

New Scholars

**RACIALISED AND GENDERED WORKPLACE
DISCRIMINATION: THE CASE OF SKILLED FILIPINA
IMMIGRANTS IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

CIRILA P. LIMPANGOG

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article shows how skilled immigrant Filipinas resist gender and racial prejudices in Australian workplaces. By activating their rights, they reassert their multiple identities as Filipina immigrants, Australian citizens, and skilled workers, although many agonise for a long time before seeking redress. Experiences of discrimination affect them in various ways, ranging from stalled career progression to negative effects on their self-esteem and psychological well-being. For many, workplace prejudices have made them more aware of their cultural difference from the majority population; but for others, their health and esteem have been so dented that they have resigned from their jobs. Looking through the lenses of gender, race, and class intersectionality, this article also explores the ramifications of the stigmatisation of Filipinas as mail-order brides in the workplace, and, to some extent, in Filipino immigrants' social circles.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the skilled Filipina immigrants' experiences of discrimination in Australian workplaces and their tactics in resisting it. It analyses the ways in which these women assert their identities as workers, citizens, and immigrant Filipinas. How they negotiate discrimination is of interest, especially given

Filipinos' dominant preference for smooth interpersonal relationships and non-confrontational approaches in dealing with work-related issues in the Philippines (Jocano, 1999). The term "Filipinos," it should be noted, is used in this article to refer to men and women collectively, while "Filipinas" is used in reference to women specifically.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 women from 2006 to 2008 as part of my PhD research on the identity reconfiguration of professional immigrants in Melbourne. Overall, there was a predominant interest in the mail-order bride (MOB) in both academia and the media (Jackson & Flores, 1989) from the 1980s to 2000. The media attention paid to the MOB in both the Philippines and Australia has led to the tightening of measures against matchmaking agencies and to campaigns against domestic violence.

Yet the association of all Filipina immigrants with the MOB image has lingered even during the period when I conducted the interviews. For the media, this image "sticks" to Filipinas even though many have lived in Australia for several years and have assumed other identities (Saroca, 2006). They have been stereotyped in contradictory terms: as demanding and manipulative, as "gold-diggers" or commodities, but at the same time as submissive, virginal, family-oriented, and victims of domestic violence (see, for instance, Holt, 1996; Robinson, 1996; Saroca, 2006). Roces (2003) maintains that although all these viewpoints have a grain of truth in them, they are mostly unidimensional, as they obscure the relationship between victim and agency and neglect other aspects of the women's domestic and public lives, including their identities as workers and citizens. In the course of my interaction with Filipinas, I noticed that these essentialised viewpoints were echoed by many, perhaps because the image was socially overdetermined. They were invariably caught in this representation, which elides other life dimensions, including work, careers, housework dynamics, mothering, transnational kinship maintenance, and social networks, that my larger research project dealt with.

This article focuses especially on the lived experiences of professional, middle-class women immigrants, precisely because they are a neglected subject in the Filipino diaspora in Australia. Although it does not directly interrogate the stereotyped MOB image, the article pays particular attention to the ways in which the women have negotiated their own identities in relation to this image. I also emphasise these women's identity as "skilled migrants," as they have finished tertiary education. Their movement has been facilitated by a visa for skilled individuals, family reunification, studies, marriage, or a combination of these. They held white-collar jobs when they were interviewed, although some performed work that was below or outside their professional qualifications at some stage. None of my informants came as MOB's even if some of them migrated to Australia because of marriage.

I have assigned pseudonyms to protect the informants' identities. I have analysed their stories using the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, as well

as cultural identity formation. Intersectionality refers to the complex interaction of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and other categories that differentiate individuals and position them in the power structures. These power structures are negotiated in “individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies” (Davis, 2008: 68). Leading cultural identity scholars (Bottomley, 1992; Brah, 1996; Hall, 2000) agree in theorising identity in relation to difference, and especially to cultural difference. Migrants’ identities are fluid and context-specific, and they are therefore subject to post-migration changes; yet they also encapsulate dominant cultural norms that are not easily dismantled. Feminist sociologist Gillian Bottomley (1992), whose scholarship on migration in Australia spans 40 years, maintains that cultural practices are significant in immigrants’ preservation of ethnic honour. Such practices are vital in their consolidation of cultural and economic capital. Certain cultural practices and beliefs are boundary markers. These can have “immense emotional and motivational power, as well as the capacity to mobilize resistance against discrimination, racism and more subtle forms of negative identification” (Bottomley, 1992: 121). Intersectionality provides a complex but highly fruitful approach to understanding migrants’ identity disruption, reconfiguration, and reassertion. I argue that the women have reasserted their multiple identities as Filipinas, immigrants, Australian citizens, and skilled workers in their dealings with workplace discrimination and violence. These intersectional boundaries, however, are not discrete but fluctuate according to the situation, to produce reworked identities within and beyond the realms of gender, race, or culture.

In the text below, the article discusses the policies that promote multiculturalism and protect the rights of skilled migrant women, the nuanced meaning of workplace discrimination as illustrated by the concepts of discrimination and bullying, and the negotiation of workplace discrimination and bullying. It gives specific examples of the various types of discrimination the women have encountered. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings.

MULTICULTURALISM AND WORKPLACE PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA

The abandonment of the White Australia Policy in 1966 was reinforced by the Labor Party’s multiculturalism strategy in the 1970s. Multiculturalism was a government response to the experiences of (mainly European) migrants who arrived in Australia during the mass immigration after the Second World War.

While the design and eventual implementation of Australia’s multicultural policies coincided roughly with those of similar policies in Canada in the 1970s, the process was, according to historian Mark Lopez (2000: 39), “incremental.” The ideas “mostly inched their way unsystematically through the corridors of power in the Department of Immigration against majority opinion in its upper echelons, encountering indifference and sometimes stiff opposition.” Changes in

attitude toward migrants at the social level undoubtedly followed, but these too can be described as incremental rather than as dramatic reversals of public opinion. As has often been observed, the stigma tends to be greatest for the most recent arrivals (currently North Africans); and the fact that migration from the Philippines has been occurring over decades means that *as an ethnic group*, Filipinos are rarely categorised as undesirable migrants. Undoubtedly, their facility with English aids assimilation—and in spite of multicultural policies supporting cultural maintenance and celebrating difference, pervasive public opinion favours assimilation (Lopez, 2000).

Multiculturalism was *invented* to correct the disadvantages met by non-English-speaking background (NESB) migrants. However, the narrow conception of “NESB women” in the 1980s as belonging to the “family” subcategory (due to the traditional domestic role linked to it) sparked tensions. Feminists argue that NESB women, having mostly arrived through the family concession, were rarely constructed as workers (Martin, 1991) or skilled workers (Fincher, 1995). Their skills and educational qualifications were rarely considered during the introduction of the multiculturalism policy. The homogenisation of the NESB women as “unskilled” has had a harrowing effect up to the present despite efforts to correct it, leading to their erasure from the skilled migration scholarship.

Despite its deficiencies, multiculturalism has either catalysed or boosted legal reforms that benefited migrant women. Legislation such as the 1975 Anti-Racial Discrimination Act, followed by the 1986 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act, the 1984 Sex Discrimination Act, the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act, the 1996 Workplace Relations Act, the 2012 Workplace Gender Equality Act (and its predecessor the 1999 Equal Opportunity Act for Women), the 2004 Age Discrimination Act, and the 2009 Fair Work Act have all aimed to prevent discrimination in the workplace and in other societal spheres.

The 1984 Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) comprehensively protects women workers from subordination “on the ground of sex, marital status, pregnancy, potential pregnancy or family responsibilities or involving sexual harassment” Consonant with the SDA, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) defines sexual harassment as “any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment is not interaction, flirtation or friendship which is mutual or consensual. Sexual harassment is a type of sex discrimination.” The AHRC administers the implementation of federal-level antidiscrimination and human rights policies. These federal-level laws are reinforced by state-level legislation. The 2012 Workplace Gender Equality Act consolidates and strengthens the policy that, among others, aims to, “promote, amongst employers, the elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender in relation to employment matters (including in relation to family and caring responsibilities)” (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2013).

In Victoria, the 1995 Equal Opportunity Act (EOA) has well-defined provisions designed to eliminate disadvantages stemming from difference. The 2010 revised act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of age, breastfeeding, gender identity, impairment, industrial activity, employment activity, lawful sexual activity, marital status, parental status or status as a carer, physical features, political belief or activity, pregnancy, race, religious belief or activity, sexual orientation, and personal association (whether as a relative or otherwise) with someone with any of the above-stated attributes.

