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Dogging it at Work: Developing and Performing Organizational Routines as a Minor League Baseball Mascot

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Dogging it at Work:
Developing and Performing Organizational Routines as a Minor League Baseball Mascot

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family who dreamt with me, made dreams come true, and brought new dreams to mind. To Reine, my muse, to Aureylia, my mimic, and to Kenny, my muscle.

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Dogging it at Work:
Developing and Performing Organizational Routines
as a Minor League Baseball Mascot

Jeffrey LaVerne Birdsell, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Larry D. Browning

Referring to an employee as “the face” of an organization suggests that an individual worker’s actions may transmit information about the kind of organization they represent. Mascots in a baseball stadium make that metaphor material by wearing an organizationally prescribed mask and performing in the name of the organization (Keller & Richey, 2006; MacNeill, 2009). This study investigated how one baseball mascot, Spike of the Round Rock Express, embodied his team’s identity through the activation of organizational routines by analyzing video recordings, autoethnographic field notes, and stories (Heath & Luff, 2013). Recognizing the highly symbolic work of a mascot work has implications for the performer, audience members, and organizations who rely on mascots to enhance the stadium experience. Additionally, this research provides suggestions for future mascot performers on how they might come to “know your role and play it to the hilt” (Devantier & Turkington, 2006).

Organizational routines combine three recursive dimensions: the ostensive, understandings an employee brings to his or her work, the performative, actions an

employee takes while doing his or her work, and the artifactual, material objects an employee uses or creates in order to facilitate work tasks (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). This research begins with an exploration of how I developed occupational and organizational role expectations. In order to know my role, I had to learn Spike's identity: what he must do, may do, and can do (Strauss, 1959; Enfield, 2011). I specifically recognize the ways I came to understand my role as someone who embodies the mission of the organization through the preparation of artifacts for performance and protection of the audience for whom I am performing.

The performative dimension is explored by identifying instances when my performance challenged established understandings of Spike's identity, specifically in instances where I was unprepared for a scenario or chose to protect one group's interest over another's. In these unanticipated moments, I often found myself turning other participants in the stadium event, like fans and coworkers, into co-performers and relied on their improvisational offerings to inform my ongoing performance (Eisenberg, 1990; Meyer, Frost, & Weick, 1998).

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Chapter 1- Front-line Employee Routines: Contributing to and Speaking in the Voice of the Organization

There are employees who, as part of their everyday organizational tasks, are expected to communicate on behalf of organizations (Torres & Kline, 2006; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Organizations spend countless resources preparing trainings and manuals to teach employees to speak in the prescribed organizational voice. Organizational communication researchers, however, recognize that as employees do the work of representing an organization, they are also contributing to their own identity and the identity of their organization (Christensen & Cheney, 2000; Alvesson, 2001; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). This research explores how one specific kind of front-line employee, the mascot performer of a baseball team, serves as both the medium of organizational communication as well as a part of the organization's communicative message (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007).

FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

A metaphor of work as drama, with theatrical terms like "role" and "performance" to describe everyday life has been used for centuries (Sennett, 1977) and increased in academic popularity through Goffman's research (1959, 1963). Originally, the metaphor applied to the idea of individuals performing for their god or gods and transitioned in the 18th century to be applied to instances in which individuals were seen performing for others (Sennett, 1977). Goffman (1959) suggests that everyday life, and especially life at work, is an ongoing process of engaging in onstage behaviors for customers and backstage behaviors where customers are not present. Tracy (2000) argues that there are

certain employees who perform “on a stage where the curtain never falls” (p. 122). These employees play characters for commerce and are vital in establishing organizational identity.

Employees who become recognizable as “the face of the organization” (Torres & Kline, 2006; Grandey et al., 2004) by clients, customers, prospective members, and other kinds of stakeholders are called front-line employees. Also referred to as customer contact employees (Seargeant & Frenkel, 2000), this type of worker is an important resource for organizations. In organizations that provide services or experiences, the interaction between customers and employees is often viewed as part of the experience (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Examples of this role are tour guides, customer service representatives, and flight attendants. Each of these positions asks the worker, through their performance, to elevate the organization so that it is experienced as a unique type of organization. Tour guides of historical sites, for example, are tasked with first, making a home feel historic, and then establishing their specific historic home as a unique historic home, thereby differentiating the tourist’s experience from similar other experiences (MacCannell, 1976; Fine & Speer, 1985).

Front-line employees are often found in organizations that offer goods or services pertaining to leisure. When leisure activities occur in environments that cohere around a theme, customer service staff become a vital part of that theming (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). “Front-line workers work with people at leisure, engaged in the business of having fun” (Guerrier & Adib, 2003, p. 1400). In performing this engagement, front-line employees span boundaries between the organization and its customers and are most

responsible for customer satisfaction in the service economy (Grandey et al., 2004). There is an increasing interest in onstage and offstage practices of front-line employees as they are increasingly viewed from an HR perspective as organizational artifacts. “For many firms, the employees are the face of the company to the consumer and it is therefore imperative that they embody the corporate personality the firm aspires to build (Keller & Richey, 2006, p. 81). This results in organizations taking interest in what employees are doing at all times and not just during the traditional workday.

Organizations do not always explicitly inform workers of the relationship between how perceptions of them serves as a heuristic for perceptions of the organizational product but employees are regularly expected to do “blue collar” work with “white collar expectations (Cheney & Ashcraft). Since most front-line employees are engaged in service work, they are often treated as having lower status (Boshoff & Mels, 1995) but, given their symbolic importance to the organization and its customers, they are expected to perform as professionals who “reign in bodily excess to perform the higher order work of the mind” (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003 in Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 164). These expectations change the world of work especially for workers beholden to the “communicative and stylistic expectations” of professionalism (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 162). Understanding how front-line employees, like mascot performers, respond to the expectation that they act logically, calmly, and restrained (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003) when their tasks at work require them to display excitement and a lack of restraint with both their words and body, is an important organizational communication concern.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

To understand organizations and the communication that occurs within them, it is helpful to first consider what it means to organize. Organizing occurs through coordination. There are three basic participants in organizing: two individuals (A and B) and a task (X). When individual A coordinates with individual B to accomplish task X, organization has occurred. There are, of course, organizations with more than two people and one task but these are all extensions of the concept of "thirdness" (Taylor & Van Every, 2010). A commonplace example of thirdness is helpful to illustrate everyday organizing. Consider the organization of two individuals, one with carpentry skills and the other with plumbing skills, remodeling a kitchen. Individual A coordinates with Individual B to accomplish Task X, in this case the remodel. Throughout their interactions, "A" is able to communicate ongoing coordination or confusion, and respond to the communication of B. The interactions required to accomplish a shared goal are called organizational communication (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2014). In this simple example, organizing has occurred and both parties communicate as members of this organization.

Even though we may perceive organizations as distinct, central, and enduring (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), the above example also shows how malleable organizations may be given that thirdness meets minimal requirements for organizing (Weick, 1969). As the kitchen project nears completion, the individuals may choose another task around

which to coordinate or find other individuals whose kitchen needs remodeling. As more tasks and individuals are introduced, the organization grows in complexity with new individuals invited to market to neighbors, developing new remodeling techniques, keeping track of sales and so on. As these individuals organize, two questions are raised: Why are they doing those things and why are they doing them in any particular way?

One of the big questions that communication scholars seek to answer is “why do people communicate the way that they do?” Organizational communication scholars extend that question to ask “why do people communicate the way that they do when they are part of an organization?” The common answers are often polarized and over simplistic, reducing the power of the individual or ignoring the influence structures have on the everyday lives of those who live within them. The poles of this debate are that humans either behave the way they do because of the social structures in which they live or that they behave the way they do through human agency and have selected a behavior from a variety of alternatives. Answering these questions in ways that accommodate the power of both individuals and structures requires a more complex theory of human communication. Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) combines social structure and human agency to explain human behavior, balancing the way processes influence roles and roles influence processes It is a particularly useful theory when attempting to understand "how different levels of analysis relate to one another" (Poole & McPhee, 2005, p. 173).

STRUCTURATION THEORY

A primary focus of Structuration Theory is interaction, as it is foundational for organization (Giddens, 1984). As action produces human practices, it also reproduces structural elements if individual agents do not challenge or attempt to alter the social structure, "Structuration Theory thus explains the system itself as the product of human actions operating through a duality in which structures are both the medium and the outcome of actions" (Poole & McPhee, 2005, p. 175). Organizations, built from interactions, are systems of human practices (large and small) which are a combination of prescribed and improvised behaviors. As organizations interact with internal and external audiences, they have the opportunity to reproduce or transform internal or external cultural systems (Jaffe, 2011). Similarly, organizations, like interactions, become sites of meaning, power, and norms and individual actions may be constrained by organizational artifacts, punishments, temporal or spatial limitations (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

A danger of organizational studies is the potential to privilege "the organization" while ignoring the foundational role that individuals play as members of the organization (Engeström & Middleton, 1996). Dawe (1979) points out that Goffman sees individuals "desperately trying to manage themselves according to [its] massively conformist demands, while at the same time attempting to preserve something of their individuality against its crushing weight" (p. 250). Although the power of structures ought not be ignored, there is great value in identifying ways workers respond to those structures in order to establish a more symmetrical relationship between the worker and the organization (de Certeau, 1984).

Organizational Communication as Ventriloquism

Structuration Theory has significant implications for the study of organizational communication. As previously mentioned, interaction is foundational for organizing and a wealth of scholarship has explored the ways in which micro behaviors build and respond to macro discourses (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1971; Cheney, 1983). One way to directly apply structuration perspectives to organizational communication is by understanding communication as ventriloquism (Cooren, 2012). Bakhtin (1986) originally presented the term "ventriloquation" in describing the positioning that authors take in presenting the words of their characters. Carried into an interactional context, all utterances are "filled with others' words…which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (Bakhtin, p. 89).

Ventriloquism brings voice to a variety of figures. When humans interpret the actions of animals, for example, the bifurcation between humans and other organisms becomes less clear (Kirsey & Helmreich, 2010) and "communication becomes the ways in which the world (through its various incarnations and embodiments, i.e., its figures) comes to speak by, to, and for itself." (Cooren & Sandler, 2014, p. 226). The figures animated by ventriloquism do not have to be biological either. Organizational members give voice to an organization and speak in the voice of the organization when they are encouraged to "live the brand" (Keller & Richey, 2006). Strauss (1959) hints at this concept in his explanation of the complexity of human communication can be. When engaging in communication about organizations, it can be seen that Party A speaks on behalf of numerous invisible others who would identify as being co-members with Party

A while Party B may be listening as an individual or with the ears of numerous, absent others as well (Strauss). This is commonly practiced by sports fans in the expression "Did *we* win?" or by organizational employees who begin a phone conversation by announcing "Hi, this is Jeremy *with* Home Remodeling Enterprises." Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) aligns with Taylor and Van Every (2010) in seeing the thirdness that exists when we speak in the voices of others.

> A word (or in general any sign) is interindividual. Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the 'soul' of the speaker and does not belong only to him [or her]. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one). The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet, but a trio). It is performed outside the author, and it cannot be introjected into the author" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.121-122).

Viewing communication as ventriloquism does not reduce human interaction to the activation of preordained structures by powerless participants (Strauss, 1959). Communicators, as ventriloquists, "have the ability to make a difference by ventriloquizing figures in such a way that it questions the coherence, fidelity, or aesthetics of their collective sensemaking, which affects how situations are enacted" (Cooren et al., 2013, p. 272). Effective organization requires management of the interplay between all of the possible combinations of present and absent, autonomous and interdependent parties, and challenged or accepted structures (Eisenberg, 1990; Giddens, 1984). This management is manifested in the everyday behaviors of organizational members regardless of title or task (Cooren, Matte, Benoit- Barné, & Brummans, 2013).

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Identity emerges at the intersection of structure and agency (Sennett, 1977). As both individual and organizational identities are formed, they seek to reconcile how they want to be perceived with how they are perceived (Erikson, 1959). When organizations express their identities they engage in meta-messages which seek to “establish and affirm their own self-images or their own cultures” (Christensen & Cheney, 2000, p. 252). There are identity benefits for an organization that establishes a strong identity, especially as it is carried forward by its members and establishes preferred organizational identities that may even be more important than the actions it takes or products it produces (Keller & Richey, 2006).

Traditional understandings of organizational identity present it as a collection of what stakeholders believe to be central, distinctive, and enduring about the organization (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Deetz, 2001). From this perspective, organizational identity develops linearly in a way that allows for measureable progress (Strauss, 1959) and control over members (Alvesson, 2001; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Establishing recognized identities allows potential clients or customers to differentiate between organizations that appear to be offering relatively the same experience (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Keller & Richey, 2006; Foreman & Whetten, 2012). The primary point of this differentiation comes in the way that organizations choose to answer central purpose questions: "to what, for what, and to whom am I committed?" (Strauss, 1959, p. 39).

When organizations answer these central purpose questions, they establish preferred interpretations of organizational identities. As organizational identities are

composites of employee characteristics, brand managers, tasked with controlling identity, are increasingly interested in managing individual employee traits (Keller & Richey, 2006). Members are asked to incorporate organizational identity and role expectations into their own identities. If the organization is a distinct type of organization, members should think the same distinct things about it, both collectively and individually (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011). Subsequently, management expectations are that employee performance should align with those preferred organizational understandings and behaviors (Foreman & Whetten, 2012).

EMPLOYEE ROLES

As identities are evoked, they imply both personal and social histories, which require organizational members to operate as representatives of multiple roles (Strauss, 1959). In these instances, members must decide which role to play. The polar options are to perform as the ventriloquist and make the organization the dummy or allow the organization to manipulate the performance of the worker. These choices must be made in communication that occurs in physical and virtual spaces (Berkelaar, Scacco, & Birdsell, 2014; Takeya, 2014) and create a tension between the worker being “real” or “fake” (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Mendenhall, 2014).

Roles, like identity, emerge in the behaviors that enact the internal ideas of the performer. The composition of any role is made through knowledge of what a performer *must* do, *may* do, and *can* do (Strauss, 1959; Enfield, 2011). When individuals are aware that “activity is available for all present to perceive, the individual tends to modify this activity, employing it with its public character in mind” (Goffman, 1963, p. 33). This

modifying face work is both fragile and precise and positioning it correctly is a foundational skill in performing particular roles (Goffman, 1963; Mauss, 1973). All occupations require members to conceal practices in order to maintain socially constructed, and in some cases highly managed, impressions (Goffman, 1959). Workers may have any number of ideas about their role, even negative ones (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) but so long as organizational and customer goals are achieved, these idiosyncrasies are accepted (Crossan, 1998; Wakin, 2012).

PERFORMANCE FOR AN AUDIENCE

Because identities emerge through communication, the role of the multiple audiences for whom individuals and organizations perform[1] should be attended to as well. Although individuals seem to have become familiar with how to prepare their own role and identity performances, they regularly enter a world of strangers and lack much of the information commonly used to predict the behaviors of others (Sennett, 1977). In response to this ambiguity, individuals may choose to rely on immediate interactional data: how someone dresses or adorns themselves (the props), speaks or behaves (the lines), or the space or time (the set) to rapidly create “an internal, self-sufficing standard of believability” (Sennett, 1977, p. 80). These performances occur in interaction and identity work is ongoing even if it is not the primary concern of the interactants (Weigert,

[1] Whether a behavior is labeled as “performance”, a term often reserved for performing arts, or “performative”, such as the enactment of certain “on-stage” behaviors in contexts other than a dance, music, or other visual arts, it “is an interactive and contingent process [that] succeeds according to the skill of the ‘actors’, the context within which it is performed, and the way in which it is interpreted by the audience” (Szarycz, 2011, p. 154)

1986). Once one's own role is established and they have rapidly assessed the role of another individual, a relationship may be formed to check those roles (Coser, 1966) and, as with identity, determine what modifications are required in order to continue the relationship.

More recent scholarship indicates a trend toward broader understanding of identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Performances can endure and be reinterpreted by audiences (Strauss, 1959) who develop their own understandings of the performer (either individual or organizational). The performance of a role varies in response to the perceived audience and the intended function of the performance (Kirsh, 2010). When presented as something co-produced through interdependent relationships, understandings of organizational identity shift from monolithic (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) to an arena which accommodates multiple possible selves "and corresponding action strategies that people modify to varying degrees with experience" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 773). As individual identity is always "a becoming" (Strauss, 1959, p. 31), it might be wise to similarly move from attempting to understand what the organization *is* and, instead, turn attention toward what it *was* in moments, days, or years ago, and how we might reproduce or modify that through individual performances (Ibarra, 1999; Katovich, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES

The term "routine" is commonly used to describe mundane, structured, repetitive actions. Organizational routines, however, are dynamic combinations of multiple resources (Feldman, 2003, Feldman & Pentland, 2003, Pentland & Feldman, 2005).

Organizational routines require connection between participants and are “characterized by multiple actors and interdependent actions” (Pentland & Feldman, 2005, p. 795). This definition rejects the notion of a routine as basic, repeated action. The additional layer of interdependence results in a conceptualization of organizational routines, which cannot simply be “played back. Rather, they are generative systems that can produce patterns of action based on local judgment and improvisation by actors” (Pentland & Feldman, 2008, p. 249). The interactions that fuel these systems can contribute to organizational stability but may also be sources of organizational change when members combine their understandings of organizational identity with individual performances (Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). A complete understanding of organizational routines recognizes that each routine consists “of both the idea of the routine and the performance of it” (Feldman, 2003, p. 749).

An employee activates an organizational routine when he or she combines artifactual, ostensive, and performative elements (Pentland & Feldman, 2005). The artifactual element is made up of artifacts, items used to accomplish routines or items that are produced because of routines (Pentland & Feldman). The ostensive aspect is the abstract information that participants use to understand why and in what way a routine should be performed. From a Structuration Theory perspective, the ostensive aspect could be labeled as the structure (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Understanding the role that one is expected to play is part of the ostensive aspect as well. As useful as the concept of the ostensive aspect is, the term is an unwieldy one. For the sake of clarity, I will use “internal idea” when discussing this aspect.

The performative aspect is made up of an individual's external behaviors as he or she enacts their internal ideas about the organization, the routine, themselves, and others. Throughout the performance, the individual is able to evaluate, and perhaps modify, his or her internal understandings. These aspects are recursive rather than linear "for organizing routine, everyday practices produce unreflexive, embodied forms of practical knowledge" (Szarycz, 2011, p. 154). In this way, routines allow organizations to balance their identity between adaptability and stability (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002; Feldman & Pentland, 2003), echoing understandings that organizational communication is a tool for balancing creativity and constraint (Eisenberg et al., 2014). Identity requires performance (internal to external), work performed must be informed (external to internal), and the artifacts used to do so are all essential to the analysis of organizational routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

Answering organizational identity questions from a structuration perspective introduces analyses that position members as more than just those who can reproduce the organization as it *is*. Instead, they can choose to produce "the organization that *could be*" (Feldman, 2003, p. 748). Doing so, however, may result in disapproval by a variety of interdependent parties (Feldman, 2003). When faced with this danger, organizational members may seek to perform routines in ways that accomplish employer goals while still allowing for improvisation (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Pentland & Feldman, 2005) and adaptation for the next performance (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002).

Improvisation

As interactional accomplishments between organizational actors, routines invite some amount of improvisation (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Conceptualizing improvisation as something done from nothing or spontaneous action undervalues what it truly is and the potential it has to improve organizations (Weick, 1998). The term "improvisation" can be used as a verb or noun. In the verb form, Berliner (1994) defines improvisation as the reconstruction of material in response "to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation" (p. 241). Situations that are high in improvisation, in noun form, often have very little time between composition and execution (Moorman & Miner, 1998a).

Organizational members are afforded numerous opportunities to revise their routines. In doing so, they are not making something from nothing but instead are evoking something to be embellished (Mirvis, 1998; Weick, 1998). Moving away from traditional understandings that hinge on spontaneity and "something from nothing" is important in order to conceptualize improvisation as something that can be improved through practice (Weick, 1998). Although it may be simply stated, practicing to improvise is anything but simple. Preparing to improvise has implications for organizational routines. This turn is required in order to extend organizational improvisation theory (Crossan, 1998).

Organizations that value predictability and repeated action often view employee behavior as something to be controlled (Eisenberg et al., 2014). Problems can be

attributed to someone failing to follow instructions and future problems can be avoided by modifying the training manual. When ambiguity arises, however, employees spend their cognitive resources seeking the prescribed performance for the scenario. The resulting performances in these novel situations are slower and less innovative (Barrett, 1998; Moorman & Miner, 1998b).

Suggesting that organizations may be improved by members being encouraged to improvise is a potentially dangerous recommendation. For all the positive it can bring for an organization, one poor improvisational performance can put the organization in crisis. In order to practice improvisation in a way that benefits the organization, members should improve their listening skills (Sennett, 1977; Weick, 1998). As front-line employees are regularly required to find performative solutions to interactional problems (Hartline & Farrell, 1996), perhaps it is insufficient to speak in the voice of the organization if the worker is not also listening with the ears of the organization.

Improvisational comedians rely on listening techniques that center around a principle of “yes-and.” This involves the performers choosing not to establish any a priori expectations of a scene but rather taking what is given to them by other performers and working actively to create the scene around them (Meyer et al., 1998). Musicians of many genres, when “jamming” (Eisenberg, 1990), do much of the same thing. Successful improvisation in music, comedy, or in the workplace requires members to share a similar skill level, recognize structural expectations in the setting, and surrender the desire to lead or impose direction on the task at hand (Eisenberg; Meyer et al.). Doing so involves

a great deal of risk to many individual's desires to be "consistent, comfortable, confident and competent" (Crossan, 1998, p. 597).

When the focus of organizational routines centers on how performances can be more orderly, members are less likely to do the listening and take the risks needed to be successful. What is often the case is that players attempt to do more than their competency allows (Eisenberg, 1990). The improvisational embellishments with the greatest potential for achieving flow are the decisions to enter into a routine where even the member is unaware of what the end will be (Peplowski, 1998). Embellishment, and the resulting instability, however, runs counter to many organizational goals of standardization and predictability (Weick, 1998). In order for autonomy and interdependence to co-exist, employees and organizations should be skilled in both listening to and speaking in each other's voices (Eisenberg, 1990).

SITE OF STUDY

Sport is a worthy context for study "because it provides a nexus of body, multiplex identities, and multilayered governance structures combined with a performance genre that possesses qualities of play, liminality, and storytelling, that enables us to explore connections among these dynamics in a unique way" (Besnier & Brownell, 2012, p. 454). Much like Geertz's (1974) presentation of the Balinese cockfight, sport research has the potential to "turn functionalism on its head by arguing that…[it's] primary function is interpretive" (Besnier & Brownell, 2012, p. 445). Trujillo's (1992) analysis of ballpark activities did so in the context of baseball by recognizing interpretations that had previously been under articulated. The production of

an MiLB contest is more a ritual to bring people together than it is a game to be won (Levi-Strauss, 1962 in Besnier & Brownell, 2012).

Baseball is traditionally considered one of the four major American sports, along with American football, basketball, and hockey (Kassing, Billings, Brown, Halone, Harrison, Krizek, Meân, & Turman, 2004). As part of this cluster, baseball can be viewed as both part of the broader sport landscape and "constituting its own relatively autonomous field" (Washington & Karen, 2001, p. 205). This autonomy allows baseball to carve out uniqueness from the rest of the sport landscape. Knowing the game at a basic level and how baseball clubs operate as organizations will be useful foundations for understanding the forthcoming data and analysis.

Baseball as sport

At its most basic level, baseball is a game between a pitcher and a batter. The goal of the pitcher is to get the batter out. He[2] may do so by striking the batter out or causing the batter to fly out or ground out. To strike out a batter, the pitcher must cause three strikes. Strikes occur when the batter swings at a thrown ball and misses or the umpire determines that a ball the batter has not swung at passed through the batter's "strike zone", traditionally conceived as being the width of home plate and the vertical area between a batter's knees and chest. If the pitch is not swung at and is not in the strike zone, it is called a "ball." If a batter takes four balls, he is awarded first base. This is

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[2] Playing baseball is not an activity exclusive to men. In keeping within the context of Major and Minor League Baseball, which currently have no players who identify as female, I am choosing to use the masculine pronoun.

called a “walk’ or a “base on balls.” A batter can make contact with a ball on his swing but “foul it off” by hitting it in an area that is out of play. A foul ball is considered a strike unless there are already two strikes on the batter at which point he may continue to foul off pitches indefinitely.

When the batter is able to put the ball in to play, it will result in one of three things: an out, a hit, or an error. A batter is out if a) the ball is hit into the air and caught by any of the 9 players in the field before it hits the ground or b) the ball is in the possession of a fielder who tags the batter or, in the case of a “force” out, stands on the base the batter is attempting to advance to. If a batter is able to hit the ball in the air so far that it lands beyond the wall of the ballpark, it is ruled a home run and the player rounds all of the bases to score. Home runs are rarer than hits. Hits occur when the batter hits the ball into the field of play and is able to advance to first base before a fielder in possession of the ball reaches first base. Once the batter has arrived safely at first base, he may decide to advance to second base, third base, and then to score at home plate so long as he is not tagged out by a fielder with the ball. When a player is at one of the bases, he may remain there without being tagged out. When he is between bases, he is in jeopardy of being tagged out.

In order to defend against hits, fielders will place themselves around the field in such a way as to cover the most area so that they can catch the ball before it falls or throw the ball to the appropriate base. When a ball is hit towards third base, for example, the third baseman will likely field the ball and throw it to the first baseman instead of trying to outrun the batter to first base. If, during the attempt to field or throw out the batter, a

fielder misplays the ball or throws it out of the reach of a teammate, the fielder has committed an “error.” A batting team can continue to bat until three outs have been made, then the teams switch sides with the fielders becoming batters and vice versa. Once both teams have made three outs, that is called an inning. There are 9 innings in a baseball game and the team who has scored the most runs (had the most players cross home plate) is the winning team. MiLB teams follow the same rules as MLB teams do (MiLB, 2015) and additional “baseball basics” can be found on the MLB website (MLB, 2015) with the official rules available for download.

To some, the description of baseball I have provided is exhilarating, others may wonder where the action is and what the draw is to watching eight people stand in a field while two people face off. Like public speaking, there is a lot of the same activity going on only punctuated by moments of excitement that offer the audience a chance to respond (Atkinson, 1984). Baseball is unique in that it allows the viewer to pay as much or as little attention as they like. If you’re interested in the game within the game that occurs with every pitch, as there are different strategies for what pitch to throw when there are two balls and two strikes instead of three balls and no strikes. This may be fascinating but if you are hoping for a punctuated activity every few seconds, that is unlikely to occur. Offense and defense only change sides after three outs have been recorded. There are no turnovers or takeaways. Home runs are rare. Getting a runner to first base is only a quarter of what needs to happen in order to score a run and only runs matter. A team can lose a game 1-0 even if they have fourteen hits and the opponent has two.

Baseball's uniqueness

Unlike basketball, football, hockey or soccer, which use a clock to determine when a half or period should be over, baseball uses game events as its chronological units[3]. In a recent game I attended, the pitcher had to throw over 20 pitches, all of which were hit foul by the batter, in order to record one strike. This sequence lasted over 10 minutes. When time is understood as moment-by-moment instead of second-by-second, there exists space for interrupted attention between the punctuated, dramatic moments (Seligman, 2013). This treatment of space and time produces a series of on-field rituals that allow attention to be paid to seemingly trivial activities (Seligman) but does not require an intense focus on these activities in order to be enjoyed. In light of this potential for boredom, baseball teams, as organizations employ more than just the ballplayers to manage the multiple events that occur on gameday (Nathan, 2014).

Multiple events at a baseball game

During any sporting event, there are actually three events occurring: the game event, stadium event, and media event (Williams, 1977). The game event is the action on the field and the sidelines. The stadium event is the "total sequence of activities occurring in the stadium, both perceived and participated in by the fans and including the game event" (p. 135). The medium event is the combination of all the broadcasting elements, a rarity for MiLB teams. Both the quality of the game played and the quality of the viewing environment are vital to the enjoyment of the stadium event (Welki & Zlatoper, 1999).

[3] For more detailed exploration of the experience of time and its function as an organizational resource, see Ballard (2008) and Schein (2004).

Since crowd reaction during the stadium event is a mediating variable of spectator enjoyment (Hocking, 1982), it is in the interest of baseball organizations to find ways to keep the crowd engaged in the game event which does not always appear to provide fast-paced action. Pat O'Conner, President and CEO of Minor League Baseball, recognizes the importance of the stadium event and asserts, "Minor League Baseball is thriving as an alternative to other more costly entertainment options. We have the thrills of a theme park, the emotions of a good movie, the element of surprise at a concert and the cuisine of your favorite restaurant…" (O'Conner, 2014) and while this approach doesn't come without detractors who see baseball stadiums as "glorified malls…all about over charging fans for parking, tap water and processed chicken and soggy fries" (Hart, 2014), there is an organizational emphasis on the stadium event provided by MiLB teams.

Many writings on baseball take a romantic approach to understanding baseball as both a game event and stadium event. As baseball treats time differently from other major American sports, there is the potential for a game to continue forever which, to some, evokes feelings of long, country, summer days and a nostalgia for "the gentler more naïve days of our [American] lives" (Bick, 1978, p. 48). Baseball places more emphasis on history than other major American sports (Bick) which serves as the backdrop for baseball's affinity for myth (Schwartz, 1987). In scholarly explorations (Newman, 2001) and mediated fictions (Burg & Shelton, 1988) alike, baseball diamonds have been cast as places of worship. Instead of inviting repentance or enlightenment, however, the church of baseball invites a continued reverence for the past. For many baseball romantics, watching baseball and being in baseball stadiums is an invitation to participate in

baseball's myths and community and bridges the game's past into the present (Schwartz, 1987), bringing its system of shared knowledge and experience with it (Bick).

Some argue that stakeholders in baseball's success often exaggerate its significance (Nathan, 2014). In contrast to romantic interpretations of baseball, the ballpark can also be viewed as a site of commerce. Even for those who "play" the game, the ballpark is a workplace (Nathan). The stadium event is the primary product of an MiLB front-office and the ballpark is offered as a themed universe, accessible through the purchase of a ticket, with additional consumption opportunities offered as part of the "complete" experience. Workers in these "Disneyized" (Bryan, 1999) organizations are expected to perform as an extension of the theme and organizations often attempt to move any evidence of production and the labor process into backstage areas. Trujillo's (1992) ethnography of a baseball stadium specifically sought the voices of employees at the ballpark whose labor exists as a necessary, but overlooked, part of the theme creation. The experiences of numerous front-line employees are expressed in Trujillo's work but one voice remains absent, that of the team mascot.

ORGANIZATIONAL MASCOTS

Many organizations use characters to attract attention. Some of these characters only exist in print form. Many breakfast cereal characters such as Tony the Tiger or Snap, Crackle, and Pop appear in commercials and on product boxes but rarely, if ever, "in person." Some characters, like those individuals who dress up like the Statue of Liberty, attract attention using a costume but their faces are not covered. Characters like Ronald McDonald and Mickey Mouse who appear in multiple print forms and also have "live"

versions that perform at their respective organizational spaces. Performing as these characters requires the performer to hide their face behind either a mask or heavy makeup to ensure that when people see the mascot, they see “Ronald” or “Mickey” in “real life.”

When mascots appear in person, as opposed to in print, they affirm a historical significance that never existed and create new significance through their embodied performance (Slowikowski, 1993). As shown in the previous discussion of everyday life as performance, creating and maintaining a standard of believability, even in a fantastical environment, is the primary task of theater (Sennett, 1977). Like clowns in rodeo, the use of mascots in sport marks a shift in the sport’s culture from one that relies on the sporting event to one that recognizes the stadium event (Stoeltje, 1989). Arguments that disparage them as peripheral distractions, less than serious elements of the sport experience, or glib accessories elevated at the expense of the participants, however, are over simplistic (Fox, 2009; Gorn, 2003; Lukes, 2000; Nathan, 2014). As culturally constructed as mascots are, they are also embodied and research in this area provides an opportunity to explore how sport invites performances and how those performances “create connections between peoples” (Besnier & Brownell, 2012, p. 454). Before further exploring the ways a mascot is made “real”, some historical background as to the origins and evolution of American sporting symbols is helpful.

Mascot evolution

Animal mascots initially served as a symbol of what was being hunted. Over time, the animal mascot was ceremonially puppeted by its hunters in rituals designed to bring luck to a future hunt. This act of requiring animals to perform or reanimating the

conquered beast in order to produce luck lives on in sport mascots (Slowikowski, 1993) but either option is problematic because of a mascots incomplete representational abilities. When the animal is performing as a mascot, it can neither truly represent their species or the organizations using them as a symbol (Szarycz, 2011). On the other hand, addressing this inauthenticity by animating real animal corpses invites questions about the ethicality of the practice and would likely be disturbing for many contemporary audiences[4].

The representation of a team by a mascot reveals objects that are perceived to be predatory of, or possessed by, the community (King, 2009) and the selection of a mascot is rooted in power: the power to label, mimic, and/or control the story an object can tell. (King, 2004). In the historical sense, the turn from being afraid of bears to training them to dance happened very quickly (Szarycz, 2011). The selection of a mascot for a community's sports team is a symbolic statement by the community that either "We used to be scared of this but we conquered it so there's no reason to fear the next scary thing we face" (Cougars, Titans, Longhorns, etc.) or "This is a symbol we are proud to possess, thus we should be proud as we take on this challenge" (Mariners, Clippers, Jazz, etc.) Using either perspective it is clear why many have taken a critical stance in the use of Native American mascots (King, 2004).

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[4] The story of the George Fox University Bruin (2015) illustrates the potentially disturbing nature of keeping mascots tied to material referents. Originally a live bear brought to campus after its mother was shot, the animal was kept in captivity in a nearby canyon until it began escaping often and was "turned into steak for the dining table." It's hide was preserved and possession of the hide by a particular class (freshman, sophomore, junior, or seniors) became a point of pride until it deteriorated and was replaced by a replica.

More recently, teams have turned to being represented by powerful symbols that are beyond absolute control or nostalgic symbols of communities (King, 2004). Examples across the major American sports include Hornets (NBA), Wild (NHL), Nationals (MLB), and Texans (NFL). MiLB teams are no exception and the nickname "The Express" serves in both capacities. The team shares its nickname with one bestowed upon Nolan Ryan, a Hall of Fame pitcher and principle owner of the team (Round Rock Express, 2015a). Trujillo (1999) identifies the mediated portrayal of Ryan as a valorization of his physical force over which, at times, even he was unable to control. The graphic identity of the team also incorporates locomotive imagery that reflects the proximity of Dell Diamond, the home field of the team, to active train tracks. Train whistles are regularly heard by fans as an engine passes the ballpark. Additionally, a page on the team website suggests that the team mascot, Spike, assumed his role after "a well calculated jump off a Union Pacific boxcar" (Round Rock Express, 2015b).

In some sport contexts, particularly European soccer, mascots do not appear to be as prevalent. This may have to do with the difference in naming conventions, the work of organized supporters to keep others engaged in the stadium event, and the distraction rich environment of baseball, which is not as prevalent in other sports. European soccer teams are often named for the area in which they play with the recognition that they operate as "football clubs". Fußball-Club Bayern München plays in Munich, Real Madrid Club de Fútbol plays in Madrid, and Liverpool F.C. play in Liverpool. Some American soccer teams have followed the geography/club naming convention (FC Dallas, Real Salt Lake, Chicago Fire Soccer Club) and others have taken the path more familiar to most

American sport consumers (Portland Timbers, Colorado Rapids, San Jose Earthquakes).[5] Fans of European football clubs also work as mascots en masse with chants and songs that are woven in to the stadium event by attendees instead of being pumped through a PA system or through encouragement from a mascot during gaps in the game event.

Even among American sports, baseball seems to afford the presence of mascots in ways other sports do not. Many of the most recognizable mascots like Mr. Met, The Philly Phanatic, and The Famous San Diego Chicken, are those primarily affiliated with baseball teams (Ahearn & Ballant, 1982; McGuire, 2002). The environment created by baseball, with space for distraction, nostalgia, and myth, invites mascots to participate as another part of the structural frame that produces "sport's cultural myths" (Burgoyne, 1998; Wenner, 1993). As members of the organization, mascots are expected to engage the fans (Lin, Lin, & Ko, 1999), support the team (Kates, 2007), and be good for business (Burgoyne, 1998; Schultz, 2012, Hill, 2013).

Mascot functions

Front-line employees are those individuals identified as being the face of the organization (Torres & Kline, 2006; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Most mascot performers do their work under a costume mask that covers the performer's face with the "face" of the organization. Subsequently, fans look to the mascot to bring the team to life (King, 2004) by creating an identity, often a comedic one that extends the organization

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[5] Although "The Express" are formally titled the Round Rock Express Baseball Club, the words "baseball club" rarely appear in any external organizational documents or imagery. Internally, the "baseball club" language is in contracts and financial documents.

into the stands to be seen by fans. Because mascots exist as part of a team's competition for entertainment dollars (Burgoyne, 1998), they are relied upon to create strong and entertaining identities (Lin et al., 1999) to increase revenues and keep fan interest and attendance high (Nathan, 2014). As the extension of a team, the mascot is expected to have a sensitivity to the game and the players (Burgoyne). Some athletes have even credited mascot behaviors to positive game results (Kates, 2007). Because of their incongruity with the event, however, the expectation is that they show their support in a humorous way. The comedic elements provided by a mascot enhance the community experience of a baseball game and serve as a buffer against the possibility that the home team may lose (Snyder, 1991). One of the most commonly heard cliché's in MiLB offices is "when our fans leave the stadium they may not know who won the game, but they know they had a great time" (Hill, 2013). When the ballpark becomes a theme park (O'Conner, 2014) it can become a place where something unreal, like a mascot, has "no connotation of unreality" as the space is marked as a "retreat from 'real life'" (Sennett, 1977, p. 80).

Mascots and identity

Organizations rely on mascots, as front-line employees, to embody the spirit of the organization (MacNeill, 2009). Once a person puts on a costume and begins performing in the name of the organization, however, there is a chance that the performance shifts stakeholder understandings of team identity through improvisational behaviors that arise when the mascot interacts with audience members (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Peacock, 2009). Front-line employees, masked or not, are expected to

embody the preferred identity of the organization. This is especially true in sport organizations, like Minor League Baseball or the NCAA, where other recognizable actors, specifically players, fluctuate but the mascot endures (Greenbaum, 2013).

Even amongst front-line employees, however, mascot performers are unique. In addition to a mask or makeup concealing the performer's face, most mascots perform without words. By eliminating an actor's voice and face, the organization almost assures that mascot will endure as symbols even if the performers who animate them change. With these two points of differentiation in mind, I would like to introduce what is already understood about the way human bodies communicate at work and extend those implications to front-line employees, in general and, more specifically, mascot performers.

The body at work

The way human bodies are read at work has received attention in literature that focuses on worker experiences (Trethewey 1999; Monaghan, 2004) but it remains an understudied element of organizational communication (Styhre, 2004). Historical approaches to human communication have separated the ways individuals interact into verbal and nonverbal classifications (Heath & Luff, 2013). Bodily practices are often absent from scholarship as the result of the "tension between desire and disgust over alien bodily practices" (Farnell, 1999, p. 349). Without considering the body in research on organizational identity and routines, scholars are missing a chance to identify how work is accomplished without words and commit the error of assuming that the workers who perform organizational identity and routines are "bodiless" (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008, p.

138). Understanding the way a worker uses their body within an organization has potential benefits for both organizations and employees (Heaphy & Dutton). It has been known for some time that role performance can occur via gesture (Coser, 1966) but explanations for how humans develop gestures and why they engage in certain gestural performances also struggle with the structure/agency tension addressed by Structuration Theory.

The way communication is embodied through bodily habits varies amongst individuals and societies. While the conceiving of the body as man's most natural instrument, Mauss (1973) also questions if the natural tool can ever be used in a natural way. What begins as a series of movements borrowed from a culture are made idiosyncratic by the individual and reintroduced to the culture for evaluation and imitation (Mauss). This reintroduction includes "all movements executed by the human body as situated along a continuum-from the ordinary iteration of a habit to the most spectacular and self-conscious performance of choreography" (Noland, 1996, p. 6).

The actions of any individual may not be predictable but, when placed in a larger system, (given roles to play, in Goffmanian terms) predictable practices and habits may emerge. Mauss (1973) similarly emphasizes social structures as antecedent to gestural performances. More recent scholarship (Noland, 2009) suggests that the relationship between social structure and individual agency is recursive, with very few scholars positing the starting point of this relationship. This dynamic relationship between structure and agency is necessary in organizational communication contexts and, more

specifically, in how individuals communicate through their speech and bodily comportment at work. Workplaces are often highly social interactive spaces (Suchman, 1996) and are subject to rules or, what Goffman calls "situational properties" (1963, p. 243), which guide all instances where an individual finds him or herself in the presence of others. Individuals often perform in ways that do not indicate direct attention is being paid to these rules but, when they are violated, individuals recognize the embarrassment and move quickly to reconcile their violation. The relationship between rules and the body is so strong that de Certeau argues, "there is no law that is not inscribed on bodies" (1984, p. 139), constituting the body paradoxically as always a rule keeper but with to the potential to be a rule breaker. Goffman asks the question "In what ways is the member obliged to give himself up to the organization?" (Goffman, 1963, p. 244) and de Certeau makes clear the answer: the organizational member is expected to give of him or herself in *all* ways and specifically through the use of the member's body toward organizational goals.

The expectation that the worker keep no resource, including one's own body, from the organization, is a powerful one. Individuals are able to use their agency to resist behaviors acquired through acculturation (Dawe, 1979; Noland, 2009). How interactants manipulate speech or space is collectively informed and individually performed (de Certeau, 1984; Farnell, 1999; Streeck, 2012). Gesture is both influenced by and inherently challenging to cