways Filipino clients experience identity, relationships, and mental health. These insights can be applied to my work as a future psychologist, particularly in providing culturally sensitive and inclusive therapy. With the knowledge I now have on acculturation, minority stress, and the intersectionality of cultural expectations and personal identity will inform how I approach clients from diverse backgrounds, particularly those navigating similar dual and multiple social identities. For example, if I am supporting a gay Filipino Canadian, it is essential to be aware of the unique intersection of cultural, sexual, and racial identity that they have. This would involve integrating culturally informed practices, such as *hiya* and *pakikisama*, that acknowledge the broader socio-cultural context and the client's lived experiences. For instance, if my gay Filipino Canadian client brought up their struggles with reconciling their Catholic upbringing with their gay identity, it would be essential to explore the influence of religious teachings on this client's internal dialogue while balancing their need for self-acceptance. Applying my understanding of these complexities would allow my client a space to process and find balance between the two, and overall mental health.

### ***Working With Family Systems and Community-Based Interventions***

As discussed earlier, Filipino culture is deeply rooted in collectivism, family, and community (Alampay, 2024). Family and community support, or the lack thereof, can have a significant impact on a gay Filipino Canadian's mental health. Therefore, integrating family-based therapy approaches, such as family counselling or psychoeducation for the family, could be beneficial for some due to the importance of community support and the role of the family in shaping mental health outcomes. This would ensure that family dynamics are addressed, and communication between the family members is fostered, especially when there may be a conflict between cultural expectations and an individual's LGBTQ+ identity. In saying that, I can acknowledge that this may be a situation for the idealistic world, and not one that fits everyone's current values. Take for example my gay Filipino Canadian client, who may feel torn between wanting to come out to their family, as they fear being rejected due to cultural expectations. Engaging in family therapy or psychoeducation for the family can help family members better understand the experiences of the client and reduce shame-based narratives rooted in traditional beliefs. A further consideration is the addition of community-based interventions, such as collaborations with Filipino community organizations and LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, and peer support groups. Joining in these communities fosters resilience and connection, reduces isolation, and offers safe spaces for clients to share their experiences, validation, and collective healing with those from similar backgrounds.

### ***Addressing Acculturation Challenges***

Examining the intersections of gay Filipino Canadians means to also consider the acculturation stress that significantly affects them. As explored earlier, acculturation stress arises from the tension between maintaining Filipino cultural values while integrating into Canadian society, which can shape the client's identity and coping strategies. Considerations

to be made for any mental health worker are as follows: build bicultural competence, develop coping strategies, and foster community connection. Helping clients explore how they can integrate both cultural identities in a way that feels authentic will address acculturation stress by reducing the internal conflict that arises in individuals from navigating the intersecting cultural identities. This is done by reducing cultural dissonance, where clients can learn to balance the expectations from both of their cultures, rather than feeling like one needs to be chosen over the other, which can reduce feelings of confusion or even alienation.

Another way to address acculturation stress is to assist the client in developing coping strategies that draw on strengths from both cultures so they can respond more effectively to external pressures, discrimination, or conflicting cultural norms. Fostering community connection can also address acculturation stress by enhancing a sense of belonging through engaging with community organizations that integrate aspects of both cultures. Most importantly, promoting self-authenticity in clients by encouraging them to define what bicultural identity looks like for themselves will address acculturation stress by reducing the stress of meeting strict cultural expectations.

### ***Addressing Stigma in Help-Seeking Among Gay Filipino Canadians***

Addressing systemic barriers that prevent gay Filipino Canadians from accessing mental health services is also essential when applying it to future practice. As discussed in earlier sections, there are many barriers, including stigma around mental health, that hinder that demographic from accessing professional supports (Martinez et al., 2020). I will apply this to my future work as a psychologist by creating more inclusive mental health spaces that advocate for policies and practices that reduce these barriers. The stigma around accessing professional support for mental health issues is very present in Filipino culture. By taking a culturally sensitive approach, the goal is to reduce stigma and promote mental health awareness, making it easier for these individuals to seek professional support without fear of

judgement. Additionally, providing culturally sensitive mental health training would be beneficial for mental health professionals working with clients who are navigating these intersections.

