

# Ontology of Fake: Discerning the Philippine Elite

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## ABSTRACT

Hilary Putnam (1975) proposes that a “natural kind” term relies on a division of linguistic labor in which experts discern what is or is not a member of a kind. Centering on a Philippine-elite social kind term, this essay examines how self-appointed experts develop and share “scientific” instruments, or tests, that discern whether someone is a “real” or “fake” elite. These tests report about signs of realness and fakeness by assigning “gentle” and “rough” qualities to speech and body of differentiated social types. This essay demonstrates that such qualia are central to shaping ontologies of social types; that the discerning subject, who speaks from an elevated social position as reflexive expert, is critical to this process; and that the discerner shares expertise by developing tests that rest on different ontologies of emblem. The essay argues that discerning Philippine elite types and their aspiring subtypes and countertypes presupposes an overarching ontology of fake that already renders real elites as fakes.

There was once a prince who wanted to marry a princess. But she had to be a real princess.

—Hans Christian Andersen, “The Princess and the Pea” ([1835] 1998, 28)

**L**ike many fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Princess and the Pea” presents a world populated by princes, princesses, kings, and queens. But his is a world filled with anxiety about the “fake.” The problem: the

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prince wants to marry a princess, but he does not know how to identify a “real” one. The solution: rely on his mother. The tale attributes special expertise to her, the queen. When identifying a princess, the queen relies on a distinction between two orders of signs: the “typical” and the “necessary” (Putnam 1975; Reyes 2004, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Typical signs of a princess are identified by their absence when an unexpected guest appears one stormy night: “It was a princess who stood outside. But my, what a sight she was with the rain and the storm! Her hair and her clothes were running with water: water was running in through the toes of her shoes and out at the heels. But she said she was a real princess” (Andersen [1835] 1998, 28–29).

Although the sopping guest did not exhibit signs of a princess—the right “hair,” “clothes,” and “shoes”—she could still be a princess, because such signs are regarded as typical, not necessary. A necessary sign of a princess, the reader is told, is a “sensitive” body. Enter the pea. The queen conducts an experiment. She places a pea at the bottom of the guest’s bed and covers it with forty mattresses. The next morning the guest complains of a sleepless night because something hard in her bed has bruised her body. The narrator announces: “No one but a real princess could possibly be so sensitive” ([1835] 1998, 29). In this tale, signs of a “sensitive” body are necessary for, if not exclusive to, a real princess. Signs related to hair, clothes, and shoes are merely typical. In fact, they can be dangerously misleading. Relying on typical signs can lead one to the “fake” princess, an unacceptable marriage partner in this fairy tale world.

As a term for a social category or type, “princess” operates not unlike a “natural kind” term (Putnam 1975). A natural kind term denotes things that occur in nature, such as elements and species. Hilary Putnam uses the example of gold to demonstrate how natural kind terms require experts: some people sell gold, some people buy gold, and some people “tell whether or not something is really gold” (227). Putnam calls this a “division of linguistic labor,” which he describes as such: “everyone to whom gold is important for any reason has to *acquire* the word ‘gold’; but he does not have to acquire the *method of recognizing* if something is or is not gold. He can rely on a special subclass of speakers” (227–28). Putnam claims that “it is only the sociolinguistic state of the collective linguistic body to which the speaker belongs that fixes [a natural kind term’s] extension” (229)—the set of things a term’s sense is seen as true of.

1. My use of “typical” and “necessary” expands less on “necessary and sufficient conditions” in classical theories of categorization, and more on a contrast in Hilary Putnam’s conception of “stereotype” that involves “features of the kind that are typical” and “necessary conditions . . . for membership in the kind” (1975, 230).

As such, not everyone who uses or “acquires” a natural kind term (like gold)—or, by extension, a social kind term (like princess)—must know how to discern between its reals and fakes. The prince, for example, has acquired the word *princess* but can rely on the queen to recognize whether or not someone is really a princess. This division of linguistic labor can be of deep consequence to users of a social kind term, especially those who desire marriages with only its members. In this essay, I shift attention from the division of linguistic labor as a whole to one of its central components: the expert. I explore how experts (like the queen) claim and transmit expertise about a social kind, ostensibly increasing the set of experts within a collective linguistic body. I do this by carefully addressing this question: who are the experts, and what does their linguistic labor involve?

Drawing on research on a Philippine-elite social kind term, this essay examines how self-appointed Putnamian experts—or “discerners” (Bourdieu 1984; Bucholtz 2007)—develop and share scientific instruments, or tests, as “methods of recognizing” whether someone is a real or fake elite. I focus on three such tests: the observation, the experiment (like the queen’s pea), and the quiz. These three instruments report about signs of realness and fakeness by assigning “gentle” and “rough” qualities to speech and body of differentiated social types. This essay demonstrates three things: that such qualia are central to shaping ontologies of social types; that the discerning subject (cf. “listening subject” [Inoue 2006]), who speaks from an elevated social position as reflexive expert, is critical to this process; and that the discerner shares expertise by developing tests that rest on different ontologies of emblem—namely, how and which signs are regarded as typical, necessary, fakeable, and unfakeable. I explore how within sign assemblages, qualia can be positioned at the top of a hierarchy of value or in the midst of an egalitarian field in which all signs have equal weight. I will argue that discerning Philippine elite types and their aspiring subtypes and countertypes presupposes an overarching ontology of fake that already renders real elites as fakes.

### **Ontology of Fake, Ontology of Emblem**

As with any construal of objects or behaviors, things only become fake when they are metapragmatically formulated as such and when those formulations are taken up and circulate across events and social domains (Agha and Wortham 2005; Wortham and Reyes 2015). While this essay is concerned with renderings of both the fake and the real, I hope to offer a theorization of fake that centers on its ontology. First, some background.

It is perhaps commonplace to view “fake” as the opposite of “real,” and “real” as a matter of “authenticity.” A productive line of scholarship centers not on authenticity as an inherent quality but on “authentication” as the outcome of social processes through which something gets read as genuine or real (e.g., Jaffe 2000; Bucholtz 2003; Reyes 2005; Chun 2013). Much less discussed is the concept of “fake.” Yet a growing body of research in this area is emerging: whether on fake transgender groups (Hall 2005), fake brands (Nakassis 2012), fake porcelain (Gal, this volume), or fake academic records (Lo and Choi, forthcoming). These studies challenge simple assumptions that “fake” is the inverse of “real” or the absence of value. For even if “fake” is equated with “inauthentic,” such inauthenticity must also be authenticated (e.g., as a “real fake”) for it to be regarded and valued as such. The authentication and valuation of the real relies on the authentication and valuation of the fake.

