

# **IDENTITY FORMATION OF SELECTED FILIPINA BREADWINNERS**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*The study aimed to determine the self-identity of Filipina breadwinners and the role that the breadwinner position plays in the participants' identity formation. Twelve Filipina breadwinners, the sole source of their family income, were the participants of the research. The Lovingness, Appreciativeness and Faithfulness (LAF) model of self-identity of the Filipina breadwinner was fashioned based on the findings from the interviews. The study found that single breadwinners are appreciative of the support that their family gave to them when they were younger, thus they want to repay their family by being the breadwinner. Moreover, married breadwinners showed their loving attribute towards their family by being breadwinners. Furthermore, single moms remained faithful to their self-identity in spite of the many problems and complications in their breadwinner role.*

**Keywords:** *Filipina Breadwinners, Breadwinner Role, Self-Identity, Identity Formation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the Filipino family, the father is traditionally the head or the breadwinner. His earnings are the main source to support the needs of his family. On the other hand, the mother is responsible for managing all the household activities, budgeting, monitoring her child's/ children's welfare and teaching her children. The children of the family, regardless of order of birth, take the role of taking care and helping each other. But today, there is a new conceptualization of the Filipino family. The traditional role of fathers being the breadwinners of the family is being redefined. It is now expected that men also share child-care tasks, doing household chores, able to express emotions and value their partners' voice in decision making (World Development Report, 2012). This inability of the breadwinners, like fathers, to fulfil their duties can influence their masculine identity as men (Buzzanell and Turner, 2003).

With the decline of men as breadwinners, comes the rise of the female breadwinners. In 2008, there was an accelerating recession, thus, there were layoffs of highly paid husbands and the lowered salaried wife were unexpectedly working outside their homes (Meisenbach, 2010). Women increasingly became the breadwinners and they gained the essence of being a breadwinner. Women became the sole breadwinners in almost a third of U.S. households (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Moreover, as our society changes, gender roles also change to respond to what the society needs. According to McDonald as cited by Hernz (2003), there were considerable opportunities for women that made them work outside, aside from their role as mother. This has changed the male breadwinner model in Western societies.

Bloemen and Stancanelli (2007) explained the occurrence of female breadwinner, through investigating its determinants. According to them, the wife earns more than her husband when she has attained a higher level of education compared to him. Moreover, when the husband does not take the role of being a breadwinner, the wife feels resentful towards the husband's situation. Consequently, it makes the wife an unhappy breadwinner causing the husband to be motivated to look for a job. The happiest female breadwinner occurs when the husband chooses their wife to be the breadwinner. Females also become breadwinners when their husbands lose their jobs. The recession in the U.S. resulted in the job lay-off of a number of male breadwinners resulting in the need for the women to work (cited by Meisenbach 2010).

Murphy (2003) presented five features of marked difference between women and men in the labor market: (1) women's participation is growing at a considerable pace and faster than that of men; (2) there was a greater demand from women for part-time employment; (3) there was considerable movement in and out of the workforce for women, depending on the age of their children; (4) there was considerable activity at the fringe of the labour market even for women who describe themselves as inactive; and (5) attachment to the social welfare system may influence the level of labour market activity for women.

With the increasing number of the female breadwinners over the years, this study aimed to determine the self-identity of the Filipina breadwinners and ascertain the role the breadwinner position plays in their identity formation.

## Theoretical Overview

According to Dr. Rebecca Meisenbach (2010), the rise of the female breadwinner is an increasingly important concern; however, little research has been done about the topic. In her study, Mesienbach was able to find out that female breadwinners were proud of their accomplishments and were enjoying their independence.

### **Assumption 1: Female breadwinners will significantly gain positive self-identity.**

According to Karen Horney, as cited by Feist (2009), in her psychoanalytic social theory, there are categories that help people combat their basic anxieties. One category was the neurotic need for affection and approval. They try to live up to the expectations of others, tend to dread self-assertion and are quite uncomfortable with the hostility of others as well as hostile feelings within themselves. Thus, the breadwinner strives to be perfect for themselves and they chose to desperately hide their weakness from others.

### **Assumption 2: Female breadwinners will significantly struggle to obtain and satisfy the need for approval and appreciation from others.**

According to Eagly, as cited by Heesacker et.al (2003), the most influential explanations on why gender stereotypes are confirmed is through the social role theory. It proposed that the social roles of men and women are being acted upon, which in return will manifest in the roles that they play along their gender lines. Both men and women behave and perform according to their abilities and skills as they respond to their social roles. Therefore, both have confirmed gender stereotypes as a response to the different roles they place to different social demands.

