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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the Subculture of Working Students in Call Centers

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ABSTRACT
Employing the descriptive qualitative research method, this study drew on the Functional Theory of Talcott Parsons which espouse that subculture develop out of its adaptation from the dominant culture. It aimed to describe and analyze the subculture of working students in call centers in Metro Manila and its influence on their family relations, health, recreational activities, consumption behavior and academic performance. Results showed that the norms and values in the call center as reflected on the social environment influenced the values of the working students. The subculture in the call center produced positive and negative effects to the participants. The night shift work schedule led to health problems, less contact time with their family and peers, and less time on studying. Thus, there is a need for call center companies and schools to provide the necessary remediation to improve working students' productivity in work and performance in school.

INTRODUCTION
The Call Center Industry referred as the "sunshine industry," due to its stable growth over the past years has provided many people with the opportunity to earn a living. Call center companies have generated billions of pesos in the country, according to the Information Technology and Business Processing Association of the Philippines (IBPAP, 2015), the BPO industry is projected to generate 1.3 million jobs and US$25 billion in revenue or 8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2016. Call centers are creating wealth by being an engine of growth and resiliency amidst the global financial crisis.

The growth and expansion of the call center industry merited for the demand of more agents in order to maintain its operation. Graduates and young people who were still pursuing higher education were attracted to enter the industry. With more young people specifically student's working in the call center it is important to study the influence of call center culture on their life and studies. Hence, this study specifically described and analyzed the subculture of working students in call centers in Metro Manila specifically in Makati, Mandaluyong, Taguig, and Quezon City. The study looked into the students' norms, values, and social environment in call centers and the influence on their family relations, recreational activities, health, and consumption behavior, and the implication of these on their academic performance.

Conceptual Framework
The formation of subcultures is inevitable as society becomes more complex. Subculture is usually formed by those who get together and form a small group on the basis of their social class, occupation, age, religion, regional origin, nationality, or ethnicity. They have norms, values, and special languages which make them distinct from other members of society (Bertrand, 1973 p. 113).

According to Functional Theory, every social group must have a culture of its own- its own goals, norms, values and typical ways of doing things. Every family, clique, shop, community, ethnic group, or society has its own culture. Hence, every individual participates in a number of different cultures at the same time or in sequence in the course of the day (Tischler, 1990). The best-known proponent of the functionalist perspective was Talcott Parsons. His theory centered on the view that there were interrelated social systems consisting of the major areas of social life, such as family, religion, education, politics, and economics. These systems were then analyzed according to the functions they performed for society as a whole for one another. (Tischler, 1990). On a functionalist perspective, subculture exists to allow specialized activity. One example is occupational subculture, where it carries the knowledge necessary to perform specialized tasks, and is essential to the division of labor. (Farley, 1992, p. 104).
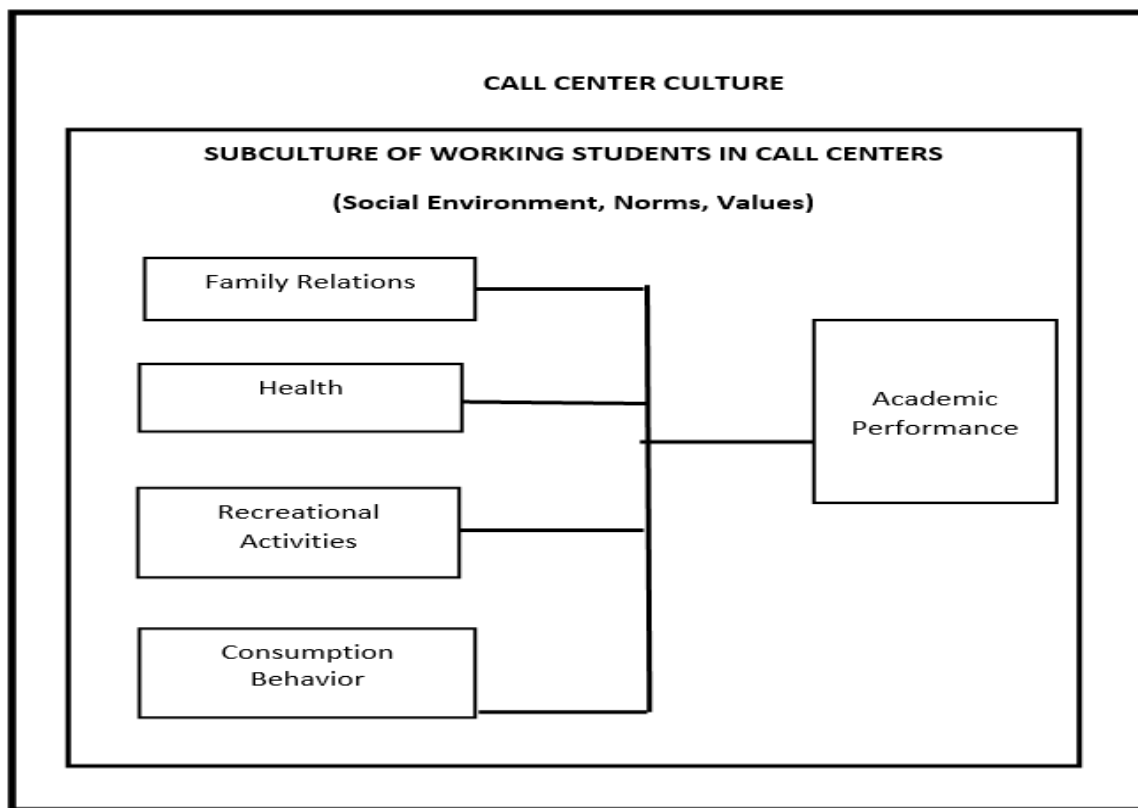