Not only is the concept of “fake” often set in contrast to notions of “real,” “genuine,” and “authentic,” it can also be set in relation to the robust literature on “mimicry” (e.g., Bhabha 1984; Cannell 1995), “imitation” (e.g., Pang 2012; Lempert 2014), and “copy” (e.g., Inoue 2006; Wong 2013). When something is read as mimetic practice, discerning between original and copy relies on a differential that is “felt to exist” (Lempert 2014, 381). “Feeling” a fake, I suggest, often involves rendering something as that which aspires through double voicing. In “The Princess and the Pea,” for example, when the presence of a sign of realness is felt (such as a “sensitive” body), co-occurring signs (such as wet hair, clothes, and shoes) may be recalibrated as those of a single-voiced real, that is, a real princess who speaks with one “voice” (Bakhtin [1935] 1981). But when the absence of a sign of realness is felt or the presence of a sign of fakeness is felt,<sup>2</sup> co-occurring signs may be recalibrated as those of a double-voiced fake, that is, a fake princess whose real voice is shrouded by a failed attempt to “animate” another voice (Goffman 1981). The fake, then, is often construed as attempting to approximate a voice that does not match its own. Importantly, neither the citing voice nor the cited voice need to be clearly identified as named kinds; the only requirement is that a contrast between the two is construed. Whereas the real is often seen as being itself, the fake is often seen as failing to resemble (i.e., stand in iconic relation to) what it aspires to be.

2. Like a real, a fake can also be regarded as a social kind to which signs are attributed. For instance, determining whether a “fake princess” is a “real servant” or a “real witch” may be less about the absence of signs of a princess or the presence of signs of a servant or witch, and more about the presence of signs of a fake. Think of a toothy smile that might be a sign neither of a real princess nor of a real servant or witch, but of a fake princess.

This essay explores the emblem-token-type-ontology configuration that emerges when self-appointed experts discern the real elite from the fake elite (cf. Silverstein 2005; Nakassis 2012). Discerners rely on ontological assumptions that elite types exist and that tokens of those types display emblems of those types. To be sure, all social types (such as princesses or elites) are social inventions: “figures of personhood” voiced with recognizable qualities and circulable as objects of discourse among a set of speakers (Agha 2005). An emblem, as “a thing to which a social persona is attached” (Agha 2007, 235), construes signs as linked to types. In “The Princess and the Pea,” for example, the queen concerns herself with emblems of type (such as a “sensitive” body that indexically iconizes the princess type), as well as tokens of type (such as the overnight guest who exhibits such emblems). And this set of associations relies on an ontology—“assumptions that drive interpretations” (Kockelman 2013, 34)—that things such as princesses exist, that they have particular features, that such features require expertise to discern, and that this matters.

Talk about what constitutes an emblem of a type or a token of a type often purports to describe an already existing ontology. Yet such talk plays a necessary role in constituting (or troubling) an emblem-token-type-ontology configuration. Not only do I question whether a type exists before it is talked about; I also question whether a real exists before a fake—just as others have questioned whether an “original” exists before a “copy” (Inoue 2006) or a “mimicked” exists before a “mimic” (Cannell 1995).

Given the discussion above, I suggest that an ontology of fake presupposes the existence of types whose tokens aspire to pass for tokens of differentiated types through double-voiced emblematic displays. This essay is concerned not only with ontology of fake but also with ontology of emblem. Here I am interested in the conditions of the existence of signs: what counts as a sign and how it is understood to be there (Lo and Rosa 2015). In this essay, discerners often categorize emblems and assign differential value to them. I reveal an ontology wherein some signs are regarded as fakeable (e.g., hair, clothes, and shoes as typical but insufficient signs), but certain linguistic and bodily qualities are not (e.g., a “sensitive” body as a necessary and sufficient sign). Such an ontology orders emblems of a type: unfakeable qualia are placed higher in a hierarchy of emblems, because such signs are regarded as more difficult to display if one is not considered a “real.” For example, it might be easier for a fake princess to manipulate signs of hair, clothes, and shoes to fool someone into thinking she is a real princess. But it might be more difficult for her to fake a sensitive body that feels a pea under forty mattresses. I explore how and why different

ontologies of emblem are mobilized across the three instruments of discernment.

### **Conyo Ontology: Mimicry, Reflexivity, Discernment**

The social type of concern in this essay is that of the Philippine *conyo*<sup>3</sup> (also spelled *konyo*, *coño*, *cono*, or *conio*). Conyo are regarded as urban elite youth who are light-skinned, wealthy, materialistic, arrogant, *maarte* ‘high-maintenance’, and vacuous. The term *conyo* also labels a language that conyo supposedly speak. Numerous tongue-in-cheek grammars describe conyo language as a kind of Tagalog-English mixing (“Taglish” or “Englog”) that is American English-dominant with excessive phatic flourishes, such as “like,” “*diba?*” ‘no, right?’, and “oh my god!” (Reyes 2012). The conyo figure is often understood as participating too enthusiastically in colonial models of behavior that are seen as overly modern and a national betrayal. This is partly accomplished through a purported desire for commodified emblems of class distinction. But it is also accomplished through a linguistic and bodily hybridity that can be recognized as containing the physical traces of the desire to be modern (Rafael 1995). Thus conyo are often understood within an ontology of fake: aspiring to be what they are not, “taking on the role of stereotype images of Spaniards or Americans that exist in the Philippine popular imagination” (Garvida 2012, 32). Similar to other postcolonial elite figures—such as “Kong girl” in Hong Kong (Kang and Chen 2014), “Peter” in India (Nakassis 2016), “burger” in Pakistan (Durrani 2016), “Model C” in South Africa (Wale 2010), “D4” in Ireland (Moore 2011), and “fresa” in Mexico (Chaparro 2016)—conyo is also about the creation of a striving internal other against which a sensible, moral, middle-class position can be constituted.

Conyo purportedly exhibit a Bourdieuan “aesthetic discernment” when it comes to taste in luxury items, such as designer clothing, expensive cars, and upscale coffee. Such emblematic displays of taste may be understood within wider “middle-class projects” of modernity in which consumption of the extralocal can provide a sense of dignity in life and a sense of access to material and symbolic resources in the outside world (Besnier 2009). The extralocal can signal a “double exteriority” (Nakassis 2016, 47) through which partaking in seemingly nonlocal practices can mark distinction from an undesirable “local”

3. In the Philippines, “conyo” is often recognized as deriving from the Spanish word *coño*, a term for female genitalia that is also a popular curse word. Origin myths tell of Spanish colonists in the 1800s being called conyo (because they frequently uttered *coño*), after which the conyo label gradually encompassed new groups based on incremental degrees of proximity to the sources of colonial power: from Peninsular Spanish, to Insular Spanish (or *Criollo* ‘Creole’), to Mestizo, to the Philippine upper classes (Reyes 2012).

exteriority (traditional, rural, etc.) as well as bring close a desired “foreign” exteriority (an imagined cosmopolitan West). But status markers are always subject to shift when they come to index undesirable social categories (like fake princesses). Enter the Philippine *jolog*, regarded as the tacky urban masses; *paconyo*, regarded as the middle-class wannabe conyo; and *mej conyo* ‘somewhat conyo’. *Jolog*, *paconyo*, and *mej conyo* can be seen as striving to exhibit signs of elite status, which positions them alongside conyo as competing types within an ontology of fake. Importantly, talk about *jolog*, *paconyo*, and *mej conyo* creates the conditions for the emergence of the real conyo and the desire to discern the real from the fake (cf. Nakassis [2013] on how a brand’s surfeits can precede the brand). Even within an ontology of fake, conyo can be understood as “real.”<sup>4</sup>

I highlight how the figures of the real and fake elite are formulated as not only subjects who discern but also objects that are discerned. Figure 1 illustrates a discerner of conyo in a meme created around 2011.<sup>5</sup> It features a character from *Futurama* (an American animated series) squinting his eyes as he discerns whether someone is conyo or merely aspiring to be. In this essay, I focus on such discerners of conyo, self-appointed Putnamian experts who locate themselves as sharing—if not exceeding—schemes of perception associated with elite status.