In all, these laws reinforce Australia's commitment to several international treaties, especially the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was later included in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. CEDAW defines discrimination against women "as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (United Nations, 2009).

Taken together, these laws assist in raising awareness of prejudice and provide reporting mechanisms. Yet these are inadequate to prevent gendered and racialised discrimination, and to support victims in achieving justice. Reluctance to name an experience as harassment, employees' inability to file complaints, and institutions' reluctance to frame harassment within their broader organisational norms and practices are some of the ongoing challenges (Charlesworth, McDonald, & Cerise, 2011). Moreover, neoliberal policies have weakened low-status female workers' ability to obtain security from discriminatory experiences and to obtain justice when discrimination is experienced. The "Work Choices" provisions of the Workplace Relations Act restricted employees' bargaining power, and increased their vulnerability, by favouring individual over collective bargaining. Pocock et al.'s study (2008) reveals that low-paid women workers became worse off in terms of job security and income, ability to negotiate, and control over flexible work hours that would accommodate family commitments. Often, they endured pay below the minimum standard, did not report violations and harassment, and did not seek redress for fear of dismissal.

I do not intend to analyse the growing discontent over the laws discussed above. What I raise is the need to deepen our understanding of how multifaceted identities frame individual-level strategies adopted to weather discrimination, and how these identities influence resistance and become reconfigured during the course of their resistance. Contemporary studies in Australia (Askew et al., 2012; Hawthorne, 1997, 2002; Hegney, Plank, & Parker, 2006; McDonald & Dear, 2008; Poynting & Noble, 2004; Stratton, 2006; Syed & Murray, 2009) continue to indicate the prevalence of workplace discrimination and harassment, especially toward the ethnic populations. These studies (with the exception of Syed & Murray, 2009), however, tend to privilege either the race and ethnicity or the

gender dimension but seldom the intersection of these dimensions. It is disturbing that the literature specifically linked to the discourse on professional migrants is relatively scanty, and even scantier in terms of linkage to the category of skilled migrant women. With regard to Filipino immigrants specifically, I have not encountered any study that explores Filipinas' interaction with paid work (with the exception of Cooke & Western, 1988; Roces, 2003; and Tibe-Bonifacio, 2003). The increasing immigration of professional Filipinos to Australia is phenomenal, being the fifth largest source of immigrants in 2011–2012 and consistently women-led since the 1970s.

The scanty literature on the skilled migration of women to Australia and other neoliberal societies reflects systemic gender blindness in the valuation of their paid work. Skilled migrant women are predominantly employed in the social welfare sector, which occupies the lowest level in the hierarchy of skilled work (Kofman, 2000). The exclusion of familial and social network discourses from male-oriented approaches to skilled migration (Kofman & Raghuram, 2005) and the fixing of female migrants as “family dependent” or “tied” to their husbands' movements (Fincher, 1995; Yeoh & Willis, 2012) all result in the erasure of women. Yet in the most recent years, emerging scholarship on gender and skilled migration has attempted to disrupt the androgenous conceptualisation of skilled migrants. It tells of the redomestication, deskilling, and stalled careers of skilled migrant women (Getachew, 2012; Ho, 2006; Meares, 2010; Purkayastha, 2005; Yeoh & Willis, 2012), as well as of workplace discrimination (Cuban, 2008; Mapedzahama et al., 2012; Syed & Pio, 2010) against them.

Feminist research on workplace discrimination in Australia remains fragmented despite efforts from feminists in the labour unions, the bureaucracy, and academia. The present article, based on the results of my PhD, aims to assist in addressing this gap. The limited literature dealing directly with NESB women immigrants (Askew et al., 2012; Hawthorne, 1997, 2002; Ho, 2006; Iredale, 2005; Mapedzahama et al., 2012; Syed & Murray, 2009; Syed & Pio, 2010; Vasta, 1991) proves that discrimination persists, both at the structural level and in everyday dealings in the workplace. Moving away from conventional quantitative and theoretical approaches, this article continues the study of discrimination by looking at the rich, divergent, and sometimes conflicting narratives of Filipinas. It also shows that the existence of protective policies does not necessarily result in changes in everyday attitudes and interaction based on ingrained racist ideologies.

GROUNDING THE CONCEPTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING

I define discrimination as the differential treatment of an individual or group of individuals by virtue of one or a combination of the following attributes: age, gender, marital status, ethnic background, physical attributes including disability, and political and religious persuasion. In the literature, the concept of

discrimination is often distinct from that of bullying. The former is associated with prejudices linked to the above-cited characteristics, whereas bullying may or may not involve these. Bullying entails physical and psychological battery, whereas discrimination may not. Bullying is characterised as directly inflicted by a specific perpetrator or perpetrators, whereas discrimination may sometimes be institutional or structural in nature, which means that blame cannot be solely ascribed to specific individuals.

Both discrimination and bullying constitute a “systematic abuse of power” (Smith & Sharp, 1994: 2) within a gendered workplace (Acker, 1990). Australian workplaces have been sites for racial and gender discrimination against my informants. Discrimination and bullying conspire to undermine their gender and race equality rights, and I believe that these two concepts should not be framed separately. Discrimination is multifaceted, and can simultaneously occur at the structural, organisational, and individual levels, and it can intersect with both paid and domestic realms in the lives of NESB skilled women (Syed & Murray, 2009). The occurrences I emphasise in this article are those that are classified as everyday discrimination, bullying, and (sexual) harassment in the workplace realm. “Everyday discrimination” is a concept that ties in closely with race and ethnic relations discourses, although some commentators also discuss it within the intersectional realm of race and gender relations (see, for instance, Yanick & Feagin, 1998). Others call it everyday racism (Essed, 2002), new racism (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Every, 2005), or cultural racism (Pred, 2000; Wren, 2001).

Loosemore and Chau (2002) observe that modern-day prejudice has been more covert than earlier forms of prejudice, and therefore not easily monitored. Policies such as those introduced by the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act in Australia have raised awareness of direct and obvious workplace discrimination, but often indirect and subtle discrimination takes its place. The same is observed in America, where people consciously avoid certain expressions that would portray them as racist (Deitch et al., 2003). While some may have a sincere intention of upholding equality, the deeply ingrained prejudice they once held against the *other* is still there, manifesting itself in more subtle forms. To Essed (2002), everyday racism, just like other forms of racism, is structured by oppression, repression, and legitimation.

Everyday ethnic diversity and racial discrimination coexist on Australian construction sites (Dunn et al., 2011; Loosemore & Chau, 2002) as it does in hospitals (Mapedzahama et al., 2012). Jokes, namecalling, and graffiti writing are staples on construction sites, where everyday discrimination is normalised and both managers and workers have underdeveloped antiracism literacy (Dunn et al., 2011). But in workplaces where the political incorrectness of racism is encoded in policies and the daily mantras of cultural diversity, moments of microaggression are even harder to pin down. Black nurses report that being avoided, being perceived as underqualified or dirty, and being treated differently by white fellow nurses and patients amount to racial prejudice (Mapedzahama et al., 2012).

Defining “workplace bullying” reflects some ideological differences. The body of work on workplace bullying traditionally resides within the discipline of organisational development and psychology, and it has recently been admitted by scholars to be lacking in gender and race analysis. However, what seems to unify their conceptualisations is the notion of “harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work” repeatedly, regularly, and increasingly (Glaso et al., 2007: 313).

The influential works of Lee (2002) and Simpson and Cohen (2004) accelerated the interrogation of workplace bullying as a gendered process. Lee (2002) criticizes sex-limited analysis as incomplete and insists that organisations are endemically gendered. She maintains that the workplace in certain industries is marked by sex segregation, and that sexist remarks and sexual harassment are specific forms of harassment traditionally aimed exclusively at women. Simpson and Cohen’s (2004) study of bullying in academia reveals the close association of bullying and power that is intrinsic to gendered relations. This especially manifests itself not only in terms of intimidation and unfair criticism but also in men’s overruling of women in decision making. Nearly a decade later, Salin and Hoel’s (2013) review of empirical evidence has reiterated that bullying is a gendered as opposed to a gender-neutral process. Salin and Hoel contend that understanding and responding to workplace bullying phenomena require an appreciation of gender theorised in relation to power, role socialisation, and social identity.

