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Culture masquerading, identity and organizational commitment

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This mixed method study examines the impact of culture masquerading among 488 Filipino customer service representatives handling international accounts. Culture masquerading is practised via taking on foreign names, locations and nationalities. Applying social identity theory, it is hypothesized and supported that masquerading of nationality is negatively related to cultural identity. As predicted, there is a positive relationship between cultural identity and organization commitment. No support is found for the hypothesis that cultural identity mediates the relationship between culture masquerading. Situated identity theory and economic, social, and historical influences are used to explain these findings.

Key words: call centre, colonialization, culture masquerading, identity, organization commitment, Philippines.

Juan Santos is at work answering inquiries from a client over the phone – which would not be unusual except that it is 3 am in Manila and the client is in New York. Juan, who calls himself Bob, identifies his location as Michigan and talks with a Mid-western accent. He chats with his caller about a snowstorm even as outside, it is the height of summer. This masquerading is part and parcel of the life of call centre workers, particularly in developing countries.

Globalization and technology have facilitated the on-line transfer of labour to developing countries with call centres representing a large segment of this outsourcing business. Businesses employing overseas outsourcing do so because of two major advantages – enhanced customer satisfaction and lower costs. Call centres operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, thus enhancing customer satisfaction. The lower costs are made possible when services are located in developing countries where labour wages are lower (Hechanova-Alampay, 2010).

The Philippines has benefitted from outsourcing and, recently, surpassed India as the largest call centre operator in the world. This is attributed to the large pool of computer-literate college graduates with English communication skills. The country is also known for its service culture, customer orientation, and affinity with American culture. Now employing 350 000 workers, the call centre industry generated \$6.3 billion revenue in 2010 (Yun & Chiu, 2011).

Although a boon to the economy, there is a downside to this industry. Call centre work has been described as stressful (Deery, Iversen, & Walsh, 2002). The work involves computer-aided telephone interactions with clients covering a variety of services. Customer service representatives

(CSRs) are expected to provide clients with information, process transactions, attend to enquiries, solicit sales, or obtain information accurately and speedily (Rose & Wright, 2005). The workload is heavy and call centre agents have little time to rest between calls (Pal, 2004). In addition, because they provide services to foreign organizations, working hours and holidays are adapted to clients' time zones (Yun & Chiu, 2011). Not surprisingly, despite high wages, the call centre industry has one of the highest turnover rates in the country (Hechanova-Alampay, 2010).

Beyond the workload and hours, some call centres require CSRs to masquerade their identities by reporting fictitious names and locations. CSRs are given intensive language training to neutralize their accents and sound more like their clients. CSRs are also provided cultural training so their clients will not suspect that the person they are talking to is in a different country. How do CSRs perceive culture masquerading and how does this affect their identity? We use social identity theory to examine the impact of culture masquerading on call centre workers.

Social identity theory and its formation

Social identity theory (SIT) suggests that one's self-concept is comprised of a personal identity and a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Personal identity is defined by individual characteristics such as traits and abilities whereas social identity is determined by the characteristics of one's salient groups. Such membership leads individuals to develop a sense of who they are and what their values, goals, beliefs and behaviours should be (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Although social identity can be derived from one's family and peer groups, it is likewise defined by membership of a larger community. According to Jensen (2003), cultural identity is shaped by the beliefs and behaviours that one shares with members of

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one's community. These cultural beliefs are typically passed on from generation to generation via everyday interactions and customs.

An individual's social identity is composed of an amalgam of identities linked to their roles and group memberships. When conflict occurs between organizationally situated identities and personal identities, individuals may respond in different ways. They may define themselves in terms of their most valued identity and reduce the significance of other identities. Given environmental pressure, they may also seek to minimize, deny or rationalize the conflict. Another possibility is that they comply sequentially with conflicting identities so that the inconsistencies need not be resolved (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The practice of culture masquerading in call centres presents an interesting context in which to view social identity. On one hand, culture masquerading is practised only during client interactions. These performances may be viewed as enactments of 'situated identities' or the behaviours we adopt according to what is socially desirable (Alexander & Lauderdale, 1977). Thus, it is quite normal to shift the way we talk, walk, dress, act, etc., depending on the social, cultural, or political demands of a given context. On the other hand, there are those who contend that culture masquerading is an implicit form of discrimination. According to Professor Harish Trivedi of Delhi University, 'It is the ultimate humiliation. We are being asked to pretend to be foreigners. No one wants to know us as being Indians – our identity is not good enough' (Pal, 2004, p. 32).

Thus, using SIT as a lens, this study examines how people view cultural masquerading and its impact on their cultural identity. This relationship is particularly important because culture masquerading is being practised in a country with a colonial past and an evolving national identity.