According to Rogers, as cited by Feist (2009), as an individual, we want that our self-image is consistent to the way we feel, experience, and behave and would reflect what our ideal self will be. The more consistent our self-image to our ideal self, the higher is our sense of self-worth. There is incongruence if some of the totality of an individual is unacceptable to their image.

**Assumption 3: Female breadwinners will significantly accept their new role to their self-identity as an individual.**

### **Research Objectives**

The purpose of the study is to determine the self-identity of the Filipina breadwinners and the bearing of the breadwinner role to their identity. Specifically, the objectives of the study are: (a) to determine the self-identity of Filipina breadwinners; (b) to determine the essential factors that defines or develops their self-identity as breadwinner; and (c) to understand the relevance of breadwinner role in their identity formation.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The study used Phenomenology in studying and understanding the new concept of the female breadwinner role. Phenomenology is defined as having careful description of everyday conscious experiences as they are experienced (Howitt, 2010). This method was suitable to the study as it allow the researchers to have a careful description and observation of individual experiences of Filipina breadwinners.

More specifically, the researchers used Empirical Phenomenological Research in this study in order to gather comprehensive descriptions of the lived experiences of Filipina breadwinners. These descriptions provided the basis for a reflective structural analysis to show the essence of the experiences. First, the original data is comprised of “naïve” descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. Then, the researchers described the structure of the experience based on reflection and interpretation of the research participant’s story. The aim was to determine what the experience meant for the people who have had the experience. From there, general meanings are

derived. Phenomenology commits itself to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analysis (Howitt, 2010).

## Participants

Female breadwinners, either single or married, who are currently the sole source of their family income, are the participants of this study. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the Filipina breadwinner participants of the study.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Filipina Breadwinner Participants

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years Breadwinner</b>	<b>No. of Children</b>
<b>P1</b>	35	Married	Self-Employed	15	3
<b>P2</b>	35	Married	Maid	15	5
<b>P3</b>	22	Single Parent	HR Assistant	3	1
<b>P4</b>	40	Single	Laboratory Technician	22	0
<b>P5</b>	35	Single Parent	CPA	15	2
<b>P6</b>	59	Single Parent	Self-Employed	36	1
<b>P7</b>	28	Single Parent	General Manager	8	2
<b>P8</b>	59	Widow	Teacher	20	2
<b>P9</b>	45	Married	OFW	18	3
<b>P10</b>	35	Single Parent	Real Estate Agent	8	2
<b>P11</b>	24	Single	Senior Property Specialist	4	0
<b>P12</b>	22	Married	Self-Employed	4	1

## Data Collection Procedure

- The researchers constructed an interview guide that was validated by three experts in the field of Social Psychology.
- The interview guide was translated to Filipino and the translation was validated by a Filipino grammarian.
- The researchers scheduled the interviews with the participants.
- The interview was a three part process. The first part was rapport building. The second part was the actual interview and the last part was the validation of what transpired during the interview.
- The researchers followed the protocol of Rebecca Meisenbach in her study entitled, “Female Breadwinner: Phenomenological Experience and Gendered Identity in Work/Family Spaces” during the actual interview with the participants. This includes the following:
  1. Personal history

2. Work-life expectations  
What expectations did you have about your career while growing up?
  3. How they became a breadwinner  
Describe how you became the main source of income for your family.
  4. Their experiences as the breadwinner
  5. Describe the transition to a new situation
- The interviews were transcribed verbatim.
  - The transcribed data were analysed through thematic analysis.

## Data Measure

The researchers formulated a semi-structured interview guide following Meisenbach's protocol. The constructed interview guide was validated by three experts in the field of Social Psychology. It had English and Filipino versions that were checked by English and Filipino grammarians.

## Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis in understanding and interpreting the interviews with the participants. Thematic analysis is defined as a form of qualitative analysis which seeks to "work up" or identify the major areas (themes) in the textual data studied (Howitt, 2010). According to Howitt and Cramer (2008), thematic analysis primarily involves three central processes. Although, they are conceptually separate processes, they do not follow a rigid order, thus overlaps considerably. The three central processes are the following:

- a. **Transcribing textual material.** In thematic analysis, transcription method was used. It is defined as a process of putting into the written word data those which are in spoken forms such as interviews, conversations, telephone calls and focus groups interaction, which involves audio recording.
- b. **Analytic effort.** This is the crucial part in qualitative analysis as it works in generating final themes in the text. It includes (a) familiarisation with the data; (b) detailed codings and conceptualizations; (c) the extent to which the researcher is prepared to process and reprocess the data; (d) the extent to which the researcher is giving effort in resolving difficulties; (e) frequency and thoroughness of scrutiny in the analysis of the data.
- c. **Identifying themes and sub-themes.** This is the endpoint of thematic analysis. Identifying the themes and sub-themes from the data transcribed. From there, it has considerable variation for the researchers to refine the themes.

## FINDINGS

The results of the interviews reveal eight essential themes. These themes are the consistent factors that allowed the researchers to determine, define and understand the role of the breadwinner position in the self-identity of a Filipina. The eight themes were Acceptance, Sacrifice, Beyond Positive Thinking, Becoming a Strong Person, Fulfilment, Identification, Independence and Feeling of Stress, Pressure and Worry.

### ***Acceptance***

The participants have wholeheartedly accepted the being the breadwinner of their family. According to Williams & Lynn (2010), there are numerous components of acceptance such as nonattachment, nonjudgemental, nonavoidance, tolerance and willingness.

Nonavoidance is where the individual continuously faces the experience or does not deny the painful experience.

*“siguro may kulang pa siyempre lalo na pag lumaki yung mga bata, lumalaki yung gastos so syempre yung word na adjustment or sa adjustment sa budget but emotionally, physically..umm siguro I’m more confident on what I’m saying siguro tipong eto na eh yung bubay ko, tatanggapin ko na kasi tipong package na eh.” -P7*

*“madali ko itong natanggap dahil sa una palang alam ko na ang takbo ng bubay na naranasan ko, maraming nagbago dahil sa una'y naisip ko na hindi na ko isang bata na may oras para maglaro...” -P12*

Tolerance is a requirement for acceptance as it increases self control, detachment from emotion and indifference to pleasure and pain.

*“tinanggap ko ito ng buong puso dahil alam ko andito lang palagi sa tabi ko ang diyos. Naniniwala ako na binigay niya ito dahil alam niyang makakaya ko.” -P8*

Willingness makes acceptance as a choice not an obligation.

*“upon graduation and I find a job, I started giving financial support to my younger siblings for their education and some financial support to my parents for their daily needs... nung nagtrabaho, kusang loob ko na ito ginawa, ang motivation ko ay mahilig sila mag-arat, kung walang support, wala, kasi hindi din naman sila tamad, sharing my blessings..” -P4*

### ***Sacrifice***

The participants manifested a means of understanding their roles as they realize that they are now responsible for the well-being of other people. They give up the things that they used to do. According to Van Lange et. al., (1997) as cited by Gordon (2010), sacrifice refers to denial of immediate self-interest for another person. This has an aim of making others feel better aside from oneself, where one is more focused on the welfare of others. They also presented two types of

sacrifice, the active and the passive sacrifice. Active sacrifice refers to the things or circumstances that an individual does not particularly want to do or to be.

*"napapagalitan ako ng boss ko so umalis ako at naghanap ng ibang trabaho, habang ako'y naghahanap ng ibang malilipatan at nakasakay sa jeep napatawan ako sa kabilang bahagi ng isang building at aking nakita ang aking ina na hibintay sa isang gate upang magpalit ng mga tansan ng pepsi para meron kaming makakain yon and tumanim sa isip ko at naawa ako sa nanay ko at nasabi ko sa sarili ko na kapag tinawag ako o pabalikin sa trabaho magtitis na lang ako para sa nanay ko at para sa pamilya ko." -P6*

*"kung tutuusin ayoko talaga mangibang bansa kasi para sakin mas malaki ang halaga kapag maiiwan ang ina kasama ang mga anak kesa sa ama pero dahil sa hindi naman nakapagtapos ang asawa ko..ay napagdesiyunan ko nalang na umalis kesa makita kong hindi makakain ng maayos ang mga anak ko at hindi makapag-aral" -P9*

On the other hand, passive sacrifice refers to giving up something that you want to do or experience.