Ideas about mimicry and reflexivity are central to the discernment of real and fake elites in the Philippines. To be sure, the figure of the conyo elite is often understood as copying colonial power, just as the figure of the fake conyo is seen as imitating conyo. These perceptions emerge within a colonial framework in which Homi Bhabha (1984) theorizes mimicry: the colonial subject as “almost the same but not quite.” Since the turn of the twentieth century, American colonial authorities have framed Filipinos—elite or otherwise—as natural imitators that lack awareness (Rafael 2000). Considering several texts written during the early years of the American occupation of the Philippines,

4. “Real conyo” functions like George Lakoff’s “real mother” in that “the very idea that there is such a thing as a *real mother* seems to require a choice among models where they diverge” (1987, 75). Thus *paconyo*, *mej conyo*, and *real conyo* do not necessarily represent subcategories of conyo as much as constitute a “cluster of models that jointly characterize” (75) conyo, with “real conyo” often understood as the prototype, or “best example,” of conyo. But while *paconyo* and *mej conyo* can indeed be conceptualized as conyo subtypes, they can also be understood as nonconyo countertypes—that is, not as a kind of conyo but as a kind of not conyo, similar to how *jolog* are often regarded. It should be clear, however, that my concern is not to list categories and rigidly designate them as subtypes or countertypes of conyo. Rather, I am interested in tracing how such categories can be variously conceived as competing types and mobilized to accomplish social action in and across events of semiosis.

5. “Futurama Fry,” available at <https://memegenerator.net/Futurama-Fry> (accessed September 20, 2012).



**Figure 1.** Memic representation of discerner of conyo [generated by <https://memegenerator.net/Futurama-Fry>].

Vicente Rafael (2005) traces how Filipino children are described as subjects who “do not know that they do not know,” and this “failure of self-reflection” (136) coincides with their “natural ability to mimic representations before them” (137). Rafael further argues that Filipino elites are similarly “discursively contained as a desexualized and mimetic presence” (140). Such colonial discourses can be traced through twentieth-century and present-day depictions of the Philippine elite and nonelite as engaging with distinct but related forms of non-reflexive mimicry.<sup>6</sup> Self-appointed Philippine discerners of the elite, on the other hand, can easily claim a reflexivity because of their professed ability to distinguish between these two types of purported mimics.

### **Conyo Qualia: “Gentle” Reals and “Rough” Fakes**

Similar to the “sensitive” qualities assigned to princesses and the “refined” qualities assigned to the Indonesian *priyayi* (Errington 1998), “gentle” qualities are

6. To say that Filipino mimicry is always construed as nonreflexive would be mistaken. More recent accounts of Filipino mimicry range from conceptualizations of nonreflexive imitation found in Renato Constantino’s (1966) portrayal of Filipinos as unknowing vessels of a colonial mentality, to reflexive imitation (or citationality) found in Fenella Cannell’s (1995) account of ironic, self-aware performances of *bakla* ‘gay men’ in beauty pageants. What I am suggesting is that historical chains of (post)colonial depictions of nonreflexive mimicry remain dense and robust.



attributed to another instantiation of the elite: the Philippine conyo. In a Peircean framework, abstract qualities—such as “sensitive,” “refined,” and “gentle”—are “qualisigns”: potential components of yet unrealized signs (*EP* 2:289–99). Such abstract qualities are experienced as “qualia” when they are felt in material form, as “qualities instantiated or embodied in entities or events” (Chumley and Harkness 2013, 5). Since qualia are experiences of sensuous qualities, they can be perceived not as the attributed phenomena that they are but rather as intrinsic features of social types and their tokens. This motivates perceptions that qualia do not merely point to or index entities but seem to inhere naturally in their character, thus establishing a more stable, iconic link (Gal and Irvine 1995).

Excerpt 1 contains an example of how “gentle” and “rough” speech qualia are attributed to conyo and non-conyo, respectively. This excerpt is taken from the “Englog” entry on the now defunct *economicexpert.com* (a website that provided a free searchable database of thousands of entries on business, industry, finance, and tax). After explaining that a “type of *Englog*—English with some Tagalog words—is called *Konyo English*,” the entry proceeds to explain the features, histories, and origins of both conyo and conyo language. The extract below appears in the middle of a discussion of phonological and morphological features of conyo language:

*Excerpt 1*

The “gentle” stresses and mild sing-song intonations of Konyo English (as an Englog) are highly opposed to the slightly [*sic*] rougher sounds of Taglish as spoken by cab drivers. Konyo English is softer and less pointed, and to the ears of some people, may seem a tad bit on the effeminate side.<sup>7</sup>

This excerpt presupposes the ontological existence of two social types: “conyo” and “cab drivers,” who are set in deep contrast to one another. Each type is assigned a language: conyo speak the more English-dominant Englog and cab drivers speak the more Tagalog-dominant Taglish. Also, each language is assigned qualia: “gentle,” “mild,” and “soft” conyo language, which is explicitly regarded as “effeminate,” in opposition to “rough” and “pointed” cab driver language, which is implicitly regarded as “mannish.” Here, qualia act as identifiable emblems of contrasting types. “Gentle” and “rough” qualia emerge through an axis of differentiation that hierarchically organizes difference (Gal 2012):

7. “Englog,” available at <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Englog.htm> (accessed March 12, 2012).

conyo language as more pleasant sounding, though at risk of gendered over-determination. In this essay, I explore how these qualia are iconized onto other displayable practices, namely, those involving the body—for example, “gentle” bodily dispositions of real conyo and “rough” bodily movements of fake conyo.

**The Three Tests**

I turn now to the three scientific instruments, or tests, that are developed by self-appointed discerners of conyo and disseminated across social media. By creating and sharing tests, these discerners act as Putnamian experts who invite viewers to use their instruments to discern for themselves. In addition to a claimed expertise, other types of authority can underlie these tests: ranging from the institutional legitimacy of a reputable magazine that publishes a test, to the popularity of a video that features a test. As these instruments become widely circulated, they purportedly increase the number of experts within a division of linguistic labor of the conyo social kind. Table 1 describes the three types of tests.

Presented within a playful and humorous frame, each test plays on the logic of empirical evidence and focuses on different positions of the sign. The observation invites viewers to observe displayable signs of others in everyday settings in order to spot emblems of realness or fakeness. The experiment also invites viewers to observe displayable signs of others, but in a “laboratory” setting in which discerners introduce a stimulus and monitor whether emblems of realness or fakeness arise in response to the procedure. The quiz invites viewers to observe displayable signs of self by answering a series of questions that determine if they themselves exhibit emblems of realness or fakeness.

Important to these tests is the bundling of signs as a “factor of co-presence” (Keane 2003, 414). As discussed above, qualisigns—such as “gentle” and “rough”—are abstract qualities that when attributed to some material form (like speech) are regarded as qualia. But as a part of this embodiment, qualia are inescapably bound to other signs copresent in that material form, such as other felt speech

**Table 1. Three Test Types**

Type	Description
The observation	Invites viewers to observe signs of others in a natural setting
The experiment	Invites viewers to conduct an experiment to elicit signs of others
The quiz	Invites viewers to administer a self-assessment of signs of self

characteristics or bodily traits that may be read as contradicting or corresponding to co-occurring signs. A potential problem for these tests, then, is how to decipher a bundle of signs that may not clearly or uniformly index a real or fake, such as when a princess has wet hair, clothes, and shoes, but has a “sensitive” body. Across these three tests, discerners claim to have developed reliable scientific instruments that decipher sign assemblages in cases where a person may display some markers of a real conyo but may in fact be a “fake.” Some tests focus on certain linguistic and bodily qualia as the true signs that cannot be faked (e.g., a “sensitive” body), as opposed to the ambiguous, overlapping signs that both a real and fake can display (e.g., the right hair, clothes, and shoes). Other tests do not rank signs but abide by the principle of “enoughness” (Blommaert and Varis 2013) to discern whether someone is a real or fake. I thus find that bundling matters, but in different ways. Competing configurations of bundling are about competing ontologies of emblem: one ontology positions signs in a hierarchical order; another ontology places signs in an egalitarian field. Below I discuss how, and to what effect, this is accomplished.

### The Observation

In many videos and commentaries that circulate in print, entertainment, and social media, self-appointed expert discerners describe emblems of conyo as perceptible to a trained observer. Often these discerners explicitly draw on axes of differentiation when describing conyo: such as real versus fake, conyo versus jolog, and conyo versus paconyo. Oppositions can also be implicitly enacted through contrasts between the conyo being described and the expert doing the describing.

In this section, I focus on an example of “the observation” test featured in the video “*Mga Pasimple* [The art of subtlety] (Conyo vs. Jolog),” which was uploaded to YouTube in 2011.<sup>8</sup> This five-minute video was posted by “Petra Mahalimuyak,” the online persona of (Megan) Ashley Rivera. As of 2016, Ashley as Petra has achieved modest success on YouTube with over 122,000 subscribers and over 21 million views, which has led to appearances on Philippine talk shows, on magazine covers, and at promotional events. Ashley has explained in interviews that she was born in the United States, grew up in the Philippines, and returned to the United States around age 17. Ashley has said that

8. “Mga Pasimple (Conyo vs. Jologs),” YouTube video posted by “Petra Mahalimuyak,” July 8, 2011, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CdNBXISvEg>.

she uses a “fake Filipino accent” when performing as Petra, by altering her real voice to sound more “Filipino.” Moreover, in this video, Ashley performs Petra performing conyo and jolog, which creates a complicated footing that involves four personae: Ashley as actor, Petra as character, and conyo and jolog as additional embedded characters.

The video features only one person but multiple figures. Ashley as Petra describes differences between conyo and jolog then acts like conyo and jolog to display those differences. Explicitly labeling conyo as “high class” and “coy” in contrast to jolog as “low class” and “obvious,” she presents five nightclub scenarios in which conyo and jolog try to be subtle: when they use cell phones, sing, ogle men, pose for pictures, and dance. This structure highlights how conyo and jolog occupy the same spaces and engage in the same activities, sharing overlapping signs of competing types. Thus conyo and jolog might be mistaken for each other if an observer is not aware of the signs that differentiate the two. In addition, the ontological framework of fakeness that encompasses both conyo and jolog is foregrounded, given that both types aspire to be what they are not—that is, “subtle.” Moreover, jolog here are further depicted as aspiring (and failing) to mimic, or double-voice, the more skillful subtlety of conyo.

Excerpt 2 features a transcript of the fourth nightclub scenario: when conyo and jolog say they don’t want their picture taken, but they really do. Ashley deploys several contrasts in her performances of Petra, conyo, and jolog. This is done in both linguistic and bodily displays. Figure 2 features some of these bodily displays. It presents a numbered progression of video stills as conyo (top row) and jolog (bottom row) pose for a camera. Each numbered video still is linked to a corresponding number in parentheses in the transcript. I also note in the transcript which character is “speaking,” although Ashley is the animator in all utterances.

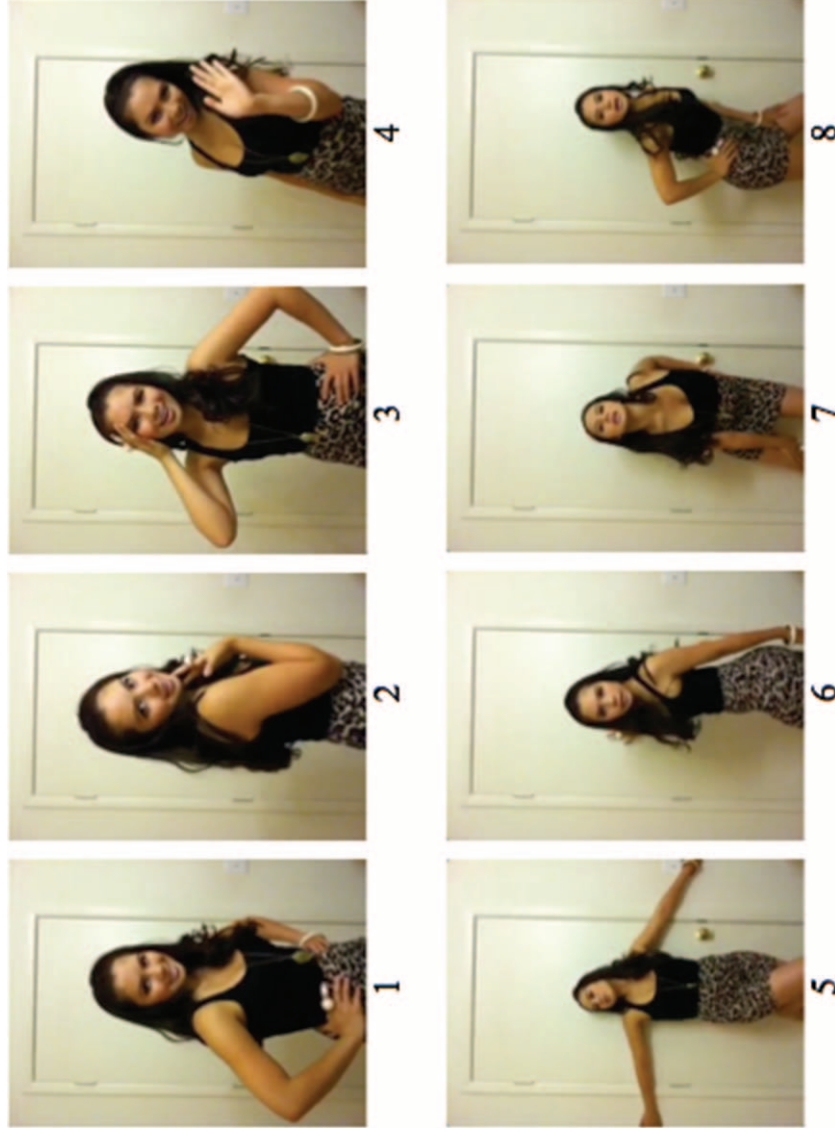
### *Excerpt 2*

- |    |       |                                                            |
|----|-------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Petra | Now number four                                            |
| 2  |       | The pictures [pitʃərs]                                     |
| 3  |       | Some people say they don’t want to take pictures [pitʃərs] |
| 4  |       | But that is a lie                                          |
| 5  |       | Because                                                    |
| 6  |       | When there’s a camera                                      |
| 7  |       | They still keep posing                                     |
| 8  |       | Even if they don’t want to                                 |
| 9  |       | Like this                                                  |
| 10 |       | What would a conyo do?                                     |

11		She would be
12		Like
13		This
14	Conyo	Stop taking pictures [pɪktʃərz] (1)
15		Oh my god you're so annoying (2)
16		Stop it (3)
17		Oh my god, no, just, no more
18		No more pictures [pɪktʃərz] for me (4)
19	Petra	Now what would a jologs do
20		She'll be like
21	Jolog	Oh my gosh, no more- (5)
22		No more pictures [pɪtʃərs] please
23		No more camera
24		Ca- cameras not allowed ok? (6)
25		Stop!
26		<i>Ano ba yan?</i> 'What are you doing?' (7)
27		<i>Ano?</i> 'What?'
28		<i>Alam mo ba yung stop?</i> 'Do you know what stop is?' (8)
29		<i>Sabi nang, sabi nang stop, eh.</i> 'I said stop already.'
30		<i>Alam mo yon?</i> 'Do you understand?'

Here, Ashley as Petra positions herself as an expert discerner, who explains how to identify a real conyo by observing them in natural settings like nightclubs. She claims epistemic authority by distinguishing between what people say (“people say they don’t want to take pictures”) and what people mean (“that is a lie”) and do (“they still keep posing”). Ashley marks clear transitions where the voice of Petra ends and where the voices of conyo and jolog begin: “she (conyo) would be like this” and “she’ll (jolog) be like.” Although conyo and jolog both refuse the camera (sometimes with the same phrase: “no more pictures”), aspects of language and body are placed in sharp contrast.

In terms of speech contrasts, Ashley as Petra juxtaposes how conyo speak more gently while coyly simpering (“stop taking pictures,” “oh my god you’re so annoying”) with how jolog use rougher, cruder language while scowling (“what are you doing?,” “I said stop already”). Both jolog and Petra pronounce “pictures” as “peechers” [pɪtʃərs], which suggests the “Filipino accent” that Ashley said she uses to perform Petra. Conyo, on the other hand, are performed with a differentiated pronunciation of “pictures” [pɪktʃərz], which suggests a more mainstream American accent. Moreover, only jolog speak Tagalog—and speak Tagalog as they become increasingly irritated—highlighting a Filipino coarseness that is not shared with conyo or Petra. Thus jolog are positioned with the most firmly rooted Filipinoness in terms of Tagalog use and Filipino accent, while conyo are displayed as oriented toward an American model of speech that



**Figure 2.** Subtle camera poses by conyo (top row) and jolog (bottom row); from a YouTube video posted by "Petra Mahalimuyak," July 8, 2011 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v53CdNBXISvEg>).

is framed as distinct from jolog and Petra as well as exterior to the Philippine nation. Since Petra shares English-only speech with conyo and Filipino-accented English with jolog, she is positioned in between the two, sharing aspects of both. This liminality creates a neutral, scientific distance for Petra, enhancing her authoritative status as expert discerner of conyo and jolog.

In terms of variations in body, conyo and jolog are displayed with a different “bodily hexis” that can reveal a contrasting social and class status (Bourdieu 1984). Conyo move more gracefully and subtly when posing, whereas jolog jerk their bodies around and pose in more vulgar positions. The top row of figure 2 illustrates how conyo pose with more restricted movements, hand often positioned near the face as if attempting to cover it out of shyness. The bottom row of figure 2 shows how jolog, in contrast, step back to ensure that their bodies are more fully in the camera frame as they abruptly stretch, turn, and bend in a manner that accentuates bodily contours. Ashley as Petra teaches her viewers that while conyo and jolog may display many of the same signs (e.g., the same clothes and hair, the same phrase “no more pictures”), discerning the reals from the fakes requires the recognition of a more precise sign constellation in which “gentle” and “rough” linguistic and bodily qualia are privileged as the more reliable—if not necessary and unfakeable—emblems of realness or fakeness.

### The Experiment

Sometimes the signs of conyo are not readily visible in a nightclub or other natural setting. In such cases, a scientific experiment can be conducted to bring out the sign. In this section, I focus on an example of “the experiment” featured in the video “Bogart the Explorer—the Philippine Conyo.”<sup>9</sup> This three-minute video was posted by “PaperbugTV,” which is the “Official YouTube Home of Bogart the Explorer.” Bogart the Explorer is a character played by Marco Ho from Davao City in Mindanao, Philippines. As of 2016, Marco as Bogart has achieved some success on YouTube with over 57,000 subscribers and over 11 million views, which has led to media appearances and product endorsements. Attempting an Australian-accented English, Bogart the Explorer is a parody of the late Australian wildlife expert Steve Irwin, star of *The Crocodile Hunter*. But the “wildlife” Bogart studies is the Philippine urban jungle and its specimens. In this video, the urban jungle is Manila, and the specimen is conyo.

In this video, Bogart the Explorer carries out an experiment in order to discern the real conyo from the fake conyo. In the video and its description, conyo

9. Posted by PaperbugTV, February 9, 2012, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=br2JPHYJ3jQ>.

are described as “snobbish and narcissistic” but comprising “2 subspecies.” One “covers itself with imported hides” (“Gucci, Versace, and Louis Vuitton”) and the other “with fake animal hides.” He calls the former the “real,” “true-blue,” and “purebred” conyo. The latter he calls “fake,” but a “subspecies” of conyo is still conyo—in other words, even the fake is real. Bogart’s explicit framing of “2 subspecies” creates subtypes of the conyo type that share some signs (behaviors construed as “snobbish and narcissistic”) but not others (what they wear). Thus for Bogart, the relevant axis of differentiation is real conyo versus fake conyo, which is in contrast to Petra who limits her discussion to conyo versus jolog. But like Petra, Bogart frames conyo as aspiring to behaviors external to the Philippines. Thus both conyo subtypes are placed within an ontology of fake, where real conyo (as “real fake”) and fake conyo (as “fake fake”) are set in contrast to one another.

In the video, Bogart is searching for conyo in the “ancient gardens of Corinthian,” a play on words to suggest “Corinthian Gardens,” a high-end gated community in Quezon City in Metro Manila. He hears “the conyo’s roar” (the sound of a sports car engine) and then spots a young man driving a red sports car. Bogart sets a trap for the young man, whose name turns out to be Carlito, by luring him with “overpriced coffee.” Figure 3 is a video still showing Bogart with his trap and in his khaki safari outfit, and Carlito with his car and in his topsider shoes, white shorts, red short-sleeved polo shirt, sunglasses, and newsboy cap. Excerpt 3 begins after Bogart has immobilized the conyo:

*Excerpt 3*

1	Bogart	On to the experiment
2		I want to find out if this is a real conyo
3		To do that
4		We will use
5		This fake designer handbag
6		When I rub it on the conyo’s skin
7		If it develops a rash
8		That means it’s a true-blue conyo
9		Because it’s only used to genuine stuff
10		Not fake
11		So, let’s go
12		Here you go (Bogart rubs bag on Carlito’s arm)
13	Carlito	No
14		Ouch, come on (Red dots appear on Carlito’s arm)
15	Bogart	It’s in pain
16		It’s developing a bright red rash
17		Which means



18	This is a purebred conyo
19	One of the ancients
20	From the Spanish era
21	Amazing

As a wildlife expert who claims scientific knowledge about conyo, Bogart demonstrates to his viewers how to discern the real from the fake by conducting an experiment. Like Petra who achieves scientific distance as an outsider to both categories she distinguishes between (i.e., conyo and jolog), Bogart is also positioned as a neutral observer because he is “Australian,” and thus neither real nor fake conyo. Bogart captures Carlito who displays some emblems of the conyo type (e.g., the right car, clothing, and taste for expensive coffee), but Bogart seeks further evidence, evidence that relies on the body. Bogart introduces a stimulus: a fake designer handbag. He lightly rubs it on Carlito’s bare forearm. Carlito hollers in English—“No, Ouch, come on”—his only four audible words in the entire video. His American-accented English is as distinct from Bogart’s voice as it is similar to the conyo’s voice in Petra’s video. Not only can Carlito’s speech be situated as external to the Philippine nation, so too can his purported desire for European luxury brands (“Gucci, Versace, and Louis Vuitton”). Most important to the experiment, however, is that it reveals the bodily disposition of a real conyo to have gentle, sensitive skin that develops an allergic reaction from the slightest touch of a fake designer product.



**Figure 3.** Bogart (left) sets a conyo trap; from a YouTube video posted by PaperbugTV, February 9, 2012 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v5br2JPHYJ3jQ>).

Similar to “The Princess and the Pea,” real princesses and real conyo are presented as having delicate, tender bodies that produce involuntary signs—bruises from a pea and rashes from a knockoff—that are regarded as the necessary, unfakeable signs of a “real.” The “fake,” it follows, has a tougher exterior that cannot instinctively detect such subtlety. Bogart sends a message to fakes: you are what you wear—that is, imitations of a “real.” Indeed, fake persons and fake objects are construed as tokens of fake types that aspire to pass for tokens of real types through double-voiced emblematic displays. Like fellow expert Petra, Bogart teaches his viewers that while real and fake conyo may exhibit many of the same signs (e.g., the same car, clothing, and coffee), bodily qualia are the more reliable signs of realness and fakeness.

### The Quiz

Several online quizzes purport to help quiz takers discern whether they are a real or fake conyo. Whereas the observation and the experiment prominently feature discerners (Petra and Bogart) who are cleverly animated by their authors (Ashley and Marco), the quiz either credits no author or credits an author by name but not image. The quiz is also distinct in that it recruits quiz takers to be discerners in order to discern themselves, not others. Such online quizzes can be extensions or tropes of the magazine quiz genre. Since the 1940s, European and North American women’s magazine quizzes have encouraged readers to identify as a “type” of woman (not to mention “woman” itself) among a set of predetermined options (Wilson 1985; Liechty 2003). Quizzes do not merely reflect an ontology of existing types, but play a necessary role in creating those types, defining them according to sets of criteria (what count as emblems of differentiated types), and inviting readers to claim a footing relative to those types. In this sense, quizzes can be understood as “reflexive projects” (Giddens 1991) through which the self is formulated as an object that can be understood and potentially refashioned (Dunn 2014).

Conyo quizzes often invite “metadiscerners”: those who discern the discerners.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, Petra and Bogart have been metadiscerned. Their discerning practices are often an object of commentary in hundreds of comments posted in response to their videos and in numerous other venues, such as news articles and media interviews. I focus here on metadiscerners of the quiz because this instrument tends to attract the most critical engagement on dis-

10. Just as discerners can invite metadiscerners (those who discern the discerners), metadiscerners can invite meta-metadiscerners (those who discern those who discern the discerners), and so on and so forth. A metadiscerner does not claim expertise as much as trouble the expertise of a discerners.

cerning practices. This is perhaps because the discerner of the quiz is less visible and its footing less clear since it is not as reflexively framed through artful parody as Petra and Bogart. Here I focus on metadiscerners of the quiz, “13 Signs You’re A Conyo Of Manila.” This quiz was written by Gianna Banzon (2015) and published on Cosmo.ph, the website of the women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan Philippines*. The thirteen “signs” involve partying at exclusive nightclubs, taking luxurious vacations, having nannies and drivers, engaging with the latest technology, and displaying distinct linguistic practices (that are discussed explicitly and exclusively in four signs and performed via quoted speech throughout the quiz). Table 2 presents three of the 106 comments posted in response to the quiz as of 2016.

These comments by metadiscerners trouble the ontological configuration that the quiz presupposes. Momo Kun directly attacks the “credibility” of the author of the quiz (“Sack the writer”) for writing “garbage” that “Upper class society”—the conyo the author is supposedly describing—does not even read. In fact, the very assertion that the “13 signs” are signs of such “upper class” conyo is called into question by Cath Rina, who began the thread to which Momo Kun responded. Cath Rina asserts that this list is made up, instead, of signs of “middle income earners who are into social climbing.” Drew Lachica extends such qualities of conyo onto qualities of the quiz, calling the article itself “lame, pretensions and trying hard.” Together, such comments situate the conyo type more firmly within an ontology of fake that frames conyo as aspiring to pass as tokens of another type—that is, “upper class.” At the same time, both the quiz and its author are also framed as tokens of types that share conyo traits. That is, conyo, the discerner (author of the quiz), and the quiz are all construed by metadiscerners as aspiring beyond their ranks in comparable ways: “trying hard,” “pretentious,” “social climbing”—and thus, “fake.”

**Table 2. Metadiscerners of a Quiz**

Number	Commenter	Comment
35	Drew Lachica	They should change the title to “13 signs you’re a son/daughter of a corrupt politician of the Philippines.” What a lame, pretentious and trying hard article @cosmoph #cosmoph
67	Cath Rina	This is a list for above average middle income earners who are into social climbing. Either that or someone who lives off from their parents’ good ol money.
67a	Momo Kun	Upper class society doesn’t even read this garbage. Sack the writer, she just cost Cosmo a lot of credibility.