Colonialism and the evolution of the Philippine identity

The Philippines was first colonized by Spain from 1856 to 1896, followed by the United States (USA) from 1901 to 1946, and then by Japan from 1942 to 1945 (Larkin, 1982). Even when the Philippines gained its independence, the influences of Spain and the USA, particularly on religion, language, culture, politics, education, and business remained. The Japanese, appalled at the extent of colonial influence, promoted the use of the national language and the appreciation of Filipino cultural traditions as part of their 'Asia for Asians' policy. However, Japan had little cultural influence on the country, perhaps because of its short rule, the atrocities Japanese soldiers committed during their invasion, and the eventual liberation of the country with the help of Americans (Roces, 1994).

The consensus among many post-war nationalists was that colonial rule had a negative effect on Filipino identity and that the Filipino was a 'lost soul.' However, there was a lack of agreement on how to address this identity crisis. There were those who encouraged the repudiation of the colonial past. They believed that the Filipino identity resided with the masses and tribal Filipinos who were least influenced by the colonial culture. On the other hand, there were those who saw colonialism as part and parcel of the Filipino identity. Given its pervasive influence and integration into Philippine society, they recommended the appreciation of this heritage as something that must be understood and even preserved (Roces, 1994).

The issue of identity permeated political and economic institutions as well. In 1959, President Garcia launched a 'Filipino First' policy to ensure that Filipinos were given control of their own trade, capital, and business resources. Laws were later passed requiring that the novels of National hero José Rizal be compulsory reading, and for Philippine history to be taught in the national language. Filipinization also took the form of turning over foreign-owned industries to Filipinos and for citizens to acquire top management positions that were previously reserved for American expatriates. This managerial revolution likewise permeated the media and religious institutions (Roces, 1994).

The debate on Filipino identity peaked in the 1960s. The confidence and pride in being Filipino was further emphasized by ex-President Marcos' nationalism campaign that exalted the racial traits of Filipinos – flat noses, slanted eyes, and brown skin (Roces, 1994). Another offshoot in the development of Filipino identity was the questioning of the predominantly Western theory and methodology taught in schools and an assertion of indigenous perspectives and approaches. In psychology, for example, it was in this era that the concept of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology) took root. Its aim was to foster national identity and consciousness, social involvement, and a better understanding of the psychology of language and culture (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Although the orientation towards indigenous perspectives took root in education, politically, the quest for identity appeared to decline by the 1970s. Roces (1994) suggested three possible reasons for this. First, the Filipinos had become more confident and assured in their identity and were less threatened by other influences. Second, the goals of Filipinization were achieved and resulted in substantial financial and professional gains for Filipino intellectuals, businessmen, and politicians. Third, the problem of identity was eclipsed by problems of social justice, poverty, dictatorship, and the lack of freedom.

Ironically, the growing sense of nationalism worked against Marcos in the 1970s. Student activism led to rallies and demonstrations against Marcos' martial law and the continued presence of US military bases¹ (Roces, 1994).

The 1986 People Power revolution that led to the overthrow of Marcos further raised the pride of Filipinos as the world recognized it as a peaceful, bloodless revolution. The EDSA² revolution, as it is commonly called, became the symbol of the Filipino people's journey from colonial rule to independence and democracy (Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011), and is considered the most prominent national event in recent history (Montiel, 2010).

Twenty-five years after the liberation of the country against the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines has struggled to rebuild its democratic institutions and economy amidst several attempts to replicate the people power revolution in order to overthrow corrupt leaders (Montiel, 2010; Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011). The issue of identity has become even more complex given the influence of globalization and developments in information and communication technologies. Media and the Internet have exposed the young to different cultures like never before. The breaking down of trade barriers has led to an influx of foreign brands and merchandise. Overseas work and tourism have reinforced the connectedness that crosses spatial boundaries (Perterra, 2004).

Arnett (2002) suggests that adolescents in the world of globalization develop both a local identity that is shaped by interactions as well as a global identity that is shaped by the media. Perterra (2004) argues that globalization challenges the notion of culture as territorial, homogenous, and exclusive because it is both enriched and challenged by other cultural allegiances. He suggests that in such global modernity, the notion of a consensual and homogenous Filipino national culture is no longer tenable.

However, others argue that contact with other cultures may also serve to sharpen and strengthen the desire to preserve the uniqueness of local culture (Arnett, 2002). Despite its dominance worldwide, McDonalds has yet to beat the Philippine hamburger chain Jollibee that markets its products as having a 'Filipino taste'. Even as foreign brands have flooded the market, recent years have also seen the popularity of apparel sporting Philippine symbols and icons. The debate on language also remains vigorous. Although there are those who argue that English is the language of globalization and a competitive advantage for Filipinos, others argue for the greater use of Filipino³ to strengthen cultural identity (Laurel, 2005). For example, President Benigno Aquino III's inaugural address in Filipino was a sharp contrast to that of his predecessor and was lauded for its ability to 'resonate with the native soul' (Pangalangan, 2010).