*"I need to save up more now for me to provide the needs of my child, no more unlimited shopping, no more hang out with friends because after class, I have to go straight to home to take care of my son, I need to sacrifice all that makes me happy in order for my child to have a better future." -P3*

*"malaki ang aming pamilya na talagang marami kaming magkakapatid..... may pagkakataon na nabihinto ako para bigyang daan ang mga kapatid ko... kaya mula't sapul ay naging working student ako para matustusan ang pag-aaral ko." -P7*

### ***Beyond Positive Thinking***

The participants accepted their role with willingness in their heart as they perceive it in a positive light. This resulted in a stronger faith in God. According to Sasson (2007), positive thinking is a mental attitude that admits into the mind thoughts, words and images that are conducive to growth, expansion and success. It also refers to the expectation of having a good or favourable outcome and the anticipation of happiness, joy, health, and success for every situation. In the words of the participants:

*"look always on positive kasi dito ka mag-move kung hindi puro problems. Puro maganda titignan mo, look on negative on a positive way"-P4*

*"naging matatag tsaka naging positive ka dahil sa mga experiences mo na yan dahil kapag naranasan mo yung hirap tapos naiahon mo yung sarili mo doon, parang nagkakaraoon ka nang.. ah .. confidence sa sarili mo tapos... si ab anu ab ganyan lang yan dati tapos ngayon umangat na yung buhay"-P1*

This factor also manifests the participants' faith in God. They have a positive outlook about life. This positive view in life is grounded on the participants' faith and trust in God.

*"being a breadwinner or simply solo parent, I realized that really before you are born your destiny has been designed by God. All the problems should be treated as trials wherein when are able to discern their purposes in your life, you would become matured and considered yourself a blessed one.. positive thinking makes hard life bearable and blissful" -P5*

*"yun yung pumunta ako sa baclaran church tapos I prayed to Mama Mary na sana, kunware sana ngayong week na ;to magkaroon ako ng pera kasi kelangan talaga... so after 2 days may dumating na grasya" -P7*

*"tinanggap ko ito ng buong puso dahil alam ko andito lang palagi sa tabi ko ang Diyos. Naniniwala ako na binigay niya sa akin ito dahil alam niyang makakaya ko, optimism ang pinapairal ko sa buhay, dahil the more na isipin ko bakit naging ganito, mas lalo lang akong mabihirapan" -P8*

### ***Becoming a Strong Person***

Ramsden (1992) as cited by Rachel Ong states that learning is best conceptualized as a change in the way in which people understand the world around them. This enables students to develop an understanding of themselves and their contexts, and the ways and situations in which they learn effectively (Savin-Baden, 2000 cited by Ong). This way developing a sense of understanding of their situation resulted in the participants learning from it, thus giving them the capability to handle their respective situations.

*"...ang advantage dun, you learned from your mistakes for the past years then umm, naging matibay kang tao diba...." -P10*

*"mas tumatag ang pagkatao ko kasi sakin sila umaaasa kung ako panghinaan ng loob pano na ang pamilya ko diba?" -P11*

On the other hand, it also shows that becoming a strong person is grounded in the sacrifices they make for the sake of their family. Because of an understanding of their current situation, they are willing to make the necessary sacrifices, thus making them stronger persons.

*"nung baguhang pa lang ako hindi mawala sa isip ko yung mukha ng mga anak ko na umiiyak nung paalis ako na halos nagdadalawang isip nako tumuloy pero kelangan magtiis kasi alam ko na para sa ikabubuti nila ang gagawin ko at dahil dun natutunan kong maging matatag at magsikap pa lalo para sa kanila." -P9*

### ***Fulfillment***

The participants showed a sense of happiness on being a breadwinner. Baumeister (1991) as cited by Wong (2012), suggested that a person feels a sense of happiness in achieving their goals.

*"it was fulfilling, knowing and seeing my son is happy, all of the hardships and sacrifice makes me realized it was all worth it" -P3*

*"Masaya na unti-unti nang nakukuntento kasi kapag nakikita kong maayos ang pamumuhay nila ngayon na nakapagtapos at may trabaho napapawi yung lungkot na nararamdam ko sa madaming taon, nagbunga labat ng paghibirap ko at alam ko darating din ang panahon na sila na mismo ang maalagaan ko ng buong-buo.." -P9*

*"bilang tagapagtuguyod mailalarawan na akoy sobrang galak, una dahil malaking tulong ito sa aking pamilya at bigit ko silang napapaligaya... mahal na mahal namin ang isa't isa kelangan namin ang pagtutulungan at maligaya ako sa ginawa ko." -P12*

Furthermore, it refers to the persons' sense of belief that their life is worth living and has value (Ieda & Muraki 1999).