### ***Reflections or Personal Learning***

My understanding of how identity development is shaped has been expanded by the research done for this Capstone. As a Filipino Canadian myself, I have spent time reflecting on my own experiences and my views on mental health, family, and sexuality have been shaped and influenced by my cultural values. Reflecting on this has led to a deeper understanding of how my cultural background may impact the approach I take in therapy and how I can relate to clients from similar backgrounds. I have realized that while cultural values are essential to my sense of self, including family loyalty and respect, these values can create barriers for others when it comes to conflict with their personal identities. This is especially present for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. I have gained a deeper appreciation for those who navigate the emotional burden that comes with reconciling these multiple social identities. Gaining this insight will allow me to be a more responsive, compassionate and empathetic clinician in the future, especially when I have clients who are navigating these challenges.

Having researched this topic has reinforced the importance of creating inclusive spaces not only in therapy but in society as well for gay Filipino Canadians who experience discrimination, stigma, and marginalization. I have also expanded my understanding of intersectionality in this research process. It is not exclusively about understanding the different aspects of a person's identity but also recognizing ways these identities overlap and interact with the systems of power and oppression present in society. Lastly, this research process has inspired me to consider the ways in which I can contribute to greater conversations about mental health advocacy for communities experiencing marginalization. I

also recognize the work that can be done with clients when not only their individual concerns are addressed but working towards systemic changes is what can promote equity and accessibility in mental health services. My research and learning on this topic will not conclude when this Capstone is complete. I will continue to reflect on these issues and apply what I have learned from this research to support the well-being of those who face discrimination, stigma, and marginalization.

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## Appendix

### Historical Context of Filipino Family Separation and Reunification

Family separation and the desire for reunification is a phenomenon among Filipinos that cannot be understood without first examining the historical aspects that shaped labour migration patterns from the Philippines. Policies such as colonization, imperialism, and institutionalized labour export all contributed to the normalization of family separation particularly those who migrated to countries like Canada.

The first wave of Filipino migration happened in the early 1900s, following the colonization of the Philippines by the United States, where the American influence deeply embedded in Filipino education and labour structures (Ball, 1997). A significant outcome that resulted because of this was the shaping of the nursing profession, as American-style nursing programs were established, which created a workforce that specifically met global healthcare demands. This first wave was when nurses were sought after internationally, especially in the United States and then shortly after, Canada, due to their proficiency in English and their familiarity with Western medical practices.

The second significant wave of migration emerged in the 1960s and 70s, when the Philippines government (led by President Ferdinand Marcos) institutionalized labour export policies as part of an economic strategy (Oh, 2016). The government in this time encouraged Filipinos to seek employment, amid the economic instability, particularly in blue-collar sectors such as manufacturing and construction. The government saw this as a deliberate move to stabilize the economy through remittances, positioning Filipino workers as an essential export commodity.

The third major wave of migration occurred in the 1980s, when deeper institutionalized and gendered targeting of workers were present (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration [POEA], 2007). During this time, there was an economic crises

and global demand for low-wage care work, shifting Filipino migration towards domestic work, particularly with women. Systems like the POEA formalized the recruitment and deployment processes, as policies evolved, which lead to actively promoting and certifying workers for overseas employment. The migration of these domestic workers were deliberately funnelled into regimes that increasingly professionalized care work while normalizing the separation of families.

A turning point for migrant workers came with the passage of the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (Ireland, 2018). This was influenced by the execution of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore, where the Act reflected the Philippine state's growing emphasis on protecting the rights and maintaining the migrant worker's dignity abroad. Although it was evident that that Act improved legal protections, it also reinforced the labour export model, which affirmed that the state's role was to manage, professionalize, and protect the flow of Filipino workers overseas rather than dismantling the structures needed for migration.

Overtime, it became clear that migration became deeply embedded within Filipino cultural narratives as a sacrifice for the betterment of the family's future. Through these historical shifts and waves, Filipinos not only saw working abroad solely as an economic necessity, but also as a moral duty for one's family. This meant that the separation from one's family (a temporary sacrifice) became rationalized as an investment in long-term familial success, which was a logic that sustained the normalization of migration across generations. However, in reality it often involved decades of separation, with "family reunification" becoming a cherished yet delayed goal. For many Filipino families, migration was the primary strategy for gaining citizenship, stability, and upward mobility, particularly in countries like Canada, where immigration policies increasingly opened pathways from temporary work to permanent residency, with the hopes of eventual family reunification.