I turn now to discuss another quiz, “Yes or No: Are You a Conyo?,” to illustrate how qualia figure into the quiz genre. This quiz appeared in 2015 on “Snackvox,” a Philippine website that offers dozens of quizzes. Unlike “13 Signs,” this quiz does not credit an author. As of 2016, “Are You a Conyo?” has received over 9,600 “total quiz takes.” Other examples of Snackvox quizzes include “Which Filipino Fast Food Restaurant Are You?,” “What Is Your Emoji Spirit Animal?,” and “Are You In The Friend Zone?” As noted in all of these titles, the structure of many Snackvox quizzes invites an unaware “you” to engage in a process of self-discovery.

“Are You A Conyo?” has an entry page with the subheading “Dude, I have *kwento* [a story] . . .” that features a pair of topsider shoes that “speak”: “My bag is so *bigat* [heavy] today,” “*Ang tagal nyo* guys I’m here *na*” (You guys are taking so long, I’m here now), and “Guys make *pasok na* to our class” (Guys, let’s go to our class) (see fig. 4).<sup>11</sup> The figure is a whiney, private-school male student who wears conyo shoes (like Carlito’s in Bogart’s video) and speaks conyo language.

After clicking “start,” the quiz taker answers ten “yes” or “no” questions. These questions not only pose queries but also presuppose several emblems of the conyo type. These emblems can be grouped under linguistic signs, material signs, and human labor signs. First, linguistic signs attributed to conyo include named registers like Taglish, which is reflected in question 7, “Do you speak Taglish a lot?,” as well as specific elements of the register, which is reflected in question 8, “Do you use the words *steads* [steady], *dude*, *OMG*, *chong* [dude], *dein* [no way], *tus* [that’s wrong], or *hassle* a lot?” These two questions are also accompanied by images and quoted speech that exemplify and reinforce these emblems: “Yaya, can you make *tingin* [look at] this dictionary?,” and “*Tus*, bro!,” the latter “spoken” by an altered image of late nineteenth-century nationalist hero, José Rizal, refashioned with conyo appearance (trendy hairstyle and eyewear) and conyo behaviors (speaking conyo language, attending a music concert). In addition to linguistic signs, material signs are attributed to conyo, such as topsider shoes, exclusive car plates, private schools, taxis, luxury items from Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Prada, and large banknotes. Human labor signs are also attributed to conyo, such as having nannies, drivers, and nightclub promoter insiders.

11. “Yes or No: Are You a Conyo?,” available at <http://ph.snackvox.com/quiz/88> (accessed June 14, 2016).

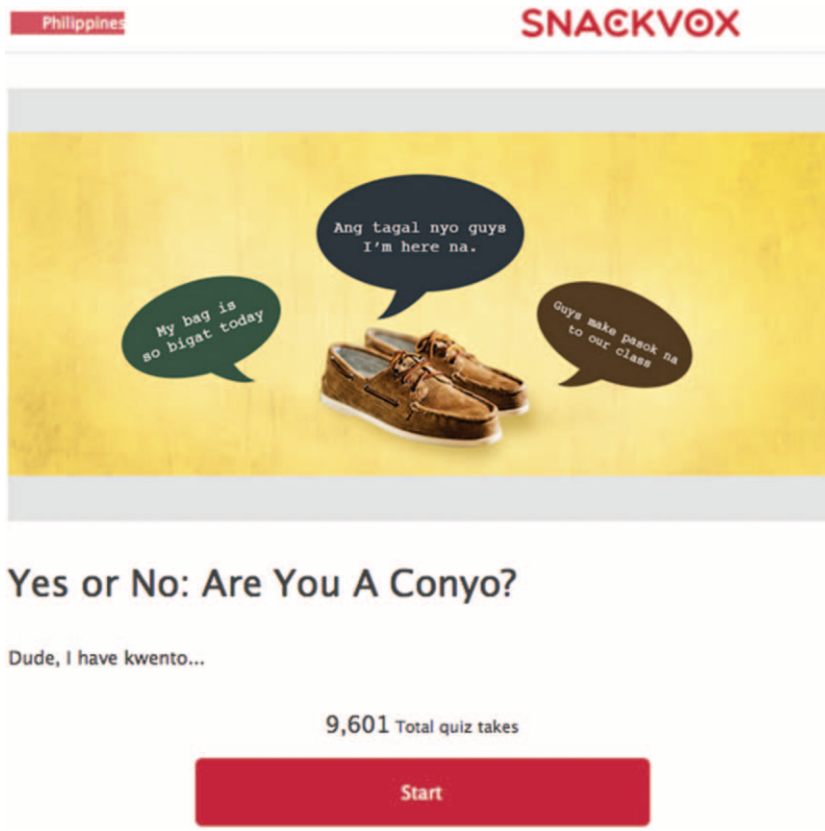


Figure 4. Quiz entry page (from the defunct website [ph.snackvox.com](http://ph.snackvox.com))

Figure 5 shows question 5, which asks, “Have you tried commuting without riding a taxi?” alongside an image of a jeepney, the cheapest means of public transportation in many urban areas in the Philippines.<sup>12</sup> Signs of conyo include having a driver (found in question 6) or driving one’s own car (found in the “13 Signs” quiz and in Bogart’s video), but rarely riding a jeepney, which is generally a crowded, hot, noisy, and bumpy mode of transport. Notice how the pas-

12. Answering “yes” to this question (and to any of the others) counts toward receiving a “You’re a conyo, dude” result. However a token of a conyo type would likely answer “no” to this question, given that “commuting without riding a taxi” entails the possibility of riding a jeepney. Whether this is an error on the quiz’s part or a confusion on my part, riding a jeepney is an activity rarely emblematic of real conyo. However, complaining about jeepneys and being *maarte* ‘high-maintenance’ on jeepneys are behaviors often associated with middle-class wannabe fake conyo.

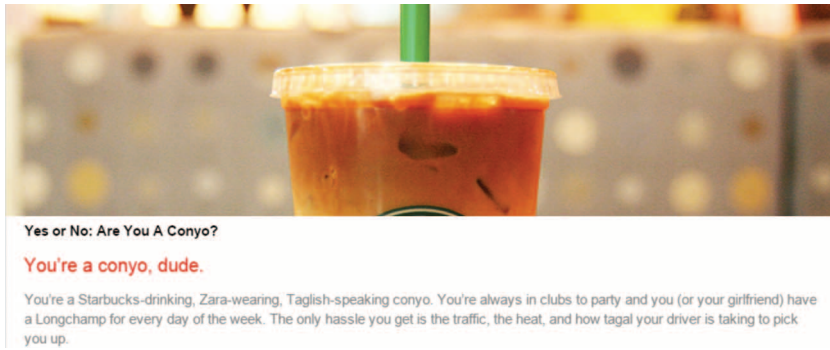


**Figure 5.** Quiz question (from the defunct website [ph.snackvox.com](http://ph.snackvox.com))

sengers in the image are packed tightly inside and overflowing on top and at the rear of the jeepney’s metal exterior under the full sun.

After the last question, the quiz taker receives one of three results: “You’re a conyo, dude,” “You’re not a conyo,” or “You’re mej conyo.” Quiz takers receive “You’re a conyo, dude” if they answer “yes” to any seven or more questions. They receive “You’re not a conyo” if they answer “yes” to any three or fewer questions. They receive “You’re mej conyo” if they answer “yes” to any four to six questions. Different sets of behaviors and feelings are attributed to each result. In the “You’re a conyo, dude” result (see fig. 6), quiz takers are conyo because of what they drink (Starbucks coffee, featured prominently in the image), what they wear (designer labels Zara and Longchamp), what they speak (Taglish), and where they go (“[night]clubs” like in Petra’s video). But they are also conyo because of how they feel “hassle[d]” by “traffic,” “heat,” and waiting (“how *tagal* [long] your driver is taking”). In the “You’re not a conyo” result, quiz takers are not conyo because they care less about what they eat or drink (instant “3-in-1 coffee” is fine) or ride (“jeepney” is fine). In the “You’re mej conyo” result, quiz takers are somewhat conyo because they exhibit emblems of competing types: for example, they go to high-end shopping areas, which is linked to conyo, but keep up with tabloid gossip, which is not.





**Figure 6.** Quiz result (from the defunct website [ph.snackvox.com](http://ph.snackvox.com))

Qualia are assigned throughout the quiz entry page, questions, and results. Most notably, the conyo type is attributed a “gentle,” sensitive, and weak body. For instance, conyo are portrayed as unable to tolerate heat (fig. 6), carry a heavy bag (fig. 4), or handle the “rough” ride of a jeepney (fig. 5). Distinctive Taglish linguistic practices are assigned to conyo throughout the quiz as well, practices that have been explicitly labeled “gentle” by the website entry presented earlier (excerpt 1).

Just like the observation and the experiment, the quiz rests on the logic that one sign alone does not indicate a real conyo. Yet unlike the observation and the experiment, the quiz does not privilege certain emblems over others; that is, it does not assert that emblems involving qualia are more reliable indicators of conyo. For the quiz, all of the signs are typical, ambiguous, and overlapping and having “enough” (Blommaert and Varis 2013) is sufficient for indicating realness. The observation and the experiment, on the other hand, privilege linguistic and bodily qualia as the true signs—the necessary and unfakeable signs—of the reals and fakes. Thus observations and experiments increase the awareness of viewers-turned-discerners to a greater, more nuanced, degree than do quizzes. The more skillful discerners and more reliable instruments are those presented through artful, reflexive performances in which carefully crafted personae (Petra and Bogart) appear to animate what discerners (Ashley and Marco) have authored. The discerners who create quizzes, on the other hand, more readily invite metadiscerners who question and criticize their footing. Metadiscerners do not necessarily regard all quizzes, quiz creators, and quiz takers as conyo; rather, they frame all three as exhibiting similar conyo traits. That is, the qualities assigned to conyo transfer onto the quiz creators and the quizzes

themselves, such that all types are rendered as “trying hard,” “pretentious,” and “social climbing” fakes.

### **Conclusion**

What is a fake? How can it be discerned? Why does this matter? This essay examined the practices of self-appointed Putnamian experts of a social kind term, that of the Philippine conyo elite. Such experts not only position themselves within the “special subclass of speakers” that possesses a “method of recognizing” whether or not someone is really conyo. They also speak from an elevated social position as reflexive discerners who develop and share scientific instruments, or tests: the observation, the experiment, and the quiz. Analyzing these tests, which purportedly discern real conyo from their aspiring subtypes and countertypes, reveals how qualia are central to shaping ontologies of social types. While all tests present a range of typical signs that reals and fakes can both display, only the observation and the experiment prioritize linguistic and bodily qualia as the necessary signs that cannot be faked. In this sense, the finest discerners are the ones who develop observations and experiments because they distinguish between these two orders of signs. This is not unlike the queen whose expertise relied on a distinction between the typical signs of a princess (e.g., the right hair, clothes, and shoes) and the necessary signs of a princess (e.g., a “sensitive” body). Thus, as revealed by Petra’s observation and Bogart’s and the queen’s experiments, qualia are central to the most reliable instruments of discernment: it is not what people say, but how “gently” they say it; not what bodies look like, but how “gently” bodies move and react.

But why does anyone care about discerning tokens of elite social types? And what motivates the different methods of selecting and arranging emblems of these types? I hope to address these questions by circling back to the two central framings of this essay: ontology of fake and ontology of emblem.

There is no real. We already know this. The scholarly literature on authentication has firmly established that things are only real if they are construed as such. But what is less theorized is how the fake comes before the real. For this essay, this means two things. First, talk about differentiated categories—such as jolog, paconyo, and mej conyo—create and clarify the conditions of existence of real conyo and the desire to discern the real from the fake. Second, the very notion of the real Philippine elite requires the notion of the fake Philippine mimic as a precondition of its existence. And the fake, here, is something that not only precedes the real, but also absorbs the real. This is to suggest that conyo elite types cannot exist before or outside of a sense of



fakeness that envelops them. This is why both the elite and the fake are a matter of social concern: there is always the underlying postcolonial mimic that must be unmasked, its loyalty to the nation called into question, its excesses of modernity kept in check, its pretension of superiority rejected. The elite is always already contained within an ontology of fake. I thus argue that discerning Philippine elite types presupposes an overarching ontology of fake that already renders real elites as fakes. Throughout this essay, both real and fake conyo are framed as fakes: they appear to be Filipino but they also appear to display linguistic behaviors, bodily dispositions, and social tastes that are situated as external to the Philippines.

Also requiring more theorization is the role of qualia in the making of social kinds. This essay illustrated how qualia attributed to language and body are central to the discernment of reals and fakes, but they are not always privileged in systems of sign value. Within sign assemblages, qualia can be positioned at the top of a hierarchy of value or in the midst of an egalitarian field in which all signs have equal weight. This produces two competing ontologies of emblem. When an ontology of emblem arranges signs in an egalitarian fashion (as in the quiz), one need only display “enough” to be regarded as a token of the type. This makes the quiz a blunter instrument, and one that invites metadiscerners that trouble the ontological assumptions of the discerner—partly, I argue, because the discerner’s footing is not as cleverly shrouded by artful parody. When an ontology of emblem arranges signs in a hierarchy (as in the observation and the experiment), two orders of signs emerge: the typical and the necessary. The typical signs are fakeable and assigned less value. The necessary signs are unfakeable and assigned more value. In this ontology, fakes need to do more than just say the right thing and wear the right clothes (typical, fakeable emblems). Their language must “sound gentle,” their bodies must “be gentle” (necessary, unfakeable emblems). Qualia are privileged signs, I suggest, because as experiences of sensuous qualities, they fool us into believing that they inhere naturally in people, as essential features of “who they really are.”

In the closing words of “The Princess and the Pea”: “And that’s a true story!” (Andersen [1835] 1998, 29). Or isn’t it also already fake?

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