*"you have the means to support your siblings and in return you earn respect...." -P4*

*"Wala naman akong katulong, anjan naman ang mga anak ko na na-aapreciate ang mga ginagawa ko sa kanila...kaya sapat na sa akin iyon..." -P8*

*"proud kasi kahit ako lang mag-isa ay nabibigyan ko ng magandang buhay ang mga anak ko." - P10*

### ***Identification***

Some participants are single parents who take on the role of being both the mother and the father to their child. However, it shows that though they portray two roles, there are no changes on how they perceive themselves. Instead both roles become part of their identities. This has been mentioned by Wollheim (1974, where a person forgets their own self in response of identifying or imagining someone else or becoming the other. However, the participants show that they do not forget their own identities, rather they share the perspective other people's view of their role (Bettelheim 1943as cited by Cohen 2001).

*"it wasn't easy to become a single parent, I become a father, a mother, a playmate, a caregiver, a teacher and a provider all the same time, playing all those roles for my son makes me realized that I can be of something" -P3*

*"naiisip ko dito na kabit ako lang ang mag-isa na bumubuhay sa kanila, naipadama ko na walang kulang sa kanila, tumayo ako bilang isang ina at ama sa kanila at alam kong naramdam nila iyon..." -P8*

However, one participant did not mention that she identified herself both as a mother and a father. However, her statements show a picture of taking into her identity the roles of various people.

*"I had to prepare the kids meals, clothing, school needs or everything.. I have to personally tutor the kids, when they are asleep I have to clean the house.... I had to impose discipline strictly and talk less because of limited time.." -P5*

The themes Independence and Feeling of Stress, Pressure and Worry identified in study of Meisenbach were also identified in this study.

### ***Independence***

Similar to Meseinbach's (2010) study about breadwinners, the statements from her participants show that they value their sense of capacity to provide their family needs. Independence is defined as having control, being capable of doing and does not rely on someone else.

*"when we were together, I provided my family's financial need, after the turbulent breakup I supported all their needs without a single centavo for educational support from their father..." -P5*

*"naiisip ko dito na kahit ako lang mag-isa na bumubuhay sa kanila, naipadama ko na walang kulang sa kanila..." -P8*

*"Kabit ako lang mag-isa ay nabibigyan ko ng magandang buhay ang mga anak ko.." -P10*

### ***Feeling of Stress, Pressure and Worry***

It occurs when an individual is not ready for the unexpected events in their life. Examples include when one worries about managing or providing the needs of her family, when pressured with one's own desire to repay the love her parents gave to her and when one has to continuously support her siblings even when she already has her own family.

*"my mind is full of doubts and uncertainty that I could not be a good parent for my child" -P3*

*"everyday since that separation seemed to be so tough. Working daily at my office, had to prepare the kids meals, personally tutor my children, doing household chores and had to impose discipline strictly and talk less coz of limited time." -P5*

*"Since I graduated for me kasi since my mom and dad help me to finish college, I should repay them for their hardworks and efforts they give.. aah minsan kasi pag alam mong gipit ka tapos mahirap magbudget nga nagagalit ka, hinde mo naiiwasang makapagbitiw na masasakit na salita kasi masakit din sa ulo minsan lalo na iisipin ko ako lang talaga inaasahan nila." -P11*

*"mahirap kasi kabit may asawa na ako at the same time pinag-aaral ko pa rin yung mga kapatid ko kahit na may asawa na ako, kabit gaano kahirap, gusto ko siya ibangon,... kaya kadalasan talaga medyo nakakaramdam talaga ako nang hirap, mahirap.." -P1*

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings show essential factors that define how Filipinas see themselves as a unique person taking the role of the breadwinner of their family. These are the following: (a) Acceptance, (b) Sacrifice, (c) Beyond Positive Thinking, (d) Becoming a Strong Person, (e) Fulfilment, (f) Identification, (g) Independence and (h) Feeling of Stress, Pressure and Worry.