The struggle to establish a national identity in the shadow of a colonial history is even more pronounced because of the Philippines' collectivist culture. Unlike individualistic cultures that emphasize self-interest over those of the collective, in collectivist cultures, the self is defined in terms of group membership (Hofstede, 2003).

Members of collectivist societies tend to view their work groups and organizations as a fundamental part of themselves (Matsumoto, 2000). Filipino anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano (1999) indicates, for example, that in the Filipino language there is no term for the pronouns 'he' or 'she'. The frequent use of the word 'ako' (I) is also frowned upon in Philippine culture and is seldom used in public because it is considered boastful, especially when referring to one's accomplishments.

Culture masquerading and identity

Social identity is formed through two critical processes – self-categorization and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000). In self-categorization, an individual identifies himself or herself with a particular social group. This leads to the accentuation of perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members. At the same time, social comparison accentuates the perceived differences with out-group members. Such accentuation shapes one's self-esteem. One's self-esteem is enhanced when the in-group is judged positively and the out-group is judged negatively (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). Related to this, group status also drives social identity. Group identity is likely to be stronger among high-status groups because their membership positively distinguishes group members from outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, a study of Hispanic first-year college students in an Ivy League university revealed that those who viewed their group as having lower status had weaker identification as Hispanic (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Because the practice of culture masquerading positions Filipinos as belonging to a lower status group, the study predicts that:

Hypothesis 1: CSRs who practice cultural masquerading will report less cultural identity than those who can reveal their true identity.

Cultural identity and organization commitment

SIT posits that individuals choose activities congruent with their identities and support institutions embodying these identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The study focuses on organization commitment, which has been defined as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Commitment is manifested in a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a desire to maintain organizational membership (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

Extending SIT, work socialization theory suggests that individuals want to be in work environments that are congruent with who they are. Moreover, if a person and their work environment are not congruent, the person will seek to change themselves, their environment, or both (Feij, van der Velde, Taris, & Taris, 1999). Given this, it is predicted that:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between cultural identity and organizational commitment.

Culture masquerading and organizational commitment

How would organizational practices such as culture masquerading impact organizational commitment? The SIT literature does not describe exactly how social identification occurs, however, Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest that organizational socialization, defined as the process in which a newcomer comes to understand an organization's policies, logistics, role expectations, behavioural norms, power, and status structures, may either have a direct or indirect effect on how workers feel about the company that employs them. They posit that it may be possible to internalize an organization's culture without necessarily identifying with it. However, they also acknowledge the possibility of an indirect effect. That is, socialization affects identity, which, in turn, affects internalization. They suggest that the impact of socialization will vary according to organizations and roles. They cite the example of military and religious organizations that seek to reconstruct a newcomer's social identity by divesting them of symbols of previous identities, imposing new identities, and prescribing, punishing, and rewarding new behaviours. The authors posit that the 'greater the individual role requirements deviate from the societal mainstream, the greater the need for organizationally situated identifications' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 27).

The above argument has been applied to regular organizations and professional roles. Call centres, however, are quite unique. On one hand, the divestiture of cultural identity is temporal. CSRs employ culture masquerading only during actual calls. On the other hand, given the volume and workload of CSR's this 'script' occurs again and again throughout the day. Moreover, in certain call centres, culture masquerading is imposed and there are sanctions for non-compliance. CSRs are rewarded not just for their productivity but also for their compliance with standards and procedures. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, culture masquerading represents a deviance from societal mainstream especially in a collectivist culture such as the Philippines. Given this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Cultural identity will mediate the relationship between masquerading practices and organizational commitment.

In addition to the above hypotheses, the study elicits the reactions and perceptions of Filipino call centre workers regarding the practice of culture masquerading.

Phase one: qualitative study

The study used a mixed-method approach to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase, a grounded approach was used to explore the phenomenon of culture masquerading. In the second phase, a survey was administered to obtain quantitative data on the relationship of culture masquerading on identity and organization commitment.

Methods

In this phase, the grounded theory approach as described by Creswell (2007) was adopted. The in-depth interviews elicited how CSRs experience culture masquerading (core phenomenon), their attributions of the practice (causal conditions), the strategies they employed (strategies), and its effects (consequences).

Sample

Interviews were conducted with call centre representatives from eight call centres. Creswell (2007) suggests that data gathered should be conducted until a saturation point is reached and no new ideas emerge. Such saturation point emerged at the 25th interview but an additional interview was conducted, for a total of 26 interviews. Sixteen interviewees were female (62%). The age of interviewees ranged from 20 to 43 years ($M = 26$ years, $SD = 5$). Fourteen (54%) of the agents handled customer service accounts, 31% handled sales, and the rest handled process outsourcing or technical accounts. Sixty-five percent handled inbound accounts and 92% were in outsourced (as opposed to in-house) call centres. The interviews lasted one to two hours. On average, the transcriptions were 1100 words long.