For the first time, Australia now has a unified definition of workplace bullying. The 2013 Fair Work Amendment Act stipulates that a worker is bullied at work if an individual or group of individuals repeatedly behaves unreasonably toward the worker, or toward a group of workers of which the worker is a member; and that the behaviour creates a risk to health and safety. This was enacted following a series of studies showing workplace bullying as a “hidden problem” whose prevalence “cannot be determined with any precision due to the absence of a national evidence base from which such indicators might be drawn” (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2012: 8). WorkCover Victoria (currently WorkSafe Victoria) claims that at least 14% of workers in Victoria experience bullying every year.

Studies of workplace bullying and harassment are mostly large scale in nature and are focused on certain sectors or job categories, with nursing as the most widely studied sector (Farrell, Bobrowski, & Bobrowski, 2006; Hegney et al., 2003, 2006; Hutchinson et al., 2006; Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002; Madison & Minichiello, 2000; Omeri & Atkins, 2002). A Queensland study (Timo, Fulop, & Ruthjersen, 2004) reveals that ancillary nurses in aged care facilities have the highest bullying reportage rate. Commonly reported situations or incidents include unmanageable workloads, offensive remarks, and humiliation due to excessive monitoring or supervision of tasks not normally associated with their jobs. These incidents are associated with poor human resource management

induction procedures and weak grievance procedures. Verbal and physical aggression has caused Tasmania-based nurses to make mistakes that affect their productivity (Farrell, Bobrowski, & Bobrowski, 2006). Medical doctors are not spared from bullying: as many as 25% of 747 cross-sectional respondents in 2008–2009 had experienced persistent behaviour in the previous 12 months (Askew et al., 2012). This resulted in lowered professional self-esteem and poorer mental health, which could affect the quality of medical services provided to patients.

NEGOTIATING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING

All of the informants in this study admitted to experiencing one or more incidents of discrimination in Australian workplaces, although many did not immediately identify them as such. One said, “I had no idea what bullying in the workplace was. I really had no knowledge of it, as in zero.” This informant was the victim of sustained bullying for four months in her interim job as a newly arrived migrant. She reported it to her supervisor much later, but she resigned before a resolution was implemented. After telling me their stories, some informants would check with me: “Would you call that bullying?” (Luisa); or “Is sexual harassment considered as discrimination?” (Luningning).

Labelling the Incident

The difficulty in labelling an incident as abusive is not uncommon among victims, especially those who have been sexually assaulted (Charlesworth et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2003; Lee, 2001; Madison & Minichiello, 2000; Office of Women’s Policy, 2005; Salin, 2003; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1994). Usually, it occurs in a sexualised environment where explicit jokes and suggestive physical gestures and remarks (usually made by males) are commonplace, thus normalizing the violence (Lee, 2002; Madison & Minichiello, 2000; Office of Women’s Policy, 2005) and subsequently silencing the victim. A study of nurses reveals the victims’ constant struggles to describe an incident, while leaving clues consistent with harassment, such as the aggressor’s invasion of space, lack of respect, and overly friendly behaviour (Madison & Minichiello, 2000). Although some informants readily recognised the deliberate nature of sexualised behaviour, others who doubted their own judgment had to seek a trusted colleague’s confirmation.

The concept of discrimination appeared vague to several informants. Perhaps it was due in part to its having less emphasis in the Philippine setting, where only the most overt and scandalous abuses gain attention. The Philippines’ Labour Code of 1997 makes explicit the protection of women employees against discrimination on the basis of sex. Republic Act 6725 of 1989 makes discrimination against women unlawful, notably, in terms of lower wage rates and the denial

of opportunities for promotion, training, and study opportunities on the basis solely of sex. However, these laws do not protect women from discrimination prior to employment. It is still a common practice for employers to advertise a job that specifies the age, gender, marital status, and sometimes physical appearance of the person they seek. Moreover, the Philippines is more culturally homogenous than Australia, which might account for the absence of equivalent antiracial discrimination policy. Some informants admitted to encountering workplace discrimination while in the Philippines, but they judged it as less severe than the discrimination experienced in Australia. The exception was the case of Bing, who was illegally dismissed from her teaching job in Manila. However, she filed a complaint with the education bureau and won the case.

Reporting and Accessing Support

Some informants' lack of clarity on what constitutes discrimination may be taken in part as denial, as many were aware of work policies that protect them against abuse. Several informants had successfully reported an incident but would usually agonise for a long time before they finally sought redress. Those who had high levels of awareness of their rights spotted weaknesses in their workplace systems.

Maggie, a media executive, co-initiated the creation of an antiharassment policy in her workplace after surviving bullying. I have chosen her story to illustrate reporting and accessing support, because of all the informants, it was Maggie who most clearly used her negative experience to improve the system at work. The operations manager verbally abused Maggie in the presence of colleagues, which led to protracted animosity. It started when the operations manager demanded that Maggie should vacate the studio where she was conducting a live interview. She hastily concluded the interview and apologised to her guest. Later, she checked and found that she had been correctly booked to use the studio at the time of the incident. The operations manager's tirade continued in a pantry in the presence of colleagues. While Maggie defended herself by talking back to him, no resolution was reached. He stalked her several times a day for several weeks, until she approached the station manager. She was new to this job, which she dearly loved. Feeling so stressed, she entertained the idea of resigning but also refused to accept defeat. She asked the station manager, and later their colleagues during a staff meeting, to draft an antiharassment policy. Several people supported the idea, having witnessed similar incidents at work. The policy that was drawn up included sexual harassment, racism, and other forms of abuse and discrimination. When the board approved it, an antiharassment officer was hired. It took about a year for the policy to be installed, and meanwhile Maggie and the aggressor maintained a civil relationship until he resigned. Her resilience, the political will of senior management, and the empathy of colleagues in a social context that endorsed multiculturalism all contributed to the creation of a cohesive reporting system.

All but one of the informants confirmed the presence of antidiscrimination and antiharassment policies in their workplaces. Usually these policies were included in a manual, and were part of their employment induction. A third of the informants had actually invoked the policies when confronted with negative behaviours. Half of these incidents were reported to male superiors or HR personnel, and the other half to females. All but two reported that the occurrences of discrimination or harassment were reasonably redressed with a direct apology, a warning (issued to the aggressor), reassignment to equalize the workload, and the granting of promotion after a long period of waiting. In two cases, one unresolved and one only partly resolved, the women eventually left their jobs after experiencing psychological battery. The large majority of informants either chose to suffer in silence for a long time or simply ignored the incident, depending on its gravity.

Labour Rights Advocacy and Unionism

Australia has a long and intense history of labour rights advocacy and unionism, in which workers have fought and won a “fair go” in terms of pay, number of working hours, working conditions, and equality at work. Trade unionism has played an important role in preventing gender and race discrimination.

Of my informants, 80% joined a union, although they believed that this was by no means a foolproof way of protecting their rights. Kris, a teacher, said, “The union isn’t really that much help. It can assist [to] investigate if there are anomalies with regards to salary and the like. But it cannot really help improve the situation. If the principal wants you out, you’ll be out.” Kris endured racist treatment from higher management, but eventually resigned. Not one informant called for the assistance of the union in gaining redress for discriminatory or hostile experiences at work.

Some informants preferred not to report an incident to the proper authorities or seek external support because they feared the perpetrator, distrusted the system, or were solely focused on surviving the negative experiences. Some simply ignored an incident because it did not substantially affect them. Meanwhile, other victims were too stressed to seek resolution and opted to resign. A survey in Victoria shows that as many as 62.1% of the 1,000 informants involved had suffered from various kinds of harassment over the five years prior to the study. More than half of them reported the violence but a significant number did not, because it was perceived as a “normal” occurrence. Irrespective of their position, women experienced normalised internal workplace violence, with professional women often enduring discomfort in male-dominated workplaces. Others simply endured in silence, either for fear of job loss or because the violation was associated with shame (Office of Women’s Policy, 2005). In my own study, Lorena was a casualty of structural discrimination in a period when her office was undergoing reorganisation. She was unable to defend herself out of shame and

fear in a male and Anglo-dominated environment. This trend surfaced in many of the cases that I explore below.

