

THE INDIAN CALL CENTER EXPERIENCE

A Case Study in Changing Discourses of Identity, Identification, and Career in a Global Context

Mahuya Pal
Patrice Buzzanell
Purdue University

This study examines the processes by which workers in a particular Indian call center located in Kolkata expanded on, negotiated, and chose among an array of possible, especially new, identities and identifications and the ways that these choices affected changing social discourses. Our case study depicted a workplace that was simultaneously casual and urgent, temporal and spatially free and constrained, situated in both Indian and U.S. cultures, and oriented toward business and night-club ambiances. Within this particular workplace, call center employees (re)constructed and negotiated among an array of discourses that bracketed opportunities for particular identities and identifications. Through these negotiation processes, they (a) engaged in strategic identity(ies) invocations and (b) reframed work, career, and family discourses and practices.

Keywords: *call centers in India; identity; identifications; discourse; organizational communication; work; career*

Organizational communication researchers increasingly focus on organizations' adaptations of their internal structures and processes to market pressures and how communicative processes adapt to and alter these changing organizational structures (Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallois, 2004; Taylor, Flanagan, Cheney, & Seibold, 2001). Nowhere are these communicative and structural challenges more evident than in contexts where local practices meet globalization imperatives. In cases such as these, workers' accounts of their work and organizational culture provide

Mahuya Pal (MSc, Calcutta University) is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Purdue University. Patrice M. Buzzanell (PhD, Purdue University) is a professor in the Department of Communication at Purdue University. Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Mahuya Pal and Patrice Buzzanell, Department of Communication, Steven C. Beering Hall of Liberal Arts and Education 2114, Purdue University, 100 North University Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2098; e-mail: mpal@purdue.edu, buzzanel@purdue.edu.

Journal of Business Communication, Volume 45, Number 1, January 2008 31-60

DOI: 10.1177/0021943607309348

© 2008 by the Association for Business Communication

entry points for seeing how identity constructions unfold and shift based on competing micro- and macrodiscourses.

This case study of one particular call center in India explores the identity(ies) constructions and communicative challenges associated with globalization in a transnational workplace culture. Call centers are unique workplaces and organizational cultures because they belong to multiple geographical spaces (e.g., North Atlantic and Asian, domestic and overseas, high and low technology, and particular country, city, organizational, and workplace spaces; see Shome, 2006). Their spaces and cultures offer arrays of possible structural positions (i.e., locations within work and nonwork networks) and discursive as well as sociocultural resources (i.e., linguistic, historical, and cultural devices that guide individuals' interpretations of events and action and influence their representations of self) on which employees can draw when they choose their different identifications and (re)position their identities (S. Hall, 1996; Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Intersections of space, identifications, and identity(ies) become evident in the ways in which work is enacted and described.

Indian call center work involves employees' providing voice-to-voice service to clients dialing toll-free numbers primarily in North America. They learn American accents, work at night to cater to U.S. time zones, and adjust to an altered social and family life. They are expected to be conversant with day-to-day American issues to the extent that they are able to carry on casual conversations with clients (Mirchandani, 2004; Shome, 2006). Although the global clientele is spread across Europe and Australia, our case study focuses largely on U.S. clients associated with a number of different companies, including British Airways, TechneCall, Swiss Air, Dell Computers, America Online, GE Capital, American Express, General Electric, Goldman Sachs, and AT&T (Mirchandani, 2004; Shome, 2006). Call center employees make telemarketing calls and cater to customers on insurance claims, credit cards, computer hardware, network connections, banking, and financial plans. So cost effective and productive are these centers that the call center industry grew 59% to \$2.3 billion between 2002 and 2003 (Sharma, 2003), and the number of foreign companies outsourcing to India increased from 60 in 2000 to 800 by the end of 2003, an increase of more than 1200% (Mirchandani, 2004). Dell alone has a 30-site call center network located in four major Indian cities and an expected 15,000 workers by 2008 (Ribeiro, 2006). With its high growth potential, total industry employment is expected to reach 600,000 by 2007, according to International Data Corporation, India (Sharma, 2003).

The call center industry is well situated within India's global leadership with its offshore information technology and business process outsourcing

industries increasing at an annual rate greater than 25% and generating export revenues of \$60 billion by 2010 (NASSCOM, National Association of Software and Service Companies, 2005). Indian call centers represent a new form of organizational process that embodies complex spaces at the intersections of “globalization, telecommunications and the intensifying of transnational and translocal dynamics” (Sassen, 2000a, p. 146). The experiences of employees do not involve transnational migration beyond national boundaries, yet they embody multiple geographical spaces. In other words, call centers represent new structures, where “organizational capabilities are increasingly developed through intensely social and communicative processes, which may not be tied to physical resources or locations” (Jones et al., 2004, p. 733). The ways in which communication underlies the structure of the organization and shapes workers’ experiences and identities (and vice versa) ensure that the processes of globalization get reified (Mirchandani, 2004). Hence, an examination of discursive constructions at a call center in India is an engagement with “dialectic of micro-practice and macro-thinking” (Stohl, 1993, p. 384; see also Stohl, 2005) that, Stohl argues, needs to be taken up as a challenge for scholars.

Our study centered on call center employees’ discursive and material (re)constructions of their different identities and identifications in light of changing corporate demands and clientele. Through the case study, we explored how workers select and negotiate among an array of possible identities, particularly new identities, and make sense of the ways these emerging identities change their relationships with coworkers, family, friends, and themselves in terms of their day-to-day practices and expectations of work importance and career.

KOLKATA CALL CENTER CASE STUDY

Case Study Method: Participants and Procedures

We explored call center identity, identifications, and cultural constructions through a case study because this method displays changing communicative phenomena within a singular context to highlight the fuzzy boundaries between context and phenomena and to offer practical solutions that may be case specific (Deetz, 1990; Kreps, 1990; Mier, 1982; Sypher, 1997; Yin, 2002). Our case study relied primarily on focus group interviews, but these data were supplemented by ongoing conversations with an acquaintance of the first author who worked at the call center, company documents, Web site details, and observation of the call center and surrounding city and global milieu to build an appreciation of the

different spaces in which workers constructed their identities and workplace culture. We used focus groups because organizational culture, meanings of work and globalization, and identity(ies) constructions are created and maintained through groups (Krueger, 1998; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Our study centered on call center employees' discursive and material (re)constructions of their different identities and identifications in light of changing corporate demands and clientele.

The first author gathered data from 20 individuals in four focus groups of 5 participants each. These 20 people were between the ages of 19 and 48 years with the average age of 21. All of them had at least high school degrees; a majority reported that they were pursuing undergraduate degrees, and some participants said they were pursuing MBA degrees. Several (40%) had work experience in marketing ($n = 4$) or in other call centers ($n = 4$), and less than 15% said they were married. Two people said that they had at least one child. There were 15 men (75%), and 5 women (25%). All focus groups contained members of both sexes.