Instrumentation

The in-depth interviews were open-ended. Interviewers were trained and given an interview guide that consisted of three sets of questions: preliminary (How long have you been a call centre agent? What do you do as a CSR?); culture masquerading (What type of culture training do you receive? Do you use a different name? Why? Do you report your true nationality? Why?); and impact (How does this impact you? How do you feel about your work?). All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

Thematic content analysis was conducted by identifying the categories and subcategories that emerged from the transcription data. Open coding was conducted to elicit the central phenomenon of culture masquerading, perceived causes, strategies, and perceived impact. Initially, the lead researcher went through the transcription and identified the themes. Two researchers validated the initial categories and coded the data independently. The lead researcher validated their coding. Inter-rater reliability using Perrault & Leigh's Index of Reliability (1989) was 0.71.

Interview results

Culture masquerading in call centres

The interviews revealed that culture masquerading was manifested in terms of name, location, and nationality.

Name masquerading

Half of the interviewees reported using Western names. As some interviewees reported, 'You're going to pretend to be an American. If you're at work, you're not Reda anymore. You're Halle Brown now'. Although this is a requirement in some call centres, changing one's name is only optional for others, 'If your name sounds Filipino, it would be much better if you would change it to an American name'. However, when prodded by their clients, some CSRs do admit that they are Filipinos or are in the Philippines. This makes it awkward for them to explain why they have American names. Some call centre agents report being embarrassed at the charade. When asked why they have an American name, they would make up a reason, like having an American father.

Location masquerading

Some CSRs were allowed to reveal their ethnicity but not their location, 'We have to tell them that I'm actually Filipina but based in California which is our headquarters'.

Nationality masquerading

Some CSRs also reported false nationalities, as one explained, 'My last name is Martinez, so sometimes if my client asking me, "What's your nationality?" I tell them that I'm half Filipina and half Spanish and that I grew up here in California'.

The interviews also revealed that CSRs are typically given training on the language, culture, history, and geography of a particular country. Explained one agent, 'You need to know their jargon and idioms. For example they don't say "encash your check" in the US, it's just "cash your check". [Here] we say, "hold your line" which will

sound weird for them because they just say "please hold" '.

CSRs also receive accent training. One CSR explained, 'We are taught to neutralize our accent and speak with an American accent. The point is to sound like them. When you get asked, "Where are you from?" that probably means they can detect you aren't American. Others even reported learning several types of accents: "I had to learn their accents since our clients are all over the United States. Like the accent of New Yorkers is different from Texans'. Two CSRs reported that in their call centre, they were not allowed to speak anything but English even in between calls to prevent clients who were speaking to other CSRs from hearing them.

Beyond language, call centres also provide training on the culture of the host clients. As explained by one agent, 'We had to memorize all the states and their capitals. We had to learn their times zones and culture'. The training also includes weather and current events, as explained by one CSR, 'I have to be aware also about their weather because sometimes, a client would ask "How's the weather there? Is it rainy? Sunny? Cloudy?"'. Another agent explained, 'I have to know current events because in sales you have to build rapport. For example, I'm talking to someone from Florida I'd say, "Oh, you know what? Miami lost the game today and Dallas won'.

Other than current events and geography, the training also includes culture and norms. As explained by one CSR, 'During the training, they taught us how to deal with different types of people or different types of American clients'.

Attributions of cultural masquerading

When asked why culture masquerading is practised, responses fell into the following themes: discrimination, backlash against outsourcing, shortens handling time, and security.

Discrimination

A number of CSRs attributed culture masquerading to discriminatory attitudes: 'I think it is discrimination. If they hear that your accent is not totally like theirs, they're gonna drop the call (sic)' and 'We are supposed to use American names because some Americans don't want to talk with foreigners'. Although some suggested that the discrimination is directed against non-Americans in general, there are those who think that the discrimination is directed towards Asians, 'They will not talk to you if they know you are Asian. They will just bang the phone on you' or 'When they hear your accent they ask, "Are you Indian or Filipino?"'. Others suggested that the discrimination is directed at people in developing countries, 'There are some Americans who will say, "Oh, I don't speak to the Third World (sic)"'. Still others felt that the discrimination is directed at

Filipinos in particular, 'It seems they are mad at Filipinos. Like they look down on us' or 'I have experienced this many times they will say, "Ah, Filipino!" and they hang up'. However, other CSRs noted a shift in the attitudes of their customers: 'Before, it was frequent for customers to demand to speak to an American. But that doesn't happen as often anymore'.