Abuses Sustained

The types of abuse and prejudicial treatment the informants faced were varied and sometimes overlapping. These included being stalked; being subjected to unreasonable deadlines; suffering the removal of support staff while still being held accountable for the work; being verbally abused in the presence of others; being falsely accused of spreading rumours and penalised for this; being sworn at, especially with the use of sexual words; being told off in the presence of coworkers; having work hours reduced and the hours given to others; being suspected of being a mail-order bride and then rejected; being subjected to racist jokes or remarks; having contributions in office meetings ignored; being rejected on the basis of accent; being dismissed from work without adequate notice; being excluded from social conversations; being the target of sexually charged behaviour; having promotion withheld allegedly on the basis of ethnic background; and being charged with incompetence without proper verification. Most of these abuses were repetitious, occurring several times in a week, or as part of a series of various forms of abuse sustained over a period of time. Still, a significant few reported one-off small- or large-scale abuses that left them with an unpleasant memory. These were associated with bullying, and with overt and covert race and gender discrimination, and, in a few instances, they were associated with a lack of proper reporting mechanisms.

Roces observed that Filipina immigrants in Mount Isa, Queensland, encountered discrimination not so much at work as from the town residents in general. Those who married Australian men were better at defending themselves, in part because their husbands advised them how to deal with racism. But those who were married to their co-nationals tend to suffer in silence (Roces, 2003). This trend did not appear in my study. I found that the nationality of their husbands did not affect the women's strategies for dealing with discrimination. The women negotiated these events on an individual and situational basis, drawing on their personal resources and appealing to their workers' rights.

Abusers were typically white, male native-born Australians in senior positions. They represented 13 out of 21 white male Australian aggressors from various work levels. Although in smaller numbers, some informants also encountered hostility and prejudicial treatment from female coworkers at all levels, including junior staff members, and from clients. When the numbers are combined, 23 male and 5 female abusers were described, confirming prevailing reports that men are most likely the initiators of discrimination and hostility (Barron, 2000; Office of Women's Policy, 2005; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). A closer look at the informants' cases directs us to the gendered nature of organisations, with 24% of the informants being employed in traditionally male-dominated organisations.

These organisations represent information technology, building design, construction and demolition, and logistics support. The majority of the informants were employed in health, education, the government sector, and professional organisations, in which males dominate the managerial positions. Overall, 76% informants reported to a male manager, and 24% to a female manager.

I turn now to the context of discriminatory actions, how the informants responded, and whether or not the abuses were rectified.

SUBTLE BLENDS OF BLATANT DISCRIMINATION

It is often hard to pinpoint what causes discrimination, and even harder to distinguish the experience as discriminatory in an era of inclusiveness and multiculturalism. Although aggression toward people in a minority group is socially unacceptable, scholars rationalise it as an attempt at preservation of self-esteem and power by those in the majority. Their refusal to deal with the *other* in her *otherness* provokes a range of emotions.

Racist Remarks and Jokes: Petty, Low-Impact but Long-Lasting?

As administrative officer in a professional organisation, Sharon had to interact with member-clients over the phone. One client complained, asking, “Why didn’t they hire someone with an Australian rather than an American accent?” She guessed that he was an elderly male, about 80+ years old. Without hesitation, she passed on the call to one of her Australian-born colleagues, who later agreed that he was “old, hard to understand . . . someone typically racist.” Sharon’s colleague may have emphasised the last part of the description of the caller to appease her but she simply shrugged it off. “That was all right with me. Perhaps he was just in a bad mood.” The office manager offered Sharon help in lodging a complaint, for the caller had clearly violated their organisational antiharassment policy. However, Sharon declined, believing that the incident was “part of the hazards of the trade” of working at a customer service desk. Her experience may be considered as a petty but obvious form of racial discrimination.

In another office setting, Carol and her colleagues were chatting about an item of news about a certain university, where, out of stress, a foreign student had shot his classmates. “The student must have been stressed because he was not good in English, and he was about to undertake an English oral exam,” Carol recalled. Then a young, white Australian-born male in her team said, “I bet you he is Asian. I’m sure he is Asian.” Embarrassed, an older white male colleague whispered to Carol, “He forgot that there are several Asians here.” But nobody confronted the younger worker. “We were just silent. This is not worth arguing about. And everyone thought so, too. Because he himself knew, why would he say that in the presence of several Asians? And we were all educated and ready

to fight.” Then perhaps sensing his own mistake, the young man added, “and drugs. I think it was drugs. It was because of drugs.” The remarks stung Carol, despite the fact that she did not complain at the time, and made her more sensitive to petty racism.

“Harmless” jokes are another form of petty discrimination commonly experienced by the informants; these jokes may or may not be directly targeted toward them. Luningning shared an encounter with a colleague in an executive meeting:

She was commenting about this particular person who is Asian, I think Chinese or Korean. Someone with an accent . . . and you know she was making faces while making this comment . . . and I found that hilarious and uncomfortable because she must have forgotten that I’m an Asian and I was there. . . . They’re very politically correct supposedly, right? If you’re in a university, you should not discriminate.

Being tolerant of racist jokes and petty discrimination may be viewed as a coping mechanism in the face of workplace hostilities. I regard such tactics as reflecting the women’s desire to be accepted and integrated in an implicitly racialised environment. After all, they claimed that their jobs gave them economic security and a venue in which to practice their professional skills. Career is an important identity to these women, as it is linked to the improved quality of life they aspire to, and their personal ambitions to reconfigure, revive, and advance their professional lives. Sharon took pride in her front-desk job in a professional association. Although it was less prestigious than her former post in Manila, the office atmosphere was collegial and her supervisors were nurturing. They encouraged her to pursue an online course in anticipation of a promotion. Carol’s and Luningning’s colleagues respected them, as they had attained their managerial positions through hard work and competence. Although their secure positions did not shield them from prejudice, they developed a tolerance for these incidents.

These women felt that their brushes with discrimination were “insignificant” in comparison to the benefits they enjoyed. Because incidents like these are rarely reported, let alone labelled as discrimination, they can easily slip by the surveillance of authorities and antidiscrimination advocates and be condoned in workplaces. But leaving them unchallenged or trivialised will simply perpetuate the abuses. The incremental impact on the survivors can be significant, and their position as members of a minority leaves them vulnerable.

Visibly categorised as belonging to “out-groups” are Asian-Australians, Muslims, and Aboriginal people (Dunn, 2003) and those who are “Third World-looking” (Hage, 1998: 19). Larson et al. (2007) demonstrate that everyday experiences of racism affect the health of Aboriginal Australians. Mellor (2004: 653-654) studied the effect of various forms of racism among Vietnamese immigrants and described their accounts in terms of “anxious agitation,” suggesting their “desire . . . to get on with life in Australia and a frustration at the barriers, including racism.” Those from Arab and Muslim backgrounds, especially women,

have reported increased experiences of both overt and covert forms of discrimination since the 9/11 incident in the United States (Poynting & Noble, 2004). They recount instances of being suspected of being “terrorists” and receiving threats. They describe the perpetrators as predominantly white Anglo-Australians from English-speaking backgrounds, but they seldom report their experiences to authorities, either because they believe that they will not be taken seriously or as a result of a past occurrence when their issues were simply ignored (Poynting & Noble, 2004). Empirical studies (Deitch et al., 2003; Loosemore & Chau, 2002; Mellor, 2004; Omeri & Atkins, 2002; Poynting & Noble, 2004; Swim et al., 2003) show that experiences of everyday discrimination take the form of uncivil verbal and nonverbal communication with the victims, joke telling or verbal slurs, offensive graffiti, impolite gestures, patronisation, stares or glares directed at them, exclusion from social relations, and being ignored or avoided, to name but a few. Although it is subtle, the cumulative impact of everyday discrimination can damage people’s physical and psychological well-being (Larson et al., 2007).

I maintain that the informants’ display of endurance in the face of petty discrimination might be stimulated in part by cultural expectations that they should be virtuous and tolerant, and mediated by their gendered and racial position in the workplace. Culturally speaking, disregard or tolerance of racist jokes is attuned to their orientation of *pakikisama* (meaning, “going along with”). In Filipino custom, *pakikibaka* (“confrontation”) is reserved for situations when all indirect and euphemistic means of negotiation have been exhausted, and when the incident deeply wounds the *loob* (inner self) (Enriquez, 1992). The informants’ long endurance of male domination in the workplace may be reflective of social relations in the Philippines, where women (especially those in or aiming for managerial positions) are expected to “integrate gender cultural role expectations and interpersonal styles” in their dealings with coworkers (Roffey, 2000: 9). Roffey’s study of Filipina entrepreneurs and managers reveal that in their conduct they display a combination of *malakas* (strong) and *maganda* (beautiful) attributes. They deal with male coworkers in ways that exemplify “diplomacy, persuasion and charm” so as to preserve their male colleagues’ *amor propio* (self-esteem) and avoid *hiya* (shame) (Roffey, 2000: 10; see also Roffey, 1999). Yet, not complaining may also be interpreted in relation to the informants’ gendered and raced power relation with their aggressors, who were largely white, native-born male Australians.