In accordance with recommendations by focus group experts (e.g., Greenbaum, 2000), we developed a brief set of focal questions centering on the nature of call center work, changes in their work context, day-to-day practices, and feelings about making cultural adaptations. The first author traveled to Kolkata to recruit and interview research participants employed at a particular call center company in Kolkata. She set up focus group meetings with the first 20 (out of 35) individuals who indicated their willingness to participate. On completion of all focus groups, both authors worked together to transcribe the data for analysis and changed participants' names to pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in English, the language of business in India, and all transcriptions were checked against the audiotapes. Transcriptions yielded 42 pages of single-spaced typed data.

All researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical-personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Being reflexive of the positionality is part of the methodological rigor that involves reflecting on our journey

as researchers and disclosing the same. Jameson (2004) uses metaphors of vision and voice to explain the challenge of communication for the researcher. Jameson argues that vision refers to the reasoning guiding the text, which depends on one's perspective on and distance from the text. Voice refers to the writer's linguistic choices that determine the meanings the writer offers to the text. Hence, it is this complex interaction between voice and vision that brings multiple possibilities to the interpretation of the text in a research study. In a sense, it is this complex interaction that Suchan (2004) calls "authentic," which he argues gets clouded in "the perception that we must be objective, clear, and in control. As a result, often the self or the I must disappear" (p. 309), which is not desirable. Rather than doing research, we think of our process as writing. The obligation of social science to maintaining authority, objectivity, and generalizability brings "heavy baggage" (Suchan, 2004, p. 308) to the writing process. Rather than being burdened by the "heavy baggage," we admit our situatedness in the text, which merits some measure of disclosure (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

In our case, disclosures begin with the first author's association with call centers, which began 5 years ago while working as a journalist writing articles about economic and organizational changes. Her journalistic stint provided her opportunities to interact with call center employees, NASSCOM executives and call center trainers in Bangalore, a city in South India regarded as the Silicon Valley of the country. Those firsthand experiences provided the author an introduction to an emergent new age work culture and identity constructions in India. As a result, she was already exposed to call center and American cultural socialization techniques, such as requiring workers to view sitcoms like *Friends* to become acclimatized to U.S. popular culture, adopting American names in workplaces, articulating concerns about issues such as racism, and learning how to manage safety and health hazards posed by new work conditions such as night shifts and other changes from traditional Indian workplace experiences. She also remembered the sense of euphoria that call centers generated as corporations promised substantial revenues and solutions to problems of educated unemployment in India.

Moreover, the first author grew up in Kolkata, which enabled her to observe call center phenomena within the nation's cultural and historical contexts. Because of her background, she could note the shift in the cultural milieu of India that is commensurate with Western practices such as the Indian call centers' affinity with gizmos or gadgets that they could buy, their dressing style, their lingo, and their different talk about family and friendship network involvement. The second author, a specialist in organizational communication in general and changing career and work-family processes in

particular, collaborated in study design, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. Although the first author's observations and past experiences were integral to the content of this case study, the second author's expertise and experiences in organizational scholarship and her questioning of the first author's assumptions and language offered a critical lens on the subject matter and research process. Moreover, the American background of the second author complemented the Indian background of the first author in such a way that somewhat mitigated against cultural bias.

Kolkata Call Center Case Overview

Our focus group participants all lived and worked in Kolkata, the capital of the state of West Bengal—the left-dominated intellectual capital of India that had shied away from foreign capital in the 1980s. A late entrant in embracing capitalism, Kolkata took longer than the rest of India to welcome information technology (IT) and IT-enabled services and is gradually gaining the confidence of the IT community. Today, almost all the big IT companies in India have set up shop in Kolkata. These companies account for 5% of the Indian IT and business process outsourcing market. Kolkata's operations are 12% to 13% less expensive than Delhi and Mumbai and 11% cheaper than Bangalore and Hyderabad, the traditional locations for call centers (McCue, 2005).

Like the rest of India, Kolkata is increasingly taking part in market-based economic reforms. At the same time, it is home to a large number of poor people. Coexistence of BMWs and hand-pulled carts, plush apartments and slums, shopping malls and people begging on the streets reflects the widening economic disparities. The call centers, however, synergize India's globalization initiative and are housed in modern office spaces. The call center studied for this project is no exception.

With a capacity of 150 seats operating in three shifts 24/7, this call center is spread over a sprawling internal area of 20,000 square feet and is equipped with state-of-the-art technology. These technologies include intelligent call routing, highly reliable edge switches ensuring excellent voice clarity, a fully digital voice logging platform, a data network built on Compaq servers, Nortel switches, and Compaq and IBM workstations among a host of other features (company Web site). The office complex, where the call center is housed, consists of a cluster of buildings in the quieter outskirts of the city earmarked specifically for IT corporations. Nested within shades of green foliage, the complex is brightly lit up in the night. The call center in our case study is located on the fourth floor of an eight-story building representing a contemporary architectural design.

The entrance of the complex is crowded most of the time as employees come out at random to take cigarette breaks. Only a few women are seen smoking in public, but they claim to feel secure outside the buildings at the main entrance anytime during the day and night as tight security is ensured in the technology park.

When she approached the Kolkata Call Center, the first author was greeted by a security guard at the main gate of the complex, and once the visitor record was entered in a log book, she was directed to the fourth floor. As the elevator reached its destination, the first author was greeted by another security guard doubling as a receptionist sitting right across from the elevator door. Lavish couches were available for visitors opposite the receptionist and on both sides of the elevator. Because it was 9:00 p.m., the regular receptionist was gone. (The call center did not anticipate official visitors after 6:00 p.m.). It was only the employees who were expected in the evenings, and they needed only to swipe their attendance cards at the reception area to enter their workplace rather than signing a log.

Seated below a wooden panel carrying the company name in glowing letters, the security guard recorded the visitor's details in a log book and phoned the author's acquaintance from inside. Unlike in the United States, no badge was given to the visitor. But the wooden door to the call center workplace, which could be seen from the reception area, remained closed. Because aurality involved in the call center job was important (Shome, 2006), the workplace was separated from the reception area.

The first author's acquaintance ushered her into the call center workplace. One might expect a "typical" Indian white-collar workplace—desks in cubicles with solitary people working at their computers in a medium-sized, white-walled room. Instead, hundreds of cubicles screamed an array of loud colors, each one painted a different color—pink, green, red, yellow, blue, and all shades in between. On the dark blue walls along the perimeter walls were a few posters on customer service tips ranging from witty to wise. These posters encouraged employees to treat customers "royally," reinforcing the call center's mission of "guiding the customer and working with the customer," a mantra inculcated from day one. The first author was told that all the calls made to or received from customers were recorded and evaluated for quality assurance.

The extreme end of this large workspace was occupied by a team of around six men working in a glass enclosure. In formal business attire of suits and ties, they were busily maintaining the center's technology. They looked up briefly and then quickly returned to their tasks. These were the software professionals, responsible for ensuring the technical support, without which the call center could not function. Loads of modem-like

machines blinked red, blue, and green, signaling the functionality of the technology. Moving past the glass enclosure of the tech maintenance workers, the author saw a door on the left opening up to a hallway that in turn led to a conference room, the managing director's office, a canteen where food and drinks were catered, and an open terrace.