Backlash against outsourcing

Another attribution for culture masquerading is economic. One CSR explained that the clients in the developing countries are upset because outsourcing has meant loss of jobs: 'Actually, it's not directly you're a Filipina. They don't want to talk to someone who is outside the States. He said Indians and Filipinos are taking away jobs from Americans'.

Shortens handling time

A common explanation for name masquerading is its convenience. As one agent explained, 'The shorter your call the better. Sometimes, when you give your name and they don't understand it, they will ask for it again. So I'd rather give a name that is easy to understand'.

Security

Still another attribution for name masquerading is protection. Recounted one CSR, 'Some customers, if they don't like your response will ask for your name and location. We are not allowed to divulge these for security purposes'.

Coping strategies

The interviews revealed different responses to culture masquerading. There were those who felt it had no impact on them and others who reported change in their cultural identity.

No impact

Some CSRs reported that culture masquerading does not affect them. Others described culture masquerading as simply role-playing. As explained by a CSR, 'When you put on your headset, you become a different person. We become actors and actresses. You can be a different voice on Monday and on Tuesday you have a different diction'. Another agent revealed, 'When you are in the pantry⁴ you are Filipino, but when you are on the floor you are a different person. You try to be a different person for the sake of the customer'.

Changes in cultural identity

However, other CSRs reported experiencing changes in terms of language, attitudes, cross-cultural awareness, and pride in one's own culture.

Shifts in language

As some call centre agents explained, 'Sometimes, at home, my family will criticize me because of the strange way I speak English. I tell them that it's because that's what I do the whole week' and 'Sometimes when I go out with my friends, I can't avoid speaking in English while they're talking Tagalog because I'm used to it already'.

Shifts in attitudes. Other CSRs reported that they are beginning to imbibe the attitude of their clients: 'Sometimes I find myself acting like them. Like when I am the customer, I get pissed and hang up'. Others reported positive changes such as increased patience ('Basically you learn to be patient and how to get along with other people'), improved communication skills ('It enhanced my communication skills'), as well as confidence in relating to foreigners ('Before, I would avoid speaking to foreigners. Now, I am more comfortable').

Greater cultural awareness. CSRs also reported greater cultural awareness. Some of the perceptions were positive: 'American people are actually fun people too. They are actually easy to get along with as long as you get down to business'. However, the interactions also generated negative stereotypes. As one CSR reported, 'Americans are very demanding, they're very aggressive because their attitude is, "Hey I work for my money, I deserve 100% service, so I have the right to demand" '.

Inferiority. For some CSRs, the experience made them feel inferior: 'Your client says – you Filipinos suck! Yeah, I really feel embarrassed' and 'You develop an inferiority . . . you really feel degraded when they curse you'.

Pride in own culture. However, CSRs who were able to identify their nationality also reported many positive experiences. One CSR recounted: 'We have callers who will say "Oh Filipinos are really intelligent, very knowledgeable" '. Not surprisingly, a common theme among CSRs is the belief that Filipinos are well suited to customer service jobs. They cited traits such as cheerfulness, adaptability, and patience as assets that make them great in customer service. As one call centre agent said, 'Indians are really good in sales. But no one can beat the Filipino when it comes to providing excellent customer service'. Some call centre agents reported that the number of compliments usually outnumber the complaints. As recounted by one CSR, 'There are times you really feel good about being Pinoy.⁵ Like when I get callers who find out I'm a Filipino and say, "Oh you Filipinos are the most hospitable people I know". That makes you feel good'.

Even the negative experiences served to reinforce pride in their culture. One CSR explained, 'Americans are good, but they are all business. They won't even say "Good-bye"

or “Thanks”. We Filipinos, are much more loving people. So if you ask me if I plan to migrate, I still prefer to be a Filipino and stay here in our country’. Another remarked: ‘Before I used to think foreigners were superior to us. Now, I realize that’s not necessarily true’.

Whether from positive or negative interactions, such reinforcement does not happen when culture masquerading is practised. As one CSR said, ‘Sometimes we think it’s a pity that we can’t say we are from the Philippines. We want to be proud of our work especially because we know we do good work’. Interestingly, the interviews reveal that in a number of companies, there appears to have been a shift in policy with regards to masquerading: ‘I experienced the time when we could not reveal our location. But after a year of good performance in our campaign, we were allowed to say that we were calling from the Philippines. That makes me proud because that was a major change’.

Consequences

Despite the booming call centre industry, the majority of CSRs appear to view their work as temporary. Some comments included: ‘I’m giving myself just a few more years here because I want to experience a normal work life’, ‘I don’t want to do this anymore. I’m just waiting for the right time for me to resign – maybe before this year ends. I wanna try a new career, something different’ and ‘Eventually, I want do work related to my course’.