Dealing with the Mail-Order Bride Stigma

From the 1980s until the 1990s, there was sensationalised media reportage of the Filipina mail-order bride in Australia. The terms “Filipinas,” and “mail-order brides” or “brides” are synonymous, insofar as the popular mass media is concerned. The label has a derogatory connotation and is shunned by most Filipinas. In dealing with what Aguilar (1996) calls “transnational shame,”

the informants invariably resist the label, and in so doing they inevitably embrace a morally and socially superior feminine identity.

At the time when I was interviewing the informants, Vilma worked as a psychologist at a hospital that dealt with drug addicts, providing counselling services. On one occasion, a male refugee patient from a non-English-speaking background told the doctor that he did not want to be counselled by someone “who was bought,” stereotyping Vilma as a mail-order bride. “When patients refuse [you], people at work [nurses and doctors] perceive you as a less competent professional.” Vilma appeared upset, although she denied it, perhaps because she had become inured to it:

I had gotten used to the subtle [stereotyped] perception of my colour held against me. The flipside of that negative client perception was how my colleagues subsequently viewed me. Being both a Filipina and a new employee, I had to prove myself. I had to prove that I was worthy of recognition and promotion.

Vilma said that her colleagues indirectly fished for clues as to whether she came from the red light district of Manila, or whether her migration was based on marriage to a white Australian. “Where are you from in the Philippines?” “Where did you grow up?” “Are you married to an Aussie?” The annoying background inquisition was repeated in Filipino social circles. “When I attend[ed] parties and social events, Filipinas would ask the same questions. At the end of the evening, there would be some kind of a subtle social boundary between the perceived mail-order brides and the rest.” Vilma was a volunteer counsellor in a church-based organisation, where her superiors insisted that she take on the Filipina MOB clients, because “being married to a white Australian, I have the same experiences with them.” She asserted her dissimilarity to the MOB clients. “In my case, it was even my husband who encouraged me to send money home, and actively took part in petitioning my family members to migrate here.”

Resistance to the label was subtly embedded in my informants’ identity reconstruction. Vilma came to Australia at a time when Filipina immigrants were highly stigmatised as “mail-order brides.” This overwhelming (mis)representation of the Filipinas was projected onto almost all Filipinas at some time or another. Other informants’ stories resonate with Vilma’s, in their displeasure at the general public’s suspicion of every Filipina as a possible MOB, and in the way that the stigma creates a division among Filipinas:

There are mail-order brides in my town. They’d ask me, “Who is your husband?” They always assume that I’m also a mail-order bride. I said, “I don’t have a husband.” “How come you have migrated here?” I wanted to say, “Excuse me, I have brains, too,” but I did not want to sound snobbish. (Ligaya)

Because of media reportage of the MOB [in the 1980s and 1990s] there was [a] stigma attached to it immediately. One if you’re an Asian, and then if

you're a Filipina. If you're married to a non-Filipino [like me], you're immediately assumed [to be] a mail-order bride. (Alma)

I have always been proud to have come to Australia as a skilled migrant together with my [Filipino] husband. That I am not a mail-order bride. But after a while, when I [came] to meet some of them and learn that they are also well-educated and decent people, I developed respect towards them. (Leah)

My informants' explicit dissociation from the MOB identity may be interpreted in two ways. First, it is an assertion of their moral superiority over the mail-order brides, as they share some of the prevailing prejudices about the perceived social origins, pecuniary motives, and immorality of such women. Second, it is a refusal to accept the sexualised identity of the Filipina, especially in the context of their own domestic attempts to stimulate spousal equality; but it is also an insistence on their own professional competence in the work sphere. Regardless of their visa classification or length of residence in Australia, these women were constantly being stereotyped as MOB's, which they felt as insulting and hurtful. Ethnocentrism and stereotyping assist each other to instill racist behaviour (Loosemore & Chau, 2002). Gender and racial prejudice intersect in the women's everyday lives. Such "gendered racism" (Essed, 1991: 5) has been uniquely inflicted on Filipina immigrants because of the MOB stigma.

Within the Filipino community, the struggles of skilled women to define themselves as markedly different from their MOB sisters is what Lowe (1996) calls wanting a vertical and horizontal understanding of immigrants' cultural identity reconstruction. The struggle for historical and material contextualisation of their identity is a call for recognition of their ethnic heterogeneity and hybridity. It is also their call for de-stigmatisation. In Bottomley's (1992) view, it is their way of restoring ethnic honour within a dominantly white culture that routinely orientalises the other. Some of my informants' efforts to distinguish themselves from the MOB's diminished over time. Rediscovering the *other's* identity helped my informants overcome certain class and morality boundaries within Filipino femininity.

Filipino brides who came to Australia in the 1970s and 1980s mostly met their husbands through their kinship network or through Australian men's visits to the Philippines, and not through marriage agencies. This is confirmed in studies (Cooke, 1986; Roces, 2003), and yet the label persists. It is false to assume that since the era of sensationalised MOB reporting has subsided, the stereotype has disappeared. Fear of rejection, shame, or status demotion among career Filipinas seems implicit in the statements above, and confirms the continued existence of the stereotype.

Expletives and the Unholy F Word

On our first meeting, I had no idea that young-looking, diminutive Lorna was an engineer who coordinated the construction of complex buildings. Perhaps

being accustomed to dealing with men in the construction industry, Lorna spoke with distinctive firmness. But despite her many years of employment in the male-dominated Australian construction industry, she cringed at abusive words that have become the norm. She recounted a particularly offensive incident:

I have difficulty working with our current director. He is so fond of using the F word, not knowing that people around him are slighted. I am particularly turned off each time he peppers his sentences with this F word. At one occasion, he was pretty pissed because of the delays in a private house project. But it was not my fault as I only inherited the coordination of this project from a colleague who resigned. The director came up to me and said, "I'm giving you an hour to do it—organise what needs to be prepared. . . . You guys are so slow, you're like turtles."

Lorna was distressed by her supervisor's constant swearing but did not complain for a long time, "because he is my boss." His abusive language persisted, along with his demands for "ridiculous deadlines." He would also "pound the table when giving instructions." Already overworked, Lorna was expected to complete a task over a weekend. This made her very angry and unable to sleep. To vindicate herself, she researched antibullying laws over the Internet. In the next days she developed antibullying leaflets and distributed them to her workmates, including the abusive director. The bullying stopped, but the abusive atmosphere remained. She said that the construction industry was a "men's territory," where swearing was accepted. The violence Lorna encountered was not only an expression of gendered power but also an example of deficiency in grievance procedures, like the situation Timo et al. (2004) reported in the nursing profession.

Bing was once a box sorter at a post office during a difficult time of career transition. She shared the workplace with a young white male colleague, who according to Bing already had a "notorious" reputation before she came. For unknown reasons, he would repeatedly kick the stereo and grumble "fuck." She surmised that his anger was directed toward her, as there was no one else in the room. She thought that as a new employee he was criticising her incompetence in sorting boxes. Despite her escalating fears, Bing did not immediately report him, out of shame. "When the boss asks how things are, I just say 'okay,' which is usual to the Filipino mentality of long endurance. If you can bear it, just bear it, which is wrong." In hindsight, "That doesn't work in here. That is not politically correct here [in Australia]." It took four months of daily doses of bullying before she took courage to file a formal complaint. She said that she had become paranoid, fearing that her colleague might kill her. However, before her complaint was addressed, she had already left the job. The strains involved in catching a 4:26 a.m. train for an early morning shift and the bullying were greater than the financial rewards she received. She was offered a job in a nursing home, which over time solved her financial problems and put her career back on track.