The first author's immediate impression of the call center workplace was that of a nightclub. With no windows in the long sprawling space, the funky metal light shades coupled with the bright cubicle colors created an environment unusual for an office setting. However, the absence of music was conspicuous. The first author was told that after much deliberation, the team leaders had decided not to play music at the workplace because of the aurality involved in the job.

The employees were mostly young men between 19 and 25 years of age. Although jeans and trendy T-shirts of Benetton, MTV, Nike, and Reebok predominated, the traditional *salwar kameezes* for women and *kurtas* for men were noticeable as well.¹ In front of a flat desktop computer monitor with their black headphones on, the employees were either attending to or making calls. All workstations had multimedia support and 17-inch color monitors. Employees would work for a couple of hours at a time, get up to stretch, and step out to attend to different needs—from bathroom breaks to social encounters. They occasionally took breaks for carbonated sodas, mostly Coke and Pepsi, or snacks available at the canteen on the same floor. They also stopped for casual chitchats. As the first author walked past groups of two to four people talking in the hallways, she caught fragments of conversations—school, weekend plans, relationship issues, movies, trivia, and sometimes anecdotes about their U.S. clients.

A sense of both casualness and urgency pervaded their work and the overall call center ambiance. There seemed to be a degree of freedom for the employees insofar as they could take their own breaks when and how they wanted. They were also eligible for perks that ranged from the "employee of the week" award and weekly happy hours to getting rides to and from their office. However, their work routines were dependent on time—numbers of calls completed in an hour, number of successful calls, amount of time to solve problems, and amount and type of purchases by clients—hence the sense of urgency. Though for inbound services (clients making calls), employees were generally expected to problem solve, for outbound services (employees making calls), they had to complete a certain number of calls depending on the product they were selling.

In a sense, then, urgency was juxtaposed against a relaxed ambiance and the latter could be attributed to the absence of a clear hierarchical

dimension. They had team leaders, who largely supervised and clarified questions. The team leaders, the first author was informed, held group meetings in the conference room once every month to evaluate the overall performances of different groups of employees and to set new goals for them. Meetings were accomplished in a manner that did not clearly demonstrate the power dimension. Team leaders held the meetings in the same conference room where the first author conducted her focus groups. With a white board lit up by lights from above, a television, and a computer, it was much like a university classroom in the United States. There was no fixed setup for the conference room, which was organized depending on the nature of the meetings. When the first author was there, wooden chairs with desks attached were organized in a semicircle in the center of the room. Unlike the main workplace with its colors and movement, this room seemed subdued with white walls, lack of wall décor, and windows overlooking the grounds.

A sense of both casualness and urgency pervaded their work and the overall call center ambiance.

The first author greeted focus group participants as they entered the conference room. Purposeful sampling method was used to guide the study. The criteria of selection flow logically from the objective of the study (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002), which was achieved by the snowball method. The objective in this case was to understand the experiences of people who typically represent a call center. The first author's acquaintance helped in recruiting focus group participants. Our sample was largely representative of the typical profile of call center employees, consisting of young, male, college students. At the same time, we attempted to diversify our sample to a certain extent by including women and older employees.

Participants were given hour-long breaks from work by their team leaders. The first focus group started at 10:00 p.m., and the last ended at 3:00 a.m. Barring a couple of participants in their 40s, the participants represented an energetic group of young employees. All the participants were students and between 19 and 21 years of age, except Gautam and Rabin, who held college degrees and were older (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

<i>Pseudonym of Participant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age / Range</i>	<i>Educational Attainment</i>	<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>
Akash	Male	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Amit	Male	21	Pursuing MBA	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Anjan	Male	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Chitra	Female	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Deb	Female	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Gautam	Male	45	College degree	Outbound caller	Married	One
Hari	Male	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Jayanta	Male	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Kumar	Male	21	Pursuing MBA	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Maya	Female	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Mita	Female	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Naveen	Male	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Pritha	Female	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Rabin	Male	48	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Married	One
Rahul	Male	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Raj	Male	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Ranjan	Male	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Ravi	Male	21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Roshan	Male	19-21	Pursuing undergraduate	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None
Sunil	Male	21	Pursuing MBA	Outbound caller	Unmarried	None

The participants walked into the conference room 5 min. before their session started and greeted the first author in the American style, saying, "Hi? How are you?" The participants' formal training in behaviors, such as voice and accent usage and competency in U.S. mannerisms, was evident. These organizational behaviors were essential for employees' fulfillment of the call center requirements for inbound and outbound services.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

It was within a workplace ambiance of casualness and urgency, freedom and constraints, Asian and Western cultures, and business and night-club orientations that workers operated. As noted earlier, we were interested in the discursive processes that were central to the workers' experiences in this particular Indian call center.

During the process of conducting and transcribing the focus groups, the process of analyzing data began. The data analysis started with open coding to identify discrete concepts that could be labeled and sorted. Afterward, the concepts that were related to the same phenomenon were grouped together

under conceptual categories. Our open coding was followed by axial coding involving the formulation of relationships within and among the categories. Finally, through selective coding, the relationships among the distinct categories were established at a more abstract level and then validated by returning to the data and finding evidence to support or refute the relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Following these guidelines, the authors worked together using face-to-face, e-mail, and handwritten correspondences to generate themes. We jotted notes in the margins of transcripts, highlighted key phrases, compared and interrogated categories using generative questions about what data represent, and wrote memos about preliminary findings (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We reread transcripts independently to see what conceptual categories surfaced repeatedly within each and across interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and audiotaped our discussions. As one example of our data analytic process, we began by noting and sorting through specific examples of behavioral changes based on work, gender, culture, and other factors (e.g., changing names from Indian- to U.S.-sounding names) reported by participants about themselves and others. We pulled these details together along with participants' evaluations of such behaviors into increasingly broader themes (e.g., from "switching identities," "meanings of work," and variations on these preliminary themes to our current findings) through multiple iterations of memoing—that is, documenting our thoughts, questions, and analysis; returning to data; and meeting to refine codes, ideas, and findings' labels (see Table 2).

The two main themes that captured workers' identity, identification, and career (re)constructions were (a) strategic identity(ies) invocations and (b) reframed work, career, and family discourses and practices.

Over the course of several meetings and e-mail exchanges, we refined two themes and returned to the data for support and confirmation. The two main themes that captured workers' identity, identification, and career (re)constructions were (a) strategic identity(ies) invocations and (b) reframed

Table 2. Summary of Findings Based on the Coding Processes

<i>Open Coding</i>	<i>Axial Coding</i>
Accents	Strategic Identity(ies) Invocations
Names	Definition: It integrates separate markers, resources, and emotions involved in invoking identities consistent with clients' cultural expectations.
Knowledge of Western culture	Example: "My call center name is Rachel, but I hate people calling me that when I am not on calls . . . because that's kind of an identity crisis for me when people can have their real names."
Global-local	
Ambivalences	
Emotional performances	
Economic discourse	(Re)framed Work, Career, and Family Discourses and Practices
Relational discourse	Definition: It integrates separate categories under the principle that the participants construct preferable meanings of their work through language.
Career discourse	Example: "It is unbelievably youthful and lively out here . . . It's more like recreating college."

work, career, and family discourses and practices (see Table 2). Each of these themes is discussed below.