Beyond the stress of client interactions, CSRs also mentioned other reasons for their leaving, such as the night work (‘I don’t want to be working graveyard my whole life. You don’t have a social life’), and its impact on their health (‘I have to sleep like 2:00 in the afternoon and then wake up at 5:00 in the afternoon and go at work . . . you don’t really get enough sleep and get sick easily’). They also cited the volume of calls (‘We receive calls at least 80 calls to a hundred calls a day’) and long hours (‘It really burns you out . . . 8 to 9 h, and sometimes it extends to 11 h here in the office. Then we go home, eat and spend like you know 6 or 7 h of sleep, wake up, then do the routine again’).

Yet many CSRs appear to be staying mainly because of the money: ‘You have to admit that it pays better than other companies’ and ‘I have my own money, I can buy anything and I can help out at home’. A few recognized the career potential in the booming industry: ‘Yes, I see myself staying in this career because there’s actually a career growth here’. Others also enjoy the company and its people: ‘I would like to stay here because I’m happy with the benefits, the people, and the company in general’.

Phase two: quantitative data

This phase focused on eliciting quantitative data to test the relationship between the study variables. However, because

the causal conditions for culture masquerading could not be validly measured nor controlled, the survey focused on the phenomenon of culture masquerading, culture identity, and their consequences.

Methods

Sample

Initially, researchers contacted call centres that were members of the Contact Center Association of the Philippines ($N = 30$). A survey questionnaire was created and piloted to a sample of 30 CSRs. After the scales were tested for reliability, the final survey was administered to 1800 call centre agents from 10 call centres (30% response rate). However, only agents currently handling international accounts were included in this study. This consisted of 488 call centre agents from six call centres. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 45 years with an average age of 24.5 years ($SD = 3.53$). Number of years of service ranged from less than a year to five years with an average of 12 months ($SD = 10$). There were an equal number of males and females. A majority of customer service representatives were single (85%) and handled inbound accounts (74%). The nature of the work varied with a majority handling technical services (39%), customer services (33%), sales (18%), and other services (10%).

Measures

The survey consisted of three sub-scales.

Culture masquerading practices. Culture masquerading is a practice designed to hide one’s real culture. All call centres in our study employed the use of English, accent training, and adapted to their client country’s holidays and work schedules. Thus, the survey elicited information on three forms of culture masquerading that differentiated organizations – name, location, and nationality masquerading. Name masquerading was coded as ‘1’ if real names were used, and ‘2’ if CSRs practised name masquerading. Location masquerading was coded ‘1’ if real location was identified, and ‘2’ if CSRs masqueraded their location. Nationality masquerading was coded ‘1’ if CSRs were allowed to reveal they are Filipinos, and ‘2’ if they masqueraded their nationality.

Cultural identity. Identification with one’s nationality is defined as valuing one’s nationality and culture. Given the absence of a reliable local measure, a scale was constructed based on the interview results. It consisted of six items: ‘I think of myself as a Filipino’; ‘I feel good about being Filipino’; ‘Practicing Filipino values are important to me’; ‘I have a strong sense of being a Filipino’; ‘I am

Table 1 Means & (standard deviation) of cultural identity by culture masquerading practice

	Means and (standard deviation)		Estimated marginal means and (standard error)	
	No (<i>N</i> = 320) 66%	Yes (<i>N</i> = 168) 34%	No (<i>N</i> = 320) 66%	Yes (<i>N</i> = 168) 34%
Name masquerading	4.46 (0.68)	4.37 (0.79)	4.02 (0.13)	4.10 (0.11)
Location masquerading	4.44 (0.68)	4.42 (0.80)	3.73 (0.16)	4.39 (0.06)
Nationality masquerading	4.48 (0.64)	4.14 (1.04)	4.49 (0.04)	3.64 (0.17)

Table 2 Analysis of variance test on cultural identity by culture masquerading practice

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Name masquerading	0.10	1	0.10	0.21	0.65
Location masquerading	7.37	1	7.37	15.18	0.00
Nationality masquerading	12.09	1	12.09	24.90	0.00
Name* Location masquerading	0.06	1	0.06	0.12	0.73
Name * Nationality masquerading	0.06	1	0.06	0.13	0.72
Location * Nationality masquerading	4.64	1	4.64	9.55	0.00
Name* Location* Nationality Masquerading	0.47	1	0.47	0.96	0.32

proud of being Filipino'; and 'Being able to speak in Filipino is important to me'. Items utilized a five-point scale with higher scores indicating greater cultural identification. The internal consistency reliability of this scale was $\alpha = 0.93$.

Organization commitment. This is the extent to which an individual identifies with, is proud of and is inspired by the organization such that he/she is willing to invest effort to ensure the success of the organization. It was measured using the short version of Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979) Organization Commitment Questionnaire. The short version has nine items such as 'I really care about the fate of this organization'. Items utilized a seven-point scale with a higher score indicating greater organization commitment. The OCQ has been used and shown to be reliable in previous local studies (Cementina, Pangan, & Yabut, 2005; Pangan, Hechanova, Franco, Mercado, & Lopez, 2006). The internal consistency reliability of this scale was $\alpha = 0.93$.

Survey results

Culture masquerading and cultural identity

It was hypothesized that customer service representatives who are required to mask their identity will report lower cultural identity. This was partially supported. Masquerading of name did not have any significant influence on cultural identity (see Table 1). However, those who were

allowed to identify their nationality reported higher scores in cultural identity (*Marginal Means* = 4.49, *SE* = 0.04) compared to those who masqueraded their nationality (*Marginal Means* = 3.64, *SE* = 0.17) ($F(1,465) = 24.89$, $p < 0.00$). In addition, those who were allowed to identify their location reported higher scores in cultural identity (*Marginal Means* = 3.73, *SE* = 0.16) compared with those who masqueraded their nationality (*Marginal Means* = 4.40, *SE* = 0.06) ($F(1,465) = 15.18$, $p < 0.00$). The interaction between location and nationality masquerading also accounted for a significant variance ($F(1,465) = 9.55$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 2).

Culture identity and organization commitment

The results supported the hypothesis that cultural identity is positively correlated with organization commitment. Specifically, agents with higher scores for cultural identity reported greater commitment to their organizations ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.00$) (see Table 3).

Cultural masquerading and organization commitment

The final hypothesis predicted that cultural identity would mediate the relationship of culture masquerading and organization commitment. This was not supported. Mediation requires that the predictor variables are correlated to both mediator outcome variables. As seen in Table 3, nationality masquerading was significantly correlated to

Table 3 Correlations between variables

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1) Name masquerading	1.34	0.48	1.00			
2) Location masquerading	1.35	0.48	0.21**	1.00		
3) Nationality masquerading	1.14	0.35	0.18**	0.49**	1.00	
4) Cultural identity	4.43	0.72	-0.06	-0.01	-0.16**	1.00
5) Organization commitment	5.27	1.02	-0.10**	-0.18**	-0.07	0.16**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

cultural identity ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.02$). However, the correlation between nationality masquerading and organization commitment was not significant ($r = -0.07$, *n.s.*), thus no regression analysis was conducted. Interestingly, although mediation does not exist, there appears a direct relationship between name masquerading and organization commitment ($r = -0.10$, $p < 0.02$). Likewise, location masquerading had a significant correlation with organization commitment ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.00$).

Discussion

This study sought to test the impact of culture masquerading using SIT. Results revealed that, as hypothesized, masquerading of nationality and location is significantly related to cultural identity but masquerading of names is not. However, this is understandable given that cultural identity in this study was defined in terms of national culture. Among the three types of culture masquerading, it is location and nationality masquerading that determines whether a CSR can identify their nationality unlike name masquerading that stops at the level of the individual.

The significant differences in social identity between those who masquerade their location and nationality may be explained using SIT. Social identity is formed through social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000) and one's self-esteem is enhanced when the in-group is judged positively and the out-group is judged negatively (Ellemers *et al.*, 1997). Interviews with CSRs who are allowed to identify their nationality revealed a feeling of pride, especially when they are complimented for their service. A recurring theme in the interviews was the belief that Filipinos are great in customer service. Conversely, some CSRs who experience discrimination react to the threat against their cultural identity using what Huddy (2001) describes as 'social creativity'. That is, they elevate the importance of positive in-group characteristics (i.e., we are not rude like them) that confer superiority over the out-group. Whether motivated by positive or negative feedback, the building up of one's cultural identity is not possible among those who practice culture masquerading.

The results validate the hypothesized relationship between cultural identity and organization commitment. As

work socialization theory suggests, individuals want to be in work environments that are congruent with whom they are (Feij *et al.*, 1999). In the course of the study, we discovered one call centre that harnessed national pride as a means to motivate their agents. Leaders regularly remind employees that Filipinos have a gift for such work and challenge agents to look at themselves as representing their country. Interestingly, this call centre had the highest scores on cultural identity and organizational commitment.

We predicted that the relationship between culture masquerading and organization commitment would be mediated by cultural identity. Unfortunately, this was not supported. Although nationality masquerading is inversely related to cultural identity and cultural identity is positively related to organizational commitment, masquerading is not significantly correlated to organization commitment.

One possible explanation for this comes from the concept of situated identity or the 'dispositional imputations about an individual that are conveyed by his actions in a particular social context' (Alexander & Knight, 1971, p. 1). According to situated identity theory, individuals are confronted by behavioural alternatives given the demands of a certain situation. The theory predicts that individuals choose the most favourably evaluated situational identity. Our study revealed that some CSRs attribute the need for nationality masquerading to labour economics. At the same time, the interviews suggested that the motivation to take on call centre work is largely financial. The Philippines' unemployment and underemployment rate is 7.2% and 19%, respectively. Further, 80% of the unemployed are below the age of 35 years (National Statistics Office, 2012). Given that the majority of CSRs are young and in their first jobs (Hechanova-Alampay, 2010), the need for continuing employment may override whatever consequences nationality masquerading has on organization commitment.