Leah, an IT engineer, also struggled against bullying. Going away on a family holiday meant she had to delegate an assignment to a colleague, Gerry. She handed over to him the task of testing a program. Leah assumed that Gerry was familiar with the program, as he had been involved in its initial stages. Later, she became unhappy when he complained to someone over the phone about “being stuck” with it. His voice was loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, which embarrassed Leah. He was implying that she was incapable of testing the program. Leah thought that he could have approached her for guidance. After the phone call, Gerry yelled, “Leahhh . . . I’m gonna slap you!” He was peppering his sentences with “fuck,” which made her very angry. The lack of detailed guidance annoyed her, but to Leah such guidance could be produced only after further testing. She was unable to explain this, out of anger. So instead, she went for a walk to regain her composure, and upon returning, she e-mailed the manager. Leah’s office had an antibullying policy. It suggested a colleague-level settlement in the first instance. If this was unsuccessful, the case could be taken to the manager. Since Leah felt too threatened to approach Gerry, she sought the manager’s intercession. She feared that she “could either lose my job or rock the boat.” To her relief, the manager commended Leah for reporting the incident, and issued Gerry with a warning.

Leah said that she could cope with her male colleagues’ frequent use of “fuck” as long as “it is not directed towards me.” She felt deeply offended by this abusive expression, like Bing and Lorna. We can appreciate these women’s struggles to ignore and endure a male colleague’s harassment out of embarrassment and possibly out of their culturally instilled *pakikisama*. I again invoke the gendered expectations of Filipina workers in the Philippines, in which they are supposed to assume nonconfrontational and diplomatic interpersonal communication with (male) colleagues.

We can also infer from their social status and gendered upbringing why the informants felt uncomfortable with sexual swearing. As all identified themselves as Christians, with most identifying themselves as practicing Catholics, “fuck” was perceived to be insulting. The Madonna, the ultimate femininity icon among Filipino Catholics, embodies gentleness and virtue worthy of every respect. To the informants, the expletives were gross, vulgar, sinful, and unwomanly. In the Philippines, I have observed that middle-classness dictates a certain degree of Madonna-instilled decorum, such that “fuck” is abhorred in both private and public spheres. Only the *palengera* (those who are vulgar in speech), the hospitality girls, the *laking kalye* (those who grew up in the streets), the *laking squatter* (those who grew up in the slums), and others who are socially disparaged are not condemned for using such expletives. No wonder that, over time, the informants asserted their equal opportunity rights in the most direct fashion. To remain silent was not only to suffer an insult but also to permit the inferiorisation of their social identity.

I argue that the informants were able to defend themselves against hostilities by appealing to their rights as skilled workers and as Australian citizens. This finding replicates that of Tibe-Bonifacio (2003), whose PhD dissertation explores the Filipinas' exercise of Australian citizenship. She argues that the women's knowledge of their rights and their proficiency in the English language significantly assisted in their ability to defend themselves against racial prejudice. They were adept at airing their grievances and at other methods of combatting discrimination when the situation called for it. In her theory of "lived activism," Tibe-Bonifacio (2009) argues that while Filipinas in Sydney are living with systems of gender and racial domination at home and outside, they are also simultaneously engaging with these agency-constraining structures. I extend this argument by stressing that "lived activism" manifests itself clearly in the workplace, where personal, social, and political powers intersect. In my study, the women showed personal courage and diplomacy in dealing with discrimination. But certainly, their exercise of agency was often fraught with fear of rejection, shame, and continued harassment.

Exclusionary Treatment

During her time as a dental nurse, Rosanna, now a dentist, had to operate an X-ray developing machine that she had never used before. She approached a white female hygienist, who sarcastically remarked, "You don't really know how that works?" In professional rankings within the Australian dental clinic structure, a hygienist is below the level of a dental sterilizer and above the level of a dental nurse. The hygienist was unhelpful, so Rosanna turned to others. Following this, the hygienist would not talk to her or sit beside her in meetings. Rosanna ignored the hygienist's cold treatment. When she was newly hired, Rosanna also felt excluded from informal office discussions. She would just assume the listener role. "I don't know if it has something to do with our being migrants [as it seems] they feel capable of taking advantage of us. But when they realise that they cannot easily harass you, they won't do it."

During executive staff meetings, IT specialist Carol would be one of the very few female managers attending. Her boss would ignore her inputs. "He wasn't concentrating when I was saying something. [He would] be asking me a question and not really concentrating on the answer." Each time Carol said something, he turned away, would not look directly into her eyes, or simply changed the subject. "You know, just to be seen, just to be asking the question, and not really meaning to ask the question." Yet Carol's performance was not affected. She said, "It didn't bother me that much. . . . I had not much to do with him anyway, as long as I was performing well with my thing, you know. He [did] not care about me. He was not really dealing much with my concerns. Anyway, I was just a female."

Rosanna's and Carol's stories of being taken for granted or excluded mirror the way in which other informants reported that they responded to similar situations.

They preferred to ignore the bullies, as long as the way they were treated was not grossly embarrassing. At the very least, they wanted their human dignity to be respected.

Ignoring “petty” discrimination may be viewed by the observer as a means of protecting their dignity, although in so doing they were also relinquishing their rights, enduring prejudice and harassment in order to belong. But the informants’ vulnerability to discrimination and harassment, and their decision, at times, not to exercise their power to arrest it served to further dislocate their identities as legitimate workers who were entitled to fair treatment. The women might have overcome the daily tribulations of petty prejudices and “attained” peaceful and cordial workplace relations, but their sense of belonging remained shaky if not illusory. They would say, “I’m okay—it does not harm me at all,” in order to avoid trouble. Yet beneath this declaration was a deep yearning for mutual respect and recognition. Anthias (2006: 20) stresses that the sense of belonging should be appreciated in terms of its function as a “precondition for a quality of life and not purely in terms of cultural initiation or cultural identity.”

However, informants’ ignoring of systemic abuse at an early stage does not necessarily mean denial of the affront. Some informants were activists leading self-help communities of migrant Filipinos to assert their own rights. Some were known in their respective circles as human rights activists, whose struggles for egalitarianism, freedom, and women’s emancipation started during the Martial Law era in the Philippines. They knew their rights and had the self-confidence to assert them in the Australian workplace. Tibe-Bonifacio’s study of Filipina immigrants in Sydney shows that they readily pressed for their equal rights when faced with discriminatory treatment at work. Having achieved Australian citizenship, they insisted that colour, accent, and qualifications obtained overseas should not be regarded as a badge of inferiority by their white Australian colleagues (Tibe-Bonifacio, 2003, 2009). This finding is broadly replicated in my study. Yet, despite some informants’ background in activism, they sometimes failed to resist discrimination. In intensely masculinist and racist environments, the women’s well-honed capacity to defend themselves met its limitation. “Lived activism” in this sense is disrupted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The informants were not spared from experiences of gender and racial prejudices despite the array of equal antidiscrimination laws and multicultural rhetoric pertinent to this domain. I have shown how the women resisted discrimination in different ways, even when labelling certain experiences as discriminatory proved to be difficult. Experiences of discrimination affected them in various ways, ranging from stalled career progression to negative effects on their self-esteem and psychological well-being. For many, workplace prejudices made them more aware of their cultural difference from the majority population; but for

others, their health and self-esteem were so dented that they resigned from their jobs. The perpetrators were predominantly white male Australians of English-speaking backgrounds. I also found that stigmatisation of Filipinas as mail-order brides continued in the workplace, as well as continuing to mark the social distinction between Filipina immigrants who came on skilled and family sponsorship visas, and those who came as brides to white Australian men.

The women handled prejudice on an individual and situational basis, using their personal resources and rights as workers. Many chose to ignore the incidents and endure them for as long as they could. This was the case for those who faced racist jokes and remarks and fell victim to exclusionary treatment. I view their subdued responses as a way of avoiding further victimisation, and as an attempt to belong. However, ignoring systemic abuse at an early stage does not mean failing to acknowledge it as a form of affront. These women had high levels of awareness of their rights, and would not concede defeat in the long run. Still, their activism and capacity for self-defense proved inadequate at times to resist discrimination in intensely masculinist and racist environments.