Strategic Identity(ies) Invocations

In much organizational communication literature, questions of agency and structure predominate such that the processes by which workplace members' identification choices shape and are shaped by valued identity(ies) constructions are of central concern (Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). These identities are but "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions" (Hall, 1996, p. 6) to which individuals "are *hailed* to assume by organizational discourses [that] are prestructured to facilitate actions that are ideologically productive" (Taylor, 2005, p. 124; see also Weedon, 1997). The individual becomes the site of "often-conflicting ideological narratives seeking to reproduce their associated interests through the interpellation of subjectivity" (Taylor, 2005, p. 124). Discursive constructions exert power to determine reality frames, minimize other interpretations, and shape individuals' embodied experiences with their worlds (Calás & Smircich, 1996; Weedon, 1997, 1999), but individuals also exert power in the processes by which they select among discursive resources offered by specific sites and organizational practices (Kuhn, 2006). In our

case, the Kolkata Call Center employees described diverse ways in which they (a) invoked particular identity markers that were consistent with work priorities (i.e., their call participants' cultural expectations) and (b) noted not only the visible ways in which their own and other workers' identities shifted over time but also that they (and others) desired and/or enhanced their new emergent identities.

Identity Markers

In the focus groups, the employees suggested that they invoked identities consistent with clients' cultural expectations and marked their identities with certain linguistic choices and practices. Although the call center was located in Kolkata, workers strategically constructed identities—through accents, names, and cultural markers—to resemble the client. Their identity constructions shifted so that they could perform the coherent manufactured identities that were essential to their work. “The whole idea of becoming Greg or Clark Adams is to make it simpler for them to understand and accept us,” pointed out one of our participants. They, therefore, invoked only identities that were consistent with and valued within their array of possible identifications. Through their discursive constructions of attachment to callers, locale (or call center) imperatives, and American culture, they performed sensible activities within particular spatio-temporal contexts (Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998).

For instance, switching between dual names and multiple accents, employees aligned and (re)adjusted to different cultural expectations, thereby moving in and out of several spatio-cultural spaces as well, because different countries belonged to different space and time in terms of normative ideals. Naveen, a tall male looking confident in his jeans and T-shirt, described the experience of adopting a different accent while attending to clients on call:

You talk to a person, a normal person, you will have a neutral accent. But as soon as you get a call and there is an American on the line or a British person, you go on to the accent straight away without even knowing it. You just go straight into your job.

The “normal” person would be one from Naveen's own culture in India and with whom he used his regular voice, which he considered to be unmarked or “neutral.” However, the client's accent signaled not only changes in his vocal performance but also multidimensional and seamless transitions into different national and workplace cultural identification

displays, as he went “straight into” his job. Similarly, Ranjan also reported that he slipped into a foreign accent and identity so easily that it was

part of me. . . . It is very natural. It happens on the job. When you are on your chair, you are calling, you get that accent automatically. Now I don't have it. But it automatically comes once you hear them [American clients].

In these ways, Naveen and Ranjan entered into identity negotiation, the “process whereby one attempts to maintain, retain or retrieve custody and authority over defining the self despite knowing that one cannot control how one's self is socially understood” (Jackson, 2002, p. 245). However, their identity work was designed to control their self, cultural, and organizational presentations simultaneously and was regulated by locale—locale of their origin or locale of their clients. Both Naveen and Ranjan recognized that they used identity markers to construct only one aspect of their identities (i.e., their role and presentation in call episodes). Once the call ended, they returned to their own accent (“Now I don't have it”) and to their other workplace and cultural identities. This attempt to control the self was reinforced over and over again as many times they mentioned, “We are just talking in an American accent; we are not becoming Americans.” Both of them repeatedly said the same things, validating one another.

Emergent Identities

The participants often engaged in identity work that would be consistent with discursive resources of their locale. In this way, Kolkata Call Center employees exerted effort to derive their identities from “distanciated forces” as they struggled to gain acceptance from foreign clients (see also “local involvements” and “interactions across distance” in Giddens, 2000, p. 92). Many participants pointed out media influences in shaping their understandings of the Western world. “Ever since India opened up the media industry, we have been exposed to lot of the Western world, which makes it easier for us to comprehend their expectations,” said Naveen. They acknowledged that such understandings complemented their work with U.S. clients insofar as it required them to learn the nuances of American culture and speak in a manner that helped them present themselves as American. Agreeing with Naveen, Amit, who was pursuing his undergraduate degree in management, remarked, “Media definitely helps us a lot in developing our perceptions about the American culture.”

Apart from adopting the foreign accent and operating in a different time zone, they also invoked identities strategically through training experiences that familiarized them with a middle-class American way of life. Hari pointed out, “We have cross-cultural training. Even little things like

Starbucks, Central Park . . . the nitty gritty things like that are important.” Chitra added, “You have to adapt yourself the way they speak. Else, they won’t tell anything.” In these and other ways, workers organized their lives in terms of American times, celebrations, styles of communication, and language (see Mirchandani, 2004). They overtly and visibly shifted their identifications from their culture of origin to those (American) preferred in the workplace for task accomplishment.

For some call center employees, their identity work (effort in constructing their identity) and identity at work (momentary self-construction) were straightforward. For them, identity work was relatively more permanent, whereas identity at work was more fluid, which was evoked at moments of attending to customers. Others, however, found that the constant shifting among cultures prompted identity fragmentations and emotional disjunctions insofar as these workers desired to enhance new emerging identities. Maya observed that she was “very simple” when she joined the center after high school:

But of course 2 years of work experience along with college . . . I know how closed my friends are, who are only studying . . . I can feel the difference . . . my maturity level is way higher than them. I have changed for the better. But many people change for the worse. Many people, you know, think because they have joined the call center they are hip and happening . . . the American way of life.

Maya viewed changes in herself in terms of exposure to others and maturity as positive but cautioned that some call center workers identified so strongly with what they perceived to be the American way of life that they believed that their call personas to be an authentic identity. Roshan, too, began his call center work upon high school graduation and commented about changes in himself. He elaborated on Maya’s comments, particularly about other workers’ emulations of the American way, in derivative terms (“wannabes”):

The open-minded has become so open-minded that the mind has fallen off . . . it’s nice that you become more open-minded and hopefully the mind has not fallen off . . . in one year of work I have seen so many changes in me . . . the American way does not bother you . . . what bothers you are the wannabes . . . but there are nice people from whom you can learn.

In these cases, our participants were not oblivious to the different kinds of identity and cultural changes that their job experiences have fostered. They perceived that call center work could lead to cultural erosion for

some but never for themselves, and oftentimes, they assured themselves that their own lives have changed for the better by framing their work as a good learning experience. They were concerned for themselves and others as evidenced in Roshan's statement, "hopefully, the mind has not fallen off," and Maya's self-proclamation, "I have changed for the better. But many people change for the worse." Their comments made visible some of the underlying tensions in adapting to different cultural situations—tensions that were central to call center workers' lives. Their lingering ambivalence about the "American way" or "American way of life" spoke to their existence at the crossroads of two cultures and to the seductiveness of the manufactured ambiance of the Kolkata Call Center workplace culture.

The employees' struggles with strategic invocations and renegotiations of identity(ies) were most evident when they discussed their call center names, which were essentially Western names. As they switched between their Indian and American names, they slipped in and out of the cultural meanings that the names held for them. Maya became Merissa, Jayita became Jessica, Palash became Pat, Om became Travis, and Roshan became Ryan. Pritha said that call center names could provoke an "identity crisis:" "Like my call center name is Rachel, but I hate people calling me that when I am not on calls . . . because that's kind of an identity crisis for me when people can have their real names." Pritha's use of the phrase "identity crisis" brought forth her strong feelings about her real name and the importance of her Indian name to her identity. Although some linked their identities strongly to their Indian names (and dissociated their identities from their American names), others expressed resignation about the reality of dual names.

Workers invoked different identities strategically as they accounted for the particularities of their work (i.e., their temporal and spatial locations in their work; see Kuhn, 2006). With their different names and momentary disconnections to the home culture, they exemplified global-local, multi-cultural, and fake-real or public-private self-conflicts in which identity and emotional performances could be bought and sold as commodities (S. Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Pritha's anguish over what she called her "identity crisis" lay in her perception that she faked her genuine self by adopting different identities and cultures. This sort of emotional labor reinforced call center workers' struggles with their complex identity negotiations in ways that differed from depictions of domestic call center and similar employees' experiences (Shuler & Sypher, 2000; K. Tracy & S. Tracy, 1998) in that their struggles brought to the fore the challenges that the "production of new spatialities and temporalities" are posing for transnational workers (Sassen, 2000b, p. 215).

(Re)framed Work, Career, and Family Discourses and Practice

Kuhn (2006) noted that discursive resources can be viewed as

the nodes at which identity work and identity regulation meet . . . it is the overarching vision of the organizational self each *assemblage* of discourses conveys that provides greater or fewer options for self-creation. In other words, it is not merely one's occupation, the nature of work, or managerial tactics that encourage particular forms of identity regulation or present opportunities for resistance, but is instead a complex amalgam of contextualized discursive practices, occupational selves, and locale-specific discourses. (p. 1354)

Just as workers' identities shifted and evolved in diverse ways, so too did their language for and their practices of work, career, and family (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). Kolkata Call Center workers' talk and actions revealed the new realities or discursive resources on which they could construct their identities. These locale-specific discourses centered on (a) economics, (b) employment as work versus career, and (c) privileging of emergent or new social, familial, and cultural identifications. Some participants perceived these changes as positive, whereas others expressed concern about their own and others' future personal, relational, and cultural experiences.

Economic Discourses

Call center employees' discourse and reported practices depicted a changing cultural order—one centered on economics redefining certain sociocultural standards and norms. So great have been economic changes in terms of high wages and expectations that some companies in India are trying to tame wages (Thibodeau, 2006). Not surprisingly, then, economic discourse pervaded participants' focus group comments in ways that established new visions of life that the participants had begun to perceive as ideal. In other words, their talk established changing interpretive repertoires for evaluating their work and family conditions and short- and long-term decision making. For instance, workers (re)defined their orientation to money and values:

Amit: I don't think the pay is high enough for you to support a growing family.

Rahul: The pay is good in terms of pocket money . . . 10,000 bucks in hand . . . we do not have to support family . . . all we do is shopping and

eating out . . . having fun . . . that's a lot when it's just pocket money . . .
but it's peanuts otherwise.

Mita: Ya, not for running a family.

Call center employees' discourse and reported practices depicted a changing cultural order—one centered on economics redefining certain sociocultural standards and norms.

In this exchange, workers perceived that “10,000 bucks” per month (approximately \$200), which is still the monthly income for a large section of single-earning middle-class Indians in Kolkata, was not enough to support a family. Call center employees can earn \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year, in a nation where the per capita income is less than \$500 (CBS, 2004). This conversation captured the transformation of the urban middle class in India in ways that were consistent with televised reports. Media images of urban middle classes shape a new India for their members by positioning a series of commodities as valuable and upholding new meanings associated with these commodities (Fernandes, 2000). Participants' comments displayed the extent to which they considered their workplace (and class) identities and statuses as commensurate with new economic and cultural visions. The call center job gave them access to the commodities for which they aspired at an early age, and it established a springboard for even higher future aspirations and living standards. As a result, the call center became a site in which they negotiated the new monetary benchmark for their survival and for their current or future career success.

Chitra: The more money you have, the more money you want to spend. You get more temptations.

Akash: Ya, the more comfortable your life gets . . .

Kumar: You want to spend money and want to be seen. Go to a disco, restaurants.

The workers expressed euphoria over their economic freedom and the luxuries that this freedom brought. Most employees were pursuing their education while working, a new phenomenon in middle-class India, where the regular practice was to finish education before taking a job. Hence, the

new material experiences for the youth spells a different cultural, social, and economic discursive resource that begins to redefine standards of what counts as ideal. As such, call center workers introduced different cultural politics into the cosmopolitan urban middle class.

Career Discourses

The employees' economic orientation, combined with their life and career stages, offered them different ways of labeling their call center employment. As a younger worker, Anjan perceived the center to be a "phase between education and venturing out into a full-fledged career." For him, it was a transition (i.e., a job) and not a career or lifelong sequence of work-related experiences (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Hall, 2002). Comments such as these emerged throughout Kolkata Call Center talk and were consistent with Deb's remarks:

I do not think it's something everyone thinks of as a lifetime career. We all start off as college kids, you know, who need a bit of pocket money . . . you work for two [or] three years and then you want to do something as [*sic*] really professional . . . something creative. I wouldn't treat this as a career per se. As far as the pay is concerned, it's not something you would want to stick to after you are 25 and probably 30, when you have a growing family. I wouldn't think of this as a career.

Most participants expressed agreement with Deb's assessments. The money they earned was useful in the present, but other dynamics were emerging for their future. If the call center was providing them "10,000 bucks" when they were 21 years of age and pursuing college, then their future became one of great promise. If the call center, despite being only a "stopgap," as they liked to call it, could provide the alluring trappings of modern India (e.g., "discos," "frequent eating out," "buying expensive clothes," and "fancy mobile phones"), then their future had the potential to become one of material and social status fulfillment. In these ways, the younger workers appeared to identify less with the discourses of their call center locale than with their fun lifestyle and imagined future identities and practices.

This anticipation of most of the younger workers contrasted sharply with the views of their older colleagues who considered call center work to be career developmental. Rabin, aged 48 years, said that he had 27 years of sales experience. He began work at the call center 2.5 years ago because he had "the opportunity to work with people," which he enjoyed.

Gautam, who was in his mid-40s, portrayed himself as “an old man for this industry” with “huge experience in marketing,” who joined the call center a year ago because he “wanted to do sedentary work:” “I thought this would be a new kind of vocation. For me, it was quite a challenge that I took up.” Through these remarks, both Rabin and Gautam indicated that they regarded the call center industry as a career site (and source of career satisfaction) unlike their young coworkers. For the younger employees, the excitement of having “pocket money” and “some work experience” was what fueled their participation.

Social Discourses

The pull toward a different economic and employment order with distinct life stage differences also was reflected in workers’ discourse and feelings about social, familial, and cultural changes in their lives. For the young, the call center cultural narrative was one of exuberance and seduction (by the appeals of and sensory displays within the nightclub-like workplace atmosphere and in work get-togethers). Deb said:

I think every hour is happy for us. It is unbelievably youthful and lively out here. It is so different from what we see in a professional environment. I think it is the only industry that can have this kind of atmosphere. It’s more like recreating college.

Deb’s comments captured the general mood of the workplace expressed by others. The young employees exuded high enthusiasm and energy while relating their workplace experiences to other focus group participants and to the facilitator. Specifically, participants who were young and students tossed around terms such as *fun*, *party*, *just like college*, and *friendly* in describing the center’s ambiance. Their linguistic choices were consistent with the ways they moved around their workplace space, decorated their cubicles to match the décor of the office, and joined others for breaks and chitchat. Their excitement with the décor, in particular, became evident in Sunil’s statement: “The moment we walk into the office, it is like a party atmosphere. With all its colors and vibrance, it is not your regular office.” Their happiness and positive attitudes about their work culture were reiterated in their talk and expressed feelings. Ravi further said, “The office has such a party atmosphere that if I am not coming to work one day, I miss work.” Others joined in to support Ravi’s view. Raj said, “I have forgotten my school friends and college friends. Even over the weekends, I hang out

with my friends in office.” Gautam provided a rationale for the creation of this ambiance: “it’s so lively that it keeps you awake . . . so the ambiance is very different, it’s fun, which is created deliberately so that people don’t feel they are made to work in the nights.” Gautam suggested that management, along with the workers, created a fun workplace atmosphere to enhance productivity and morale.

However, other employees were not convinced by Gautam’s argument. Their comments indicated that they might be trying to simulate what they missed in their nonwork lives with friends and family, but they did not see any management strategy in creating such an ambiance. A sense of denial seemed to surface when Jayanta said, “It’s not that we don’t have rainy days, but mostly it’s sunny side up.” The same view was expressed by Maya: “There are challenges . . . and we do have targets, but we are pretty satisfied.” Echoing the same thought, Ravi said, “It’s not that we do not have pressure.” But these realizations about the urgency and pressures of work appeared more in spurts that were overshadowed by the general happy and appealing ambiance of this particular workplace. In other words, they seemed to have identified so much with their workplace culture that the disconnect between the casual or nightclub-like environment of the call center and the urgency or business goals of the corporation seemed lost on our research participants. These dilemmas and disconnections resonate with Kuhn’s (2006) argument that it is not merely the nature of occupation that determines particular identity formation but a complex amalgam of context-specific discourses.

Finally, the Kolkata Call Center employees seemed to privilege their new and emergent social, familial, and cultural identifications. The young workers described their daily routine as a balancing act between their education, sleep, and work, but they rarely complained and, if they did, they tempered their comments with positive aspects of their workplace and coworkers. Their denial of any sort of loss, including free time and former friends, was somewhat evident when Jayanta talked about “bringing back your school life, college life together,” or in Maya’s words, viewing the call center as “an extension of college life” rather than a job. Employees also referred to the call center organizing processes through discourse of the family, one of the most important institutions of traditional Indian society. They often described the friends in their workplace as their family and the office as their second home. They never referred to anyone as coworkers or colleagues. Sunil pointed out, “It is like family actually . . . everybody knows what is happening in everybody’s life.” Inherent in this discourse was their desire to reconstruct or reframe their family as being in the workplace. The disruption of traditional social and cultural commitments might prompt this

reconstruction, but even so, younger workers still spoke of longing for familial interactions, as indicated by Jayanta:

You really miss out on a lot of quality time with family . . . what makes up for it is the atmosphere at work . . . and nothing can make up for the lost time with the family . . . because you miss out on that time with family, you have to have certain friends to make up for that time.

Jayanta's articulation brought forth a sense of loss that could be lessened, in part, through quick interactions with family and workplace friends. His views suggested urgency in making up for "lost time with the family." This sense of urgency also was apparent in Pritha's words:

Communication with parents has drastically fallen. I treat my house like a hotel. Come home, sleep, eat, get ready and leave for work. Probably catch a few words over the weekend . . . hardly any communication . . . but I am not complaining . . . we have to make an effort to make a conversation because we miss out on so much.

In catching up with parents and defining their friends as "family" and the office as "home," workers sought assurance by reconstructing family, or stability in their social and cultural environment. However, the discourse of family that was manifest prominently among the younger workers was missing from the other, older workers. For the young participants, family consisted of parents and siblings; for middle-aged participants, family was comprised of a spouse and children. The older participants seemed to have found a way to strike a balance between work and home. For instance, Rabin admitted that there was a change in his social pattern, but he did not appear perturbed. "It's fine . . . Saturday to Sundays, we spend time together, we go out for dinner, friends come over . . . earlier, when I was in marketing, I used to be traveling most of the time . . . so it's the same thing." In sum, Kolkata Call Center workers, especially for the younger workers, seemed to be more or less constructing new and emergent identifications with their workplace practices, members, and outcomes such that their prior (traditional) modes of work, family, and career engagement and expectations were changing.

DISCUSSION

We were interested in the processes by which workers in a particular Indian call center located in Kolkata expanded upon, negotiated, and chose

among an array of possible, especially new, identities and identifications and the ways that these choices affected changing social discourses. Our case study depicted a workplace that was simultaneously casual and urgent, temporal and spatially free and constrained, situated in both Indian and U.S. cultures, and oriented toward business and nightclub ambiances. Within this particular workplace, call center employees (re)constructed and negotiated among an array of discourses that bracketed opportunities for particular identities and identifications. Through these negotiation processes, they (a) engaged in strategic identity(ies) invocations and (b) reframed work, career, and family discourses and practices.

The importance of this line of work is manifold. Through the case study method and examination of workplace discourses influencing identity and identification constructions, we present identity and identification as active processes imbued with agency (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). We also attend to Monge's (1998) International Communication Association presidential appeal to communication scholars to respond to global changes in their research (p. 144). The discourse and related practices of Indian call center employees provide a rendering of the complexities these Third World transnational workers experience in the context of the global cultural politics.

Furthermore, as one of our reviewers points out, call center employees share many of the same challenges that all service employees face, particularly emotional labor, juxtaposition of urgency with casualness, and tensions between freedom and constraint. The commonality of challenges may indicate paradoxes, including paradoxes of structure, within these experiences that fulfill the interest of transnational corporate power (Stohl & Cheney, 2001). In other words, the findings may lead to broader research questions, such as the following: How do organizational practices within the service industry produce or maintain corporate power?

As the call center employees embodied different cultural specifications, identity markers, and emotional performances to gain acceptance from their clients across the globe, they engaged in constant negotiation and renegotiations of their identities and identifications with employment, careers, and social (friends and family) aspects that depict a new emerging social order. Traveling between diverse cultural spaces, they brought forth their multiple selves, conflicting emotions, and hopes for the future that adapted to and challenged cultural, workplace, and personal situations. In these ways, "global relations can . . . decenter the self" (Scholte, 2000, p. 181), but their discourse and practices also can enable them to accomplish this decentering in productive ways (Deetz, 1992). In the case of our Indian call center, "decentering" became particularly unique as

employees remained physically rooted in their locale, and yet embodied transnational labor by virtue of their interactions with the global through their “rearticulation of time, space, and belonging that point to new logics of diasporic productions” (Shome, 2006, p. 8). This was evident across all participants, irrespective of age and experience.

In other words, the findings may lead to broader research questions, such as the following: How do organizational practices within the service industry produce or maintain corporate power?

The global-local dialectic became central to their experience as their local existences were defined through transnational and global economic forces. It was the momentary disjuncture or displacement from the familiar cultural environment that became the site of struggle. In particular, the younger workers’ discourse demonstrated how these tensions played out in their daily lives as they (often) referred to possibilities of cultural erosion. Expressing concern over “wannabes,” one of our research participants emphasized, “You are not actually living an American lifestyle. But you are aware of their lifestyle.” However, it may be noted that none of the focus groups had any self-identified wannabes because the first author relied on her acquaintance for recruitment of participants and had asked for variation in terms of age, gender, and work experience. Though the focus group conversations indicated that wannabes would not recognize themselves as such, it could only be validated by engaging with wannabes in future research.

As boundaries between cultural spaces were blurred, call center employees navigated the hybrid cultural experience suggestive of ambivalent cultural conditions (Bhabha, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999) that was reflective of fake-real and public-private self and emotional dichotomies (S. Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Hence, the cultural experience of the employees called for new ways of thinking about identity construction and identifications in organizational communication. Identities sometimes drew from global discursive resources directly, bypassing the local. Sassen (2000a, 2000b) argues that one of the features of the current phase of globalization is that an event occurring within national space is not necessarily national. At the same time, localities are not strictly local any longer, but complex cultural

spaces (Tomlinson, 1999). The importance of the media in this complex process of interconnectedness gets emphasized as our participants expressed their reliance on the media for accessing cultural nuances.

In addition, this case study reveals the possible changes in socioeconomic conditions that new forms of organizations bring about. For instance, the call center brought forth an employment opportunity for the urban youth in India—a new phenomenon altogether, as urban youth in India historically have not been an employable category in the country. Moreover, a decent salary used only as pocket money at an early stage in life can shape future aspirations and desires at much higher levels than existing standards and may change expectations for ideal economic, social, and career capital (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). Working while pursuing higher education provided the younger employees a basis for defining call center employment as a phase between high school and career. Hence, their comments portrayed the kinds of appeal that economic discourses and their likely consequences have for their identities, constructions of worthwhile professions or careers, and lifestyle choices. However, the older employees regarded the call center industry as a career site that meant a logical progression for them after having pursued a career in marketing.

Finally, it is through their language that call center workers portrayed the disruptions of their cultural and social lives because of various conditions in which they worked, including night shifts, altered social lives, and adaptations to different cultural expectations. They recreated college and reconstructed family in the workplace to locate preferable meanings in their work and to deemphasize loss of traditional identity anchors such as family. High enthusiasm and energy embodied their workplace experiences that became evident with the participants using terms such as *fun*, *party*, *just like college*, and *friendly* in describing the center's ambiance. As the workplace ambiance of freedom, nightclub-like settings, and friendliness obscured the corporate pressure, workers' identity construction and discussion of meaning of work also evoked tension of a new kind. It became a site of seduction or unreality that drew the workers into the manufactured organizational cultures, thus promoting dissociation with or a weakening of other possible identity(ies) constructions in that locale. But this experience was exclusively narrated by the younger participants, whereas the older employees attempted to rationalize the presence of such ambiance. The older employees noted that creating such a work atmosphere was a deliberate corporate strategy to keep up the productivity in the nights. In short, our case study of one specific call center brings forth, as Sassen (2000a, 2000b) would put it, the destabilizing capacity of globalization promising different possibilities.

Limitations

We wish to acknowledge that our participants were located at a call center whose management encouraged the creation of a fun atmosphere. As a result, the fun ambiance, workplace friendships, and high morale discussed by participants differed greatly from that of call centers depicted in other academic as well as popular materials (McPhate, 2005; Lakshmi, 2005). Whether this difference was based on organizational culture, participant youth, or focus group members' self-selection is unknown.

Second, it is possible that more focus groups and observations would have yielded more and different findings. We chose to conduct four focus groups not only because it was difficult to recruit and schedule larger numbers of participants, but also because we achieved saturation insofar as similar information seemed to be emerging from the first through the last groups. Findings from previous research indicate that saturation typically is achieved after three to five focus groups (Morgan, 1997). The data we gathered indicated that these findings about saturation held true for our call center employees.

Implications

This study provides an account of identity constructions in a new occupation and career for a particular nation that is based on globalization and transnationality. As such, further research on the framing of this new occupation (e.g., Meisenbach, 2004) and discursive resources and formulations that prompt certain types of identity work, emotional labor, and real-fake identity disjunctures would be appropriate (Kuhn, 2006; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; S. Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). We also encourage ethnographic studies on the ramifications of Third World workplaces and work-family issues in transition. These types of investigations could lend support (or be at odds with) globalization theorists' differing claims about hybridity and what individuals and cultures can do to preserve what cultural members perceive to be in their best interests.

Furthermore, although concepts of narrative theory inform our case study,² we did not use its full potential. We recommend narrative interviews for future research, particularly organizational narrative, where organizational members tell stories to construct a collective reality, opening up possibilities of dialogic language and sensemaking (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

It is immensely significant for organizational scholarship to pursue these lines of research as these new forms of organizations are projected to grow at a phenomenal rate (Mirchandani, 2004; Shome, 2006). They

offer entry points for theorizing some of the challenging but unexplored workplace conditions brought about by contemporary economic and technological configurations, thereby expanding the ambit of organizational research.

CONCLUSION

This case study portrays the complex and competing ways in which workers at a particular call center in Kolkata, India, access and also challenge the discursive resources they draw on to construct their identifications and identities in multiple and new ways. Through examination of their actions and speech within their workplace and cultural locales, we depict call center employees' processes of strategic identity invocation and reframing of work, career, and family discourses and practices. It remains to be seen whether and how the discourses and practices of these transnational workers in their new occupations and careers change the social order in ways that are productive for themselves and other call center workers.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Questions

1. How is a typical day for you?
 2. How has your life changed since you began this work?
 3. How is your training program?
 4. What kinds of experiences do you have with the customers?
 5. How does it feel to make cultural adaptations?
-

NOTES

1. *Kurtas* for men are loose shirts falling either just above or somewhere below the knee, which are worn with jeans or pajama-like trousers or tight pants called *churidars*. *Salwar kameez* for women includes loose trousers (*salwar*) and a long shirt (*kameez*), usually worn with a long scarf or shawl.

2. We are grateful that the editor of the *Journal of Business Communication*, Professor Margaret Graham, recommended the use of narrative theory.

REFERENCES

- Arthur, M. B., Hall, D. T., & Lawrence, B. S. (1989). Generating new directions in career theory: The case for a transdisciplinary approach. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall, & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 7-25). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Arthur, M. B., Inkson, K., & Pringle, J. K. (1999). *The new careers: Individual action and economic change*. London: Sage.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Buzzanell, P. M., & Goldzwig, R. S. (1991). Linear and nonlinear career models: Metaphors, paradigms, and ideologies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 4, 466-505.
- Calás, M. B., & Smircich, L. (1996). From "the woman's" point of view: Feminist approaches to organization studies. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 218-257). London: Sage.
- CBS. (2004, August 1). *Out of India*. Retrieved January 24, 2006, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/12/23/60minutes/main590004.shtml>
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chiseri-Strater, E. (1996). Turning in upon ourselves: Positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity in case study and ethnographic research. In G. E. Kirsch & P. Mortensen (Eds.), *Ethics and representation in qualitative studies of literacy* (pp. 115-133). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Deetz, S. (1990). Foreword. In B. D. Sypher (Ed.), *Case studies in organizational communication* (pp. viii-x). New York: Guilford.
- Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Fernandes, L. (2000). Nationalizing "the global": Media images, cultural politics and the middle class in India. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22, 611-628.
- Giddens, A. (2000). The globalization of modernity. In D. Held & A. McGrew (Eds.), *The global transformations reader: An introduction to the globalization debate* (pp. 92-103). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Greenbaum, T. L. (2000). *Moderating focus groups: A practical guide for group facilitation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hall, D. T. (2002). *Careers in and out of organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs "identity"? In S. Hall & P. DuGay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage.
- Jackson, R., II. (2002). Theorizing and analyzing the nexus between cultural and gendered identities and the body. *Communication Quarterly*, 50, 245-250.
- Jameson, D. A. (2004). Conceptualizing the writer-reader relationship in business prose. *Journal of Business Communication*, 41, 227-264.
- Jones, E., Watson, B., Gardner, J., & Gallois, C. (2004). Organizational communication: Challenges for the new century. *Journal of Communication*, 54, 722-750.
- Kreps, G. L. (1990). *Organizational communication: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Kuhn, T. (2006). A "demented work ethic" and a "lifestyle firm": Discourse, identity, and workplace time commitments. *Organization Studies*, 27, 1339-1358.
- Kuhn, T., & Nelson, N. (2002). Reengineering identity: A case study of multiplicity and duality in organizational identification. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16, 5-38.

- Lakshmi, R. (2005, February 27). *India call centers suffer storm of 4-letter words. Executives blame American anger over outsourcing*. Retrieved January 24, 2006, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56474-2005Feb26.html>
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McCue, A. (2005, April 27). *HSBC and Lloyds TSB head offshore to Calcutta. Are traditional offshore locations getting too expensive?* Retrieved January 24, 2006, from <http://www.silicon.com/research/specialreports/offshoring/0,3800003026,39129878,00.htm>
- McPhate, M. (2005, November 17). *Outsourcing outrage: Indian call-center workers suffer abuse*. Retrieved January 24, 2006, from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/11/17/BUGB3FPFGT01.DTL&type=tech>
- Meisenbach, R. J. (2004). *Framing fund raising: A poststructuralist analysis of higher education fund raisers' work and identities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University.
- Mier, D. (1982). From concepts to practices: Student case study work in organizational communication. *Communication Education, 31*, 151-154.
- Mirchandani, K. (2004). Practices of global capital: Gaps, cracks and ironies in transnational call centers in India. *Global Networks, 4*, 355-374.
- Monge, P. (1998, July). *Communication structures and processes in globalization*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Communication Association Presidential Address, Jerusalem, Israel.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, D. L., & Krueger, R. A. (1998). *The focus group kit* (Vols. 1-6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- NASSCOM (2005). The NASSCOM-McKinsey study 2005. Retrieved January 24, 2006, from http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?Art_id=4796
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ribeiro, J. (2006, February 6). Dell to add 5000 call center workers in India. *Computerworld*, p. 15.
- Sassen, S. (2000a). New frontiers facing urban sociology at the millennium. *British Journal of Sociology, 51*, 143-159.
- Sassen, S. (2000b). Spatialities and temporalities of the global: Elements for a theorization. *Public Culture, 12*, 215-232.
- Scholte, A. J. (2000). *Globalization: A critical introduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Scott, C. R., Corman, S. R., & Cheney, G. (1998). Development of a structural model of identification in the organization. *Communication Theory, 8*, 298-336.
- Sharma, D.C. (2003, August 27). *India call centers face employee exodus*. Retrieved May 1, 2005, from <http://news.com.com/2100-1022-5068795.html>
- Shome, R. (2006). Thinking through the diaspora: Call centers, India, and a new politics or hybridity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 9*, 105-124.
- Shuler, S., & Sypher, B. D. (2000). Seeking emotional labor: When managing the heart enhances the work experience. *Management Communication Quarterly, 14*, 50-89.
- Stohl, C. (1993). International organizing and organizational communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 2*, 377-384.
- Stohl, C. (2005). Globalization theory. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging organizational communication theory & research: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 223-261). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Stohl, C., & Cheney, G. (2001). Participatory processes/paradoxical practices: Communication and the dilemmas of organizational democracy. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *14*, 349-407.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Suchan, J. (2004). Writing, authenticity, and knowledge creation. Why I write and you should too. *Journal of Business Communication*, *41*, 302-315.
- Sypher, B. D. (1997). *Case studies in organizational communication 2: Perspectives on contemporary work life*. New York: Guilford.
- Taylor, B. C. (2005). Postmodern theory. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging organizational communication theory & research: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 113-140). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taylor, J. R., Flanagin, A. J., Cheney, G., & Seibold, D. R. (2001). Organizational communication research: Key moments, central concerns, and future challenges. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 24* (pp. 99-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thibodeau, P. (2006, February 6). India aims to tame soaring IT wages. *Computerworld*, p. 15.
- Tomlinson, J. (1999). *Globalization and culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tracy, K., & Tracy, S. (1998). Rudeness at 911. *Human Communication Research*, *25*, 225-252.
- Tracy, S., & Trethewey, A. (2005). Fracturing the real-self-fake-self dichotomy: Moving toward crystallized organizational discourses and identities. *Communication Theory*, *15*, 168-195.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Weedon, C. (1999). *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Yin, R. K. (2002). *Case study approach: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.