Beyond an economic lens, the results may also be viewed from the perspective of culture and history. The Philippines has a long history of colonial rule and, in fact, the term 'Filipino' did not exist before the Spanish colonizers used that term (Bartolome, 1985). Thus, the results may manifest the lack of clarity and salience of a Filipino identity. It may even be argued that culture masquerading is a modern-day subjugation of a former colonial master and a continued

acceptance of inequality from the colonized. Still another interpretation is that results reflect the high-power distance culture of the Philippines. In such cultures, individuals expect power to be distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2003). In the interviews, CSRs perceived culture masquerading as a necessity because it is dictated by clients and thus, beyond the control of the organization.

Interestingly, masquerading of name and location is significantly related to organizational commitment, although masquerading of nationality is not. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989) individuals have multiple identities. However, they may define themselves in terms of their most valued identity. In collectivist cultures such as the Philippines, one's aspirations, loyalties, and identities are influenced by one's social groups (Hofstede, 2003). In the Filipino social structure, the basic structure is kinship – defined not just in terms of one's nuclear family, but also in terms of one's kin group. This kin group is composed of relatives, playmates, and neighbours. Thus, name and location masquerading may have a greater influence because they represent kinship identifications that are more salient than national identity.

Recommendations for future research

Although the study provides interesting insights on the phenomenon of culture masquerading, one limitation is its cross-sectional design. It is suggested that researchers explore a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-measures to better isolate the impact of culture masquerading on cultural identity.

In addition, future researches may wish to measure CSRs' attributions of masquerading practices. It would be interesting to see whether such explanations would moderate the relationship between masquerading practices and identity.

The study examined cultural identity as an outcome of culture masquerading. However, researchers may also wish to examine other variables linked to social identity such as self-esteem and ethnocentrism.

Huddy (2001) also suggests the importance of salience. Cultural identity becomes salient particularly for CSRs handling international clients. Future researchers may wish to compare the cultural identity of CSRs handling international clients with those handling local accounts.

In addition, the study focused on identification with one's national culture. However, as suggested by Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, cross-cultural exposure may actually generate dual identification with both home and host cultures. Other researchers may wish to explore the existence of multiple identifications on the part of call centre agents who handle international accounts.

Similarly, future researchers may wish to examine whether age moderates the relationship of culture masquerading and identity. Although CSRs tend to be young, there

is also an increasing trend in hiring more mature workers. The nature of cultural identity of older workers may be different from that of the younger generation, which, because of media and the Internet, has grown up with more global influences.

The study was limited to call centres in the Philippines. Given the increasing outsourcing in developing countries, it would be worthwhile investigating if the study will yield similar results in other countries that are practising culture masquerading.

Limitations notwithstanding, the results of this study provide insight on the impact of culture masquerading. The virtual migration of labour has many advantages especially for developing countries that are badly in need of employment. Hence, the call centre industry boosts the host economy by providing badly needed jobs. In a sense it also prevents 'brain drain' and keeps families intact. However, there is a downside to call centre work – particularly when organizations require their workers to employ culture masquerading. Although it has been observed that the call centre industry is changing and that the use of culture identity masquerading appears on the wane, it is still required by some clients. Even as discrimination is a reality for CSRs who reveal their cultural identity, it appears that the alternative to culture masquerading may be even more detrimental. Call centres need to recognize that name and location masquerading are associated with reduced organization commitment. Thus, in the long run, it may create even more challenges for them in retaining their workers.

In terms of the impact of virtual migration on a macro-level, Rizvi (2005) argues that beyond the economic effects of transnational flows, it is also necessary to understand its effects on cultural and political relations, as well as professional identities across national boundaries. The study shows that nationality masquerading is negatively associated with cultural identity. Thus, developing countries at the receiving end of outsourcing should be aware of the social costs of culture masquerading in terms of its impact on cultural identity. This may be especially important in countries with a colonial past and whose identity is still developing. Even though the outsourcing industry provides employment and supports the economy, the question is whether the economic gains justify the social costs of cultural masquerading.

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Endnotes

1. US military bases were closed in 1992 after the expiration of the Military Bases Agreement and the Philippine Senate rejected an extension.

2. Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue was the highway where protesters converged and stayed until the end of the revolution.
3. Now the official language under the 1987 Philippine Constitution. It is based on various regional languages of the Philippines, primarily Tagalog, the dominant language in the capital region.
4. Eating area.
5. Slang for Filipino.

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