Ignoring and enduring appeared to be a common response among the informants. This may be explained with reference to the Filipinos' cultural attitude of preserving smooth interpersonal relationships and *pakikisama* ("going along with"). Not to confront or not to complain is consistent with the highly valued Filipino cultural attitudes of preserving smooth interaction, deep sensing of the situation, and long endurance. As Bing points out, not to complain "is usual to the Filipino mentality of long endurance." Leah, rather than confronting a colleague, asked her manager for help. She attributed her shyness to her Filipina background. These women's displays of shyness and indirectness are attuned to *pakikiramdam*, a process of nonverbal deep sensing of the situation. Leah explains: "In the Philippines, you know that your coworkers are already aware of your difficult situation," and so you do not need to articulate it. Ignoring can also be related to protection of self-esteem: some informants did not want to report abuse to their supervisors for fear of being misjudged as incompetent or accused of whingeing. For those who claimed to be unaffected or only slightly affected, ignoring may be correlated with their aspiration to appear "normal" in a seemingly racialised workplace. We can assume that the levels of ignoring and enduring a discriminatory incident are different for those who negotiate a racist joke than for those who are confronted with MOB stigmatisation. For those who are faced with the latter situation, I suggest that ignoring is a strategy of silent resistance, where the battle is kept to oneself because the hostility is too pervasive to be confronted.

I have argued that the informants' resistance to the MOB label was a coping strategy used against what Aguilar calls "transnational shame." The informants wanted to differentiate themselves educationally and morally from the mail-order brides. I have suggested that resistance to this sexualised identity is linked to their bid for gender equality at home and in the workplace. They wanted to be

recognised for their professional competence and skills, free from any gender and racial stereotypes.

Rejection of the MOB identity was also the informants' way of asserting their distinction from and moral superiority over the mail-order brides, whose perceived social status of origin, pecuniary motives, and immorality do not correspond with notions of Madonna-influenced femininity. I have suggested that respectability was sought through embracing a morally and socially superior femininity. Respectability is emblematic of the middle-class Filipina identity for which they sought recognition. It is, however, difficult to determine just how much their strategies of distancing result in the women's actually endorsing, either intentionally or consequentially, the stigmatisation of other Filipinas, namely, those identified as mail-order brides. In some instances, the informants had come to appreciate their mail-order bride co-nationals, seeing beyond the stigma, and had stopped distancing themselves socially from the brides.

In cases where informants realised that being passive and sacrificial would not change their situation for the better, the informants shifted their response from *pakikisama* to *pakikibaka*, a confrontational mode. They did this when the hostility they encountered was intolerably hurtful. They knew that by asserting their workplace and citizenship rights, they would gain their coworkers' respect. They felt confident that if they invoked certain government laws and office policies, they would be able to access an internal support system or stimulate the creation of one. Assertion of one's rights need not always mean filing a formal complaint. It can also mean questioning a system, practice, or decision, in the interests of fairness. Those who successfully asserted their rights did so in order to uphold their self-worth and restore justice.

Determination that a practice or situation constitutes illegal workplace discrimination can be problematic as it is not always easy to establish what has happened or, out of fear, confusion or denial, to label it as discrimination. I have maintained that the injured party always wonders whether the experience is actually discriminatory. In this article, I have demonstrated that cultural, race, and gender lenses can open up the concept of discrimination. Workplace cultures are dominated by white male Australian values, which allow certain offensive practices, especially racist jokes and the frequent use of expletives. My informants' resistance to such practices and interpretation of these practices according to their meaning within Filipino culture may be appreciated as a struggle against Anglo-Australian cultural assimilation. Indeed, the women weathered and rose above prejudicial experiences through their insistence on their workplace rights. I have argued that by activating their inner resources and equality rights they *were refusing* to fall victim to structural prejudice, and in most situations, they achieved justice, even though they endured hardship along the way. But bearing the pain of discrimination and combatting it at an individual level do not lead to substantive change. As a step forward, multiculturalism strategies should be broadened to include gender-sensitive, ethnic-based unionizing. While union

members would consist exclusively of those from a particular ethnic group, the union would catalyse active participation with the mainstream trade unions, and negotiate for culturally and gender diverse antidiscrimination approaches. Workplaces should never assume that the absence of reported incidents means the absence of violence and prejudices. As this article shows, voices are quelled out of shame, fear, and cultural differences. A gender audit may be used to tease out closeted abuses that are complicated by gender, race, and other social and cultural differences. Participatory, and less confrontational than other methods of inquiry, a gender audit uses surveys and small group discussion to identify issues and brainstorm solutions.

Multiculturalism requires workplace cultures to be more inclusive of and sensitive to immigrant workers' communication and interpersonal ethos. Racial and gender prejudices, however subtle, inhibit immigrants from fully claiming their rights and undermine their multifaceted identities, and therefore should never be normalised.

REFERENCES

- Acker, J. 1990. Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organisations. *Gender and Society*, 4: 139–158.
- Aguilar, F. V. J. 1996. The dialectics of transnational shame and national identity. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 44: 101–136.
- Anthias, F. 2006. Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: Rethinking translocations. In N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabirān, & U. Vieten (Eds.), *The situated politics of belonging*: 17–31. London: Sage.
- Askew, D. A., Schluter, P. J., Dick, M., Régo, P. M., Turner, C., & Wilkinson, D. 2012. Bullying in the Australian medical workforce: Cross-sectional data from an Australian e-cohort study. *Australian Health Review*, 36: 197–204.
- Augoustinos, M., Tuffin, K., & Every, D. 2005. New racism, meritocracy and individualism: Constraining affirmative action in education. *Discourse and Society*, 16: 315–340.
- Australian Human Rights Commission. 2013. Sexual harassment. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/guides/sexual-harassment>, March 2013.
- Barron, O. 2000. Why workplace bullying and violence are different: Protecting employees from both. *Security Journal*, 13: 63–72.
- Bottomley, G. 1992. *From another place: Migration and the politics of culture*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Brah, A. 1996. *Cartographics of diaspora: Contesting identities*. London: Routledge.
- Charlesworth, S., McDonald, P., & Cerise, S. 2011. Naming and claiming sexual harassment in Australia. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 46: 141–161.
- Cooke, F. 1986. *Australian-Filipino marriages in the 1980s: The myth and reality*. Nathan, Australia: Griffith University School of Modern Asian Studies.
- Cooke, F., & Western, J. 1988. *Filipinas and work: The quest for a fair go: An overview of a study*. Brisbane, Australia: University of Queensland Department of Anthropology and Sociology.

- Cuban, S. 2008. Home/work: The roles of education, literacy, and learning in the networks and mobility of professional women migrant carers in Cumbria. *Ethnography and Education*, 3: 81–96.
- Davis, K. 2008. Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory*, 9: 67–85.
- Deitch, E. A., Barsky, A., Butz, R. M., Chan, S., Brief, A. P., & Bradley, J. C. 2003. Subtle yet significant: The existence and impact of everyday racial discrimination. *Human Relations*, 56: 1299–1324.
- Dunn, K. 2003. *Imagining the Congo: The international relations of identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dunn, K., Loosemore, M., Phua, F., & Ozguc, U. 2011. Everyday ethnic diversity and racism on Australian construction sites. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 10: 129–147.
- Enriquez, V. 1992. *From colonial to liberation psychology: The Philippine experience*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Essed, P. 1991. *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory*. London: Sage.
- Essed, P. 2002. Everyday racism: A new approach to the study of racism. In P. Essed & D. T. Goldberg (Eds.), *Race critical theories: Text and context*: 176–194. Melbourne, Australia: Blackwell Publishing.
- Farrell, G. A., Bobrowski, C., & Bobrowski, P. 2006. Scoping workplace aggression in nursing: Findings from an Australian study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 55: 778–787.
- Fincher, R. 1995. Women, immigration and the state: Issues of difference and social justice. In A. Edwards & S. Magarey (Eds.), *Women in a restructuring Australia: Work and welfare*: 203–222. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Getachew, G. H. 2012. “Deskilling and disempowerment” of skilled Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant women in the Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://thesis.eur.nl/pub/13052/>, September 2013.
- Glasø, L., Matthiesen, S. B., Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. 2007. Do targets of workplace bullying portray a general victim personality profile. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 48: 313–319.
- Hage, G. 1998. *White nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. Annandale, Australia: Pluto Press.
- Hall, S. 2000. Who needs “identity” In P. D. Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A reader*: 15–30. London: Sage.
- Hawthorne, L. 1997. The question of discrimination: Skilled migrants’ access to Australian employment. *International Migration*, 35: 395–419.
- Hawthorne, L. 2002. Qualifications recognition reform for skilled migrants in Australia: Applying competency-based assessment to overseas-qualified nurses. *International Migration*, 40: 55–91.
- Hegney, D., Eley, D., Plank, A., Buikstra, E., & Parker, V. 2006. Workplace violence in Queensland, Australia: The results of a comparative study. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 12: 220–231.
- Hegney, D., Plank, A., & Parker, V. 2003. Workplace violence in nursing in Queensland, Australia: A self-reported study. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 9: 261–268.