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study using a Parsonian view of the Functionalist perspective. Culture as defined by Parsons is an organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or group. The research assumed that subculture exists on the framework of a dominant culture. In this case subculture of working students exists under the established culture in the call center. The call center culture is the culture shared by everyone, whereas the subculture of working students in call centers is shared only by the working students. The subculture of working students in the call center, as reflected in their norms, values, and social environment, influences the students' family relations, health, recreational activities, and consumption behavior. The research also assumed that these in turn affect the academic performance of the working students.

The subculture developed by call center agents is influenced by the existing social environment of the company. Social environment encompasses the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact (Barnett, 2001). In this study, social environment covers the, employment relations, and demands in a call center workplace.

The call center culture has norms which every agent is obliged to observe and follow. Norms here are reflective of the policies being implemented for regular call center agents and working students in call centers. On a functionalist perspective norms function to regulate the behavior of an individual. Aside from acquiring the norms, agents also develop their values. Macionis (2012, p. 61) defines values as culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful, and that serve as broad guidelines for social living. People who share a culture use values to make choices about how to live. In this study, students working in call centers have experienced transition and adjustment of values based on the social environment and norms of the workplace.

Social environment, norms, and values constitute the subculture of the working students in call centers. The subculture developed in the work place influence the life of the working students based on their family relations, health, recreational activities, and consumption behavior.

Based on the functionalist perspective family exists to provide care and affection to its members (Tischler, 1990, p. 346). On the other hand, family relations refer to the social relations among members of the family, how an individual lives with his/her siblings and parents/guardians. It consists of the activities they participate in together and the general way life is carried out in home with family members (Macionis, 2012, p. 470). In this study, family relations refer to how the agents relate with the members of the family, their life in the household, and the quality time they spend with them.

Another component which was examined is health. According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being (Macionis, 2012, p. 488). Health from a functionalist standpoint, is the normal and natural state of affairs is for people to be healthy and contributory to their society. The opposite situation, ill health is a form of deviance. Therefore, sickness is dysfunctional for both the individuals who suffers an illness and for the larger society (Farley, 1992, p.470). This study assumed that subculture on a work place as reflected on the social environment has an influence to the health and well-being of its workers, and in the case of working students it has an influence on their academic performance at school. In this study, health refers to health condition and problems, eating habits, and food preference of the call center agents.