Most of the participants come from families with financial problems. Their early life experiences build their sense of selves to become the breadwinner of their family. They have expressed that the lack of a person to provide the needs of their family urged them to strive, claim and accept the breadwinner role. According to Swann, Bosson & Pelham (2002) cited by Swann & Bosson, self-knowledge can shift somewhat easily to fit the demands of the current situation without eliciting troubling feelings of inconsistency or inauthenticity. With the early life experiences, they created a representation about their selves to find ways to provide for the needs, sacrificing their own happiness and the like, that later made them accept being a breadwinner. Furthermore, according to Rogers, as mentioned by Feist (2009), an individual wants to have their self-image consistent to the way they feel, experience, and behave.

### ***Determining the self-identity of Filipina breadwinners***

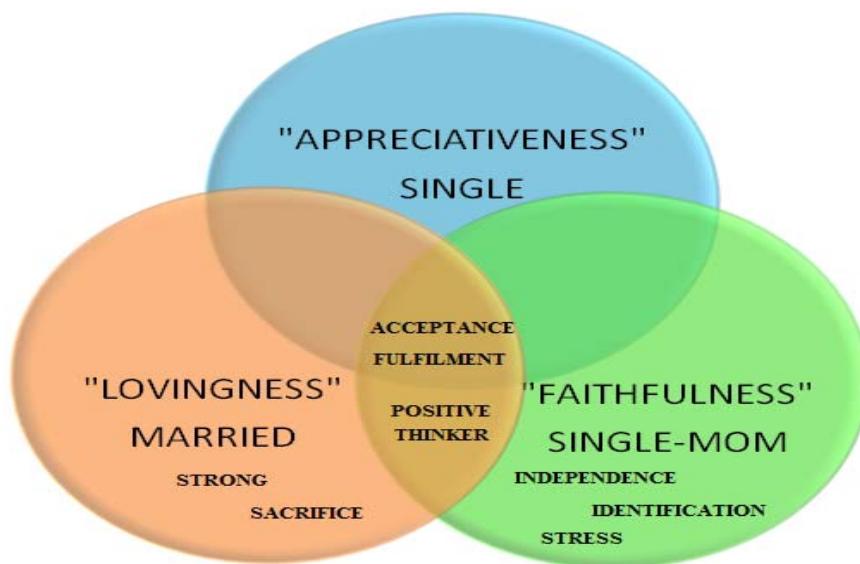
The first category of participants is the single Filipina breadwinner. The participants have an aim of giving back the love, care and support they received from their care providers when they were younger. As they gave back, it made them feel a sense of fulfilment as they know that it is for their family. The single Filipina breadwinner, who openly accepts their breadwinner role because they want to give back all the love, care and support they received when they were young illustrates their **Appreciativeness**.

The second category of participants is the married Filipina breadwinner. The participants took the role of being the breadwinner because of financial instability. They embrace the role with the aim of helping their families improve their state of living. As they embrace it, they become positive thinkers and strong persons, that later make them realize the feeling of fulfilment. This particular category demonstrates their **Lovingness** as persons who continuously express their love towards their family.

On the other hand, the study contrasted the idea of Bloemen and Stancanelli (2007) that when the husband does not take the role of being a breadwinner, the wife feels resentful for the husband's situation. Consequently, it makes the wife an unhappy female breadwinner and the husband is motivated to look for a job. In this study, the married participants expressed that they were happy being a breadwinner and their husbands are not demotivated or unhappy for them. They

were interviewed in front of their husbands, and they did not show signs of unhappiness with their breadwinner role.

The last category of participants is the single-mom Filipina breadwinner. The participants' experience of not having husbands / boyfriends with them made them gain a sense of independence. This is because they were able to have the control and capability to provide the needs of their family. Moreover, they take various roles as a result of their breadwinner position, but this does not change the way they see themselves as people. Furthermore, this sense of identification and independence is rooted in being a positive thinker and having a strong faith in God. However, feeling of stress, pressure and worries are evident to the participants who experienced unwanted pregnancy. These exemplify their **Faithfulness** to their self-identity despite of the many obstacles in their lives.



**Figure 1.**  
The LAF Model of Self-Identity

## CONCLUSION

The study identified eight essential factors in the identity formation of Filipina breadwinners. These are Acceptance, Sacrifice, Beyond Positive Thinking, Becoming a Strong Person, Fulfilment, Identification, Independence and Feeling of Stress, Pressure and Worry. From these eight factors, the Lovingness, Appreciativeness, and Faithfulness (LAF) model of self-identity of Filipina breadwinner was created.

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