- Ho, C. 2006. Migration as feminisation? Chinese women's experiences of work and family in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32: 497–514.
- Holt, E. 1996. Writing Filipina-Australian bodies: The discourse of Filipina brides. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 44: 58–78.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment. 2012. Inquiry into workplace bullying. Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ee/bullying/report.htm, September 2013.
- Hutchinson, M., Vickers, M., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. 2006. Workplace bullying in nursing: Towards a more critical organisational perspective. *Nursing Inquiry*, 13: 118–126.
- Ilies, R., Hauserman, N., Schwochau, S., & Stibal, J. 2003. Reported incidence rates of work-related sexual harassment in the United States: Using meta-analysis to explain reported rate disparities. *Personnel Psychology*, 56: 607–631.
- Iredale, R. 2005. Gender, immigration policies and accreditation: Valuing the skills of professional women migrants. *Geoforum*, 36: 155–166.
- Jackson, D., Clare, J., & Mannix, J. 2002. Who would want to be a nurse? Violence in the workplace—A factor in recruitment and retention. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 10: 13–20.
- Jackson, R. T., & Flores, E. R. 1989. *No Filipinos in Manila*. Townsville, Australia: James Cook University Department of Geography.
- Jocano, F. L. 1999. *Working with Filipinos: A cross-cultural encounter*. Quezon City, The Philippines: Punlad Research House.
- Kofman, E. 2000. The invisibility of skilled female migrants and gender relations in studies of skilled migration in Europe. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 6: 45–59.
- Kofman, E., & Raghuram, P. 2005. Gender and skilled migrants: Into and beyond the workplace. *Geoforum*, 36: 149–154.
- Larson, A., Gillies, M., Howard, P. J., & Coffin, J. 2007. It's enough to make you sick: The impact of racism on the health of aboriginal Australians. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 31: 322–329.
- Lee, D. 2001. "He didn't sexually harass me, as in harassed for sex. . . . He was just horrible"—Women's definitions of unwanted male sexual conduct at work. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 24: 25–38.
- Lee, D. 2002. Gendered workplace bullying in the restructured UK civil service. *Personnel Review*, 31: 205–227.
- Loosemore, M., & Chau, D. W. 2002. Racial discrimination towards Asian operatives in the Australian construction industry. *Construction Management and Economics*, 20: 91–102.
- Lopez, M. 2000. *The origins of multiculturalism in Australian politics*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.
- Lowe, L. 1996. *Immigrant acts*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Madison, J., & Minichiello, V. 2000. Recognizing and labelling sex-based and sexual harassment in the health care workplace. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 32: 405–410.
- Mapedzahama, V., Rudge, T., West, S., & Perron, A. 2012. Black nurse in white space? Rethinking the in/visibility of race within the Australian nursing workplace. *Nursing Inquiry*, 19: 153–164.

- Martin, J. 1991. Multiculturalism and feminism. In G. Bottomley, M. de Lepervanche, & J. Martin (Eds.), *Intersexions: Gender/class/culture/ethnicity*: 110–131. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- McDonald, P., & Dear, K. 2008. The incidence and patterns of discrimination and harassment affecting working women in Australia. *Women's Studies Journal*, 22: 37–48.
- Meares, C. 2010. A fine balance: Women, work and skilled migration. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33: 473–481.
- Mellor, D. 2004. The experiences of Vietnamese in Australia: The racist tradition continues. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30: 631–658.
- Office of Women's Policy. 2005. Safe at work? Women's experience of violence in the workplace. Retrieved from <http://www.urcot.org.au/sites/default/files/From%20WP%20website%2011%20Oct%20SafeatWorkPDF.pdf>, May 2013.
- Omeri, A., & Atkins, K. 2002. Lived experiences of immigrant nurses in New South Wales, Australia: Searching for meaning. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 39: 495–505.
- Pocock, B., Elton, J., Preston, A., Charlesworth, S., MacDonald, F., Baird, M., Cooper, R., & Ellem, B. 2008. The impact of "Work Choices" on women in low paid employment in Australia: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50: 475–488.
- Poynting, S., & Noble, G. 2004. Living with racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.stepone.org.au/media/1712/living%20with%20racism.pdf>, June, 2013.
- Pred, A. R. 2000. *Even in Sweden: Racisms, racialised spaces, and the popular geographical imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Purkayastha, B. 2005. Skilled migration and cumulative disadvantage: The case of highly qualified Asian Indian immigrant women in the US. *Geoforum*, 36: 181–196.
- Robinson, K. 1996. Of mail-order brides and "Boys' Own" tales: Representation of Asian Australian marriages. *Feminist Review*, 52: 53–68.
- Roces, M. 2003. Sisterhood is local: The Filipino women in Mount Isa. In N. Piper & M. Roces (Eds.), *Wife or worker? Asian women and migration*: 73–100. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Roffey, B. 1999. Filipina managers and entrepreneurs: What leadership models apply? *Asian Studies Review*, 23: 375–405.
- Roffey, B. 2000. Strategic leadership and management in the Philippines: Dynamics of gender and culture. *Labour and Management in Development Journal*, 10: 1–31.
- Salin, D. 2003. Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment. *Human Relations*, 56: 1213–1232.
- Salin, D., & Hoel, H. 2013. Workplace bullying as a gendered phenomenon. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 28: 235–251.
- Saroca, C. 2006. Filipino women, migration, and violence in Australia: Lived reality and media image. *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, 21: 75–110.
- Simpson, R., & Cohen, C. 2004. Dangerous work: The gendered nature of bullying in the context of higher education. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11: 163–186.
- Smith, P. K., & Sharp, S. 1994. *School bullying: Insights and perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Stratton, J. 2006. Two rescues, one history: Everyday racism in Australia. *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 12: 657–681.

- Swim, J. K., Hyers, L. L., Cohen, L. L., Fitzgerald, D. C., & Bylsma, W. H. 2003. African American college students' experiences with everyday racism: Characteristics of and responses to these incidents. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 29: 38–67.
- Syed, J., & Murray, P. 2009. Combating the English language deficit: The labour market experiences of migrant women in Australia. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19: 413–432.
- Syed, J., & Pio, E. 2010. Veiled diversity? Workplace experiences of Muslim women in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 27: 115–137.
- Thomas, A., & Kitzinger, C. 1994. "It's just something that happens": The invisibility of sexual harassment in the workplace. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 1: 151–161.
- Tibe-Bonifacio, G. L. A. 2003. Filipino women and their citizenship in Australia: In search of political space. PhD dissertation. Retrieved from <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/3109/>, January 2013.
- Tibe-Bonifacio, G. L. A. 2009. Activism from the margins: Filipino marriage migrants in Australia. *Frontiers*, 30: 142–168.
- Timo, N., Fulop, L., & Ruthjersen, A. 2004. Crisis? What crisis? Management practices and internal violence and workplace bullying in aged care in Australia. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 12: 57–89.
- United Nations. 2009. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, December 2013.
- Vasta, E. 1991. Gender, class and ethnic relations: The domestic and work experiences of Italian migrant women in Australia. In G. Bottomley, M. de Lepervanche, & J. Martin (Eds.), *Intersexions: Gender/class/culture/ethnicity*: 159–177. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency. 2013. About the Workplace Gender Equality Act. Retrieved from <http://www.wgea.gov.au/content/about-legislation>, April 2013.
- WorkSafe Victoria. n.d. Workplace bullying. Retrieved from <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/health-and-safety-topics/workplace-bullying>, May 2013.
- Wren, K. 2001. Cultural racism: Something rotten in the State of Denmark? *Social and Cultural Geography*, 2: 141–162.
- Yanick, S. J., & Feagin, J. R. 1998. *Double burden: Black women and everyday racism*. New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Yeoh, B. S., & Willis, K. 2012. Negotiating "home" and "away": Singaporean professional migrants in China. In D. W. Haines, K. Yamanaka, & S. Yamashita (Eds.), *Wind over water: Migration in an East Asian context*: 219–228. New York: Berghahn Books.

Direct reprint requests to:

Cirila P. Limpangog
 College of Arts
 Victoria University
 Ballarat Road, Footscray
 Victoria 3011, Australia
 e-mail: cirila.limpangog@vu.edu.au