Third, recreational activities refer to the period of discretionary time spent beyond the demands of work. It is also known as free time, the time spent away from business, work and domestic chores (Holman, 2002, p. 35). On a functionalist standpoint, recreation refers to experiences and activities chosen and pursued by the individual in his/her free time. In the real sense of the world, "re-creating" the individual so that he/she may be refreshed to enable him/her to resume daily obligations, whatever those may be (Veal, 1992, p. 44). In this study, it refers to the usual past time of the call center agents.

Consumption on its functionalist standpoint is the end of the line of economic activities, through consumption, the needs and wants of the people is being met and satisfied (Goodwin, 2008). The fourth component, consumption behavior, refers to the attitude of the agent when it comes to consuming and spending their hard-earned income. This study also looked into the way working students save and invest their hard-earned salary.

The influence of subculture on the educational life of the working students was identified in terms of their academic performance. Academic performance is the outcome of education. It is the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved its educational goals. Crow and Crow (1969) defined academic performance as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instruction in a given area of learning. It also denotes the knowledge attained and the skills developed in the school subject, usually designed by test scores as measured by grades. On a functionalist standpoint, academic performance serves to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of instruction and the effort being exerted by the students towards their study. In this study, it refers to how the working students in call centers deal with their studies and how they cope with or accomplish the demands of their studies.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to describe and analyze the subculture of working students in selected call centers in Metro Manila. Specifically, the study aimed to:
1. Identify the subculture in the call center as manifested in the social environment, norms, and values of the workplace using a Functionalist Perspective.
2. Describe how the subculture influence the life of students working in call centers in terms of:
    2.1 family relations;
    2.2 health;
    2.3 recreational activities; and
    2.4 consumption behavior.
3. Analyze the influence of subculture on the academic performance of working students in call centers.

RELATED LITERATURE

The social environment in call centers is different. Call center agents tend to be night owls; agents usually work until 4 am or depending on the schedule of their shifts. This existing working environment can be observed in call centers' demands on agent time. The holidays in the Philippines are not in conjunction with all the holidays of other countries. Call centers require the agents to be in the office even during the holidays so that customers can still call about their most urgent concerns. Aside from this, call center agents also need to operate regardless of the weather conditions. Training is intensive for call center agents. Trainees have to learn account information first. Once they know the account, they will be deployed ready on the floor and receive many calls as they want. It is in the culture of the call center industry to handle customers well and consider them as lifeblood that gives full stream of support to make the company up and stay on the business top. Aside from the account training, agents are also oriented on the culture and geography of their customers (Bacasong, 2008). Agents need to provide a service to people who not only have different language but also different cultural background (Feinberg, 2005). Meanwhile, in

India, Kalita (2005) found out that the culture in the call center industry created a considerable impact on the values of the call center agents. Studies show that aside from the jobs and products that US has exported to India, it has also exported values as well. As more call centers and multinationals enter India, the agents have become hot commodities, switching jobs and commanding steep salary increases along the way. The existing social environment in call centers changed the social life of the agents while young people's social life which used to revolve around family now increasingly focuses on friends and work. The average Indian youth, specifically those working in call centers, is more outward-looking, more confident, more liberal in terms of attitudes and values and social norms.

In the case of call center agents in the Philippines, Filipinos are known all over the world for their hospitality. This trait is also translated in the way agents deal with the people they talk to on the phone. They are courteous and always aware of the customers. Jocano (1999, p.38) explains that what makes Filipino relational values somewhat different from the Westerner's is the importance they give to interpersonal relations. He points to the Filipino value of pakikipagkapwa as an indication of this. Despite the negative effect or influence of work such as lack of sleep, no exercise, diminished social life and time for family, it also has its positive influence such as agents became more understanding, patient, and adaptable; improved their English; and developed communication skills.

Call center usually operates 24/7. Hence, the night shift is part of the call center lifestyle. Young adults in call centers who do night shift, then, develop a distinct pattern of routines compared to those in regular day jobs. Working at night and sleeping at day time would normally lessen their opportunities for social interaction and be more limited to the social environment in the call center which is mainly composed of co-workers who may follow the same routines. The combination of night time work and constant schedule takes its toll on agent's health, social, economic, and family life (Dizon, 2010, p. 29). This is supported by the study of Fabros (2006, p.75) which showed that the more significant relationships agents are able to sustain are those with co-workers and friends in call centers who share the same sociotemporal space they inhabit.

A study conducted by the UP Population institute (2011, p. 15), asked the call center agent respondents on what they usually do when they are not at work or how they spend their free time. Among the most commonly reported leisure activities were malling, use of internet, watching movies, and shopping. They also engage activities with friends from work, likely because their schedules coincide more with co-workers than with their other friends.

Stress is also a part of lifestyle in the call center. With the volume of calls and unpredictable customer calls, stress has a negative impact on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance. It may impede the performance in the call center industry. Aside from the dissatisfaction one can get because of stress, it also poses health risk among the agents - some of them become obese while some become skinny (Lim, 2007). In the study conducted by Villaluz (2003, p.38) on determinants of job performance among call center customer service representatives, it was revealed that there was a high pressure in the representatives' work.

Given the profuse job opportunities offered by call center companies, young adults find it appealing to start a career in the call center industry. Motivations such as high salary, bonuses, and easy promotions create a push and pull effect that simultaneously prevents them from satisfying all aspirations at once (Dizon, 2010, p. 38). Call center jobs are attractive not merely because they are available but because call center workers earn more than double the legislated minimum wage. In fact, according to the study of Medina (2008, p.42), financial stability is the greatest benefit of call centers, followed by making new friends, meeting new people, and self- satisfaction. The incentives and benefits those agents receive from their company allow the agents to spend and consume items to provide for their needs and wants. It is indeed with the promise of high pay, training and experience, call center work is still a viable option not only for graduates but for many students as well (Ermitanio, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
The researcher used the descriptive qualitative research in this study. Focused group discussion, one-on-one in-depth interviews, and non-participant observation were the data gathering methods employed. In this study, in-depth interview was used as the primary source of data while FGD was used for complementary source and validation of data. This study also used the non-participant observation. For analysis of data, constant comparison analysis was used to discuss the results and findings of the study based on interviews and group discussions. Through constant comparison analysis, underlying themes presented through the data were identified.

Research Locale
The study was conducted in eight different call center companies in Makati, Taguig, Mandaluyong and Quezon City. Two call center companies in Makati, one in Taguig, two in Mandaluyong, and three in Quezon City.

Research Participants
The researcher used the purposive sampling method in choosing the participants for this study, that is, they were deliberately

selected to provide the most information-rich data possible. There were 15 participants in the study: three from call centers in Makati, one from Taguig, eight from Mandaluyong, and three from Quezon City. All of them were college students aged 19-21 years and were identified through referral and network of friends working in call centers. The rest were gathered through chain referral or snow ball method. The researcher then contacted these prospects and secured their permission to participate in the study.

Phases of Research
Pre-survey and Selection of Participants
A pre-survey was conducted in different call center companies in Makati, Quezon City, and Mandaluyong to determine the possible participants in the study. Informal interviews to secure the involvement of the participants in the study were done through SMS, phone calls, and social networking sites. Interview guides were also discussed to the participants for them to prepare for the actual interview.

Preparation of Interview Questions
The researcher asked the assistance of his friends working in the call centers to help him prepare questions for the initial interview. The interview questions were also evaluated by the advisers of the researchers. Questions for the interview included the nature of the participants' work, their working conditions in the call centers, and their educational background.

Interview
The researcher conducted a "one-on-one" in-depth interview with the participants. The researcher used a voice recorder to record the interview. The researcher used the personal information sheet and an in-depth interview guide for the data gathering. The participants and the researcher agreed on the most convenient time, date, and place of meeting. Most of the interviews took place in a restaurant near the work place of the respondents. Interviews were conducted before or after work hours of the participants. To follow the continuity of the participants' story, a focus group discussion was conducted, and an informal follow-up interview was held five months after the last focus group discussion.

Focused Group Discussion
The focused group discussions (FGDs) were held separately, that is by location of the participants. Around three to four participants participated in the focused group discussion. The findings of the discussion helped the researcher to consolidate all information and to come up with a line of thought about working students in call centers which was used as a complementary source and for validation of data.

Analysis and Organization of Data
The researcher transcribed the data gathered from the interviews with the participants. After the transcription, the researcher categorized the responses of the participants. Constant comparison analysis was used for data analysis. According to Leech (2007), comparison analysis is one type of qualitative content analysis, and the emphasis of this analysis is to discover the themes from the transcripts. In this study, the researcher categorized the data according to themes anchored on the focus of the study. After all the data had been categorized, themes were identified and documented which was used as basis for the discussion of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. SUBCULTURE OF WORKING STUDENTS IN CALL CENTERS

Social Environment

shared by everyone
1. Demands in the workplace
2. Relationship with the customers in terms of experiences

shared only by working students
1. Relationship of call center companies to working students
2. Working relations of students working in call centers with their superiors and co-workers

Norms
shared by everyone
1. Quality of calls
2. English only policy
3. Dress code
4. Attendance and punctuality
5. No cellphone on floor

shared only by working students
Flexibility of schedule

Values
(Adjustment/ transition of values of working students)
1. Importance of time
2. Empathy
3. Tolerance
4. Appreciation of customer service
5. Value of work
6. Nationalism

Changes in lifestyle, behavior and skills of working students
1. Shorter patience
2. Improved communication skills
3. Less time with friends
4. Conscious of time
5. Particular of customer service
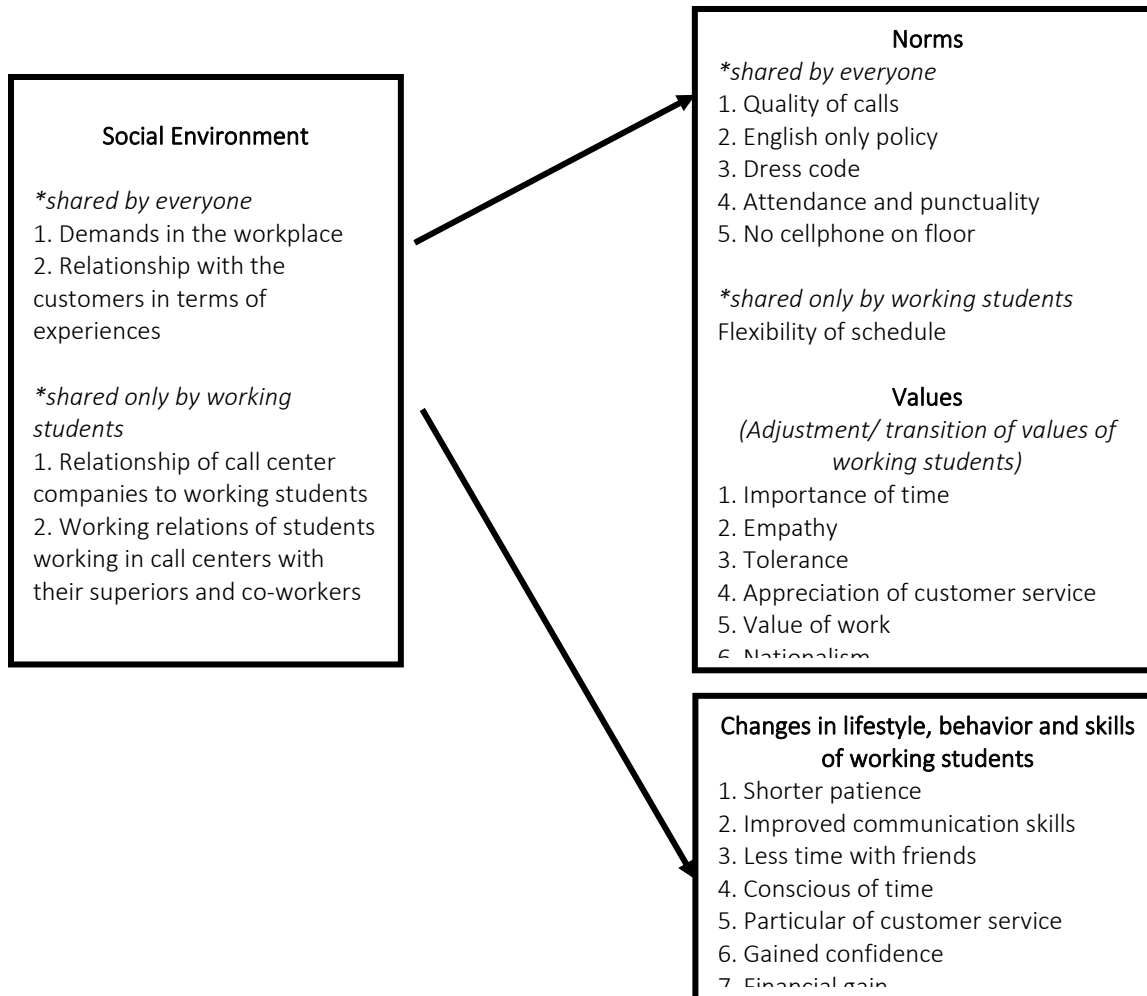6. Gained confidence
7. Financial gain

Figure no. 2. Social environment, norms, and values in the call centers.

Figure 2 presents how the norms and values were developed through the social environment of the work place. It is important to distinguish the culture shared by everyone as it reflects the call center culture and those shared only by working students as it reflects the subculture of working students in call centers. The social environment develops the norms and values and eventually changes the lifestyle, behavior, and skills of working students in call centers.

The findings revealed the influence of social environment to the lifestyle, skills, and behavior of the participants. The unique environment in call center developed the behavior and brought change to the way of living of the agents. These changes may be positive or negative. These results are supported by the Functional view that culture can be adapted based on the environment.

In this study, it was revealed that there were changes in the lifestyle, behavior, and skills of the working students as part of adaptation to the environment and norms of the workplace.

Given the adaptation of the working students in the call center, this paved the way for the development of subculture. The relationship of call center companies to working students, the working relations of students working in call center with their superiors and co-workers, the demands of managing studies and work, and the leniency of call center companies when it comes to schedule makes it distinct only among the working students. The foregoing comprises the subculture of working students in call centers. This subculture of working students in call center was born out of cultural adaptation in the environment.

INFLUENCE OF SUBCULTURE ON THE LIFE OF WORKING STUDENTS IN CALL CENTERS
On family relations
Results of the interview showed that the family relations of working students in call centers are diverse and complex. Based on the findings, some of the family accepted the part time job of their son/ daughter. They support and understand the situation of

their son/daughter, and some even provide them the special treatment on the household. This can also be attributed to the fact, that after working in the call centers, the participants were able to support the financial needs not only of themselves but their family as well. This led to finding a feeling of fulfillment for the participants, see they were able to share their hard-earned income to their family. While there are others who discouraged the participants to work because of the lessened time for studies. It also found out that most of the participants agreed that they experienced less time spending with their family.

On a functional standpoint, the family of the working students function as an emotional support. According to Parsons, although most people have close friendship that give them emotional support, family members generally play a larger role in this area. This is true based on the results of the interview where participants of the study feel the support and concern of their family.

In terms of influence of subculture to family relations, there is an indirect relation of subculture to family relations. One distinct influence is on the case of some participants absorbing the language of the call center work in conversing with the members of the household. Nevertheless, the changes in family relations of the working students were mostly brought up by the demands of the night shift schedule as manifested on the less time spend with their family.

On health

The physical surrounding and the demand of night shift schedule posed risks on the health and well-being of the working students. On a functional perspective, the health problems and sickness being experienced and encountered by the participants served as a dysfunction, since they were not able to perform their obligations as an agent and as a student.

The health hazards brought about by the night shift schedule of the agents need to be addressed by the call center industry through programs promoting wellness among its employees. This is deemed important most especially for working students who divide their time for work and studies.

On recreational activities

The findings of the study showed that students working in call centers have different recreational activities, and different ways of spending their rest day or free time. On a functional viewpoint, the recreational activities aim to re-create the energy in order to restore the ability to function of an individual. This holds true, most especially when most of the participants spend their rest day by catching enough sleep or to catch up with the school requirements. The different recreational activities helped the participants to at least lessen the stress brought about by the demands of the work place.

In terms of influence of subculture to recreational activities, this is manifested on the congenial social environment in the work place. The casual and friendly working relations in the call center paved way to create recreational activities being spent with co-workers, be it eating after work, videoke, or playing sports. The competitive salary being offered in the call center also paved way for the participants to pursue their leisure, be it shopping, watching movies, or travelling out of town. The demands of a night shift work also influenced on how the working students should spend their rest day as they need to keep in mind that they need to balance their work and their studies.

On consumption behavior

Given the findings of the study, the high salary in the call center enabled the working students to support not only themselves but their family as well. Despite the night schedule they had to deal with, the participants agreed that they became financially well-off after working in the call center. Based on these findings, it is imperative that working students in the call center learn how to intelligently spend their money to avoid impulsive buying which will help them save out of their hard-earned money. With the given concern, a call center company should at least promote programs on how to spend money/income wisely. This will help the working students to value the essence of savings and to recognize their needs and wants for wise spending.

Findings of the study strengthen the Functional Theory of Parsons. The subculture in call centers influence the life of the working students in four areas, namely: family relations, health, recreational activities, and consumption behavior. This happened when working students adapt and attained the norms and values in the workplace, and integrate it to their life. In this study, call center agents' membership in an occupational subculture influence and affects their life, whether in their family relations, their economic status through their consumption behavior, and even in their health and recreation. The belief and the lifestyle of the participants were also molded based on their association in the group.

INFLUENCE OF CALL CENTER SUBCULTURE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF WORKING STUDENTS
On problems and concerns of working students

Stress and lack of time- The participants of the study described their typical day in school as stressful and tiring. Most participants had the same sentiment of having less time for sleep which made them look haggard in school. With a sleeping time of only around 3- 4 hours, most of the informants felt sleepy and tired in school.

Attendance- Most of the respondents shared that they were often late in class, usually missing their first period subject. There were also times that they committed absences in school just to catch up with their school requirements.

Submission of requirements- Working students also felt stressed when they were bombarded with homework's and requirements. Some of them failed to submit school requirements on time. Moreover, most of the participants crammed

whenever school requirements demand immediate submission. As pressured to conform to the demands of school and work, some participants admitted to having dropped subjects.

Preparation during examinations- Most of the participants also found it difficult to review especially during exams. Other participants revealed that they just relied on stock knowledge whenever there was an examination. Some participants take leave from work whenever there is a major examination, like Midterm or Finals, to give more time to prepare and review.

The study attributed these problems to the lack of time due to the demand of call center work and school requirements. Given the said scenario, it is deemed important for the working students to manage their time well. Working students should learn to adapt to the demands of call center by studying during their rest day or lessening the time for recreation to give more time to studies or by organizing their schedule in work especially during examination season.

On relationship with the teachers and classmates

The findings of the study indicated the varied relationships of the working students with their teachers and classmates. It is good to note that the professors of the participants showed concern over the academic standing of their students, as when they called the attention of students who were always tardy as revealed by some participants. Based on the sharing of the participants, some professors even went the extra mile of personally talking to their students and advising them to focus more on their academics. The encouragement given by the professors definitely helped the working students to be motivated, knowing and seeing that their teachers were concerned about them.

On the influence of call center work to academic standing

Most of them agreed that working in the call center affected their performance in school. Aside from occasional tardiness, difficulty in catching up with lessons, and complying with requirements, they observed their declining academic standing. In addition, the irregular academic standing of most of the participants was the consequence of the subjects they dropped. They also enrolled with underload units each semester to balance their work and studies. This also led them to extend their residence in the college they enrolled in. These findings indicate how the academic standing of most of the participants suffered as they needed to balance their time for work and studies.

While most of the participants experienced difficulty to balance work and studies, few participants were still able to make it in the Dean's List. Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be deduced that although working in the call center have some negative effects on the agents' academic performance, the latter may be avoided as long as the working students are able to manage and use their time productively and wisely.

Given the influence of subculture of call centers on the lives of the participants and on their academic performance, it is then imperative for call centers to help agents to cope with work through an adequate wellness program and learning programs particularly for the working students. The schools may also help them catch up with their academic performance by providing them remediation programs and exposure in which they can use and share their talents and skills to at least catch up with their deficiencies and eventually improve their academic performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusions
Based on the aforementioned findings, the following conclusions were drawn:
1. The subculture of working students in call centers developed through the adaptation of working students to the existing culture of the workplace. The distinct policies and experiences only shared by the working students paved the way for the formation of subculture in the call center.
2. The social environment helped develop the norms and values of working students in call centers. Working in the call center helped them improve themselves based on the work ethics and values imparted in the work place.
3. Working in call center has positive and negative effects. Most of the positive effects are improved communication skills, confidence, and financial stability while the negative effects include less social time, difficulty in balancing time for studies and work, and health hazards caused by work. Given the negative effects of call center work to the participants, it is deemed necessary for working students to adapt to their schedule and balance their time for work and studies.
4. Working in the call centers brought significant changes to the lives of the working students particularly on their family relations, recreation, health, and consumption behavior.
   The night shift work schedule in the call centers yielded negative effects to the working students. Late night work made them more prone to health risks and problems which later affected their performance in school.
5. Working students in call center experienced difficulty in their studies. Hence, it is necessary for call center companies and schools to provide the needed remediation to address this concern to improve productivity in work and performance in school of working students.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations are proposed:
1. Call centers should recognize work force planning and scheduling especially for working students through observance of regularity in shift to help them adjust easily to their work and studies. They should also provide employee manuals or guidelines for working students to cover clear policy in dealing with working students. This way, working students could easily adapt to their work schedule and balance their time for work and studies.
2. Call center companies should conduct professional development programs such as wellness program for agents, most especially for working students, to cope with the demands of their schedule. This way, students working in the call centers may be able to live a healthy relationship with their family, to improve their health conditions, to find time for recreation, and to manage their finances well.
3. Call center companies should provide incentive programs such as scholarship program for working students to help them in their studies and motivate them to become more productive and competitive. In case there are already existing incentive programs in the company, it is recommended that these programs be continuously implemented.
4. Working students should also be encouraged to participate in activities, training, and seminar that will help improve their academic performance. Furthermore, teachers, through classroom activities, should provide activities, such as oral presentations, where working students of call centers can share their talent and skills. The activities will provide them opportunities to perform well in school.
5. Future researchers may conduct further studies to examine the effectiveness of remediation programs of call center companies and schools for the improvement of the academic performance of working students. They may also conduct on how to improve the academic performance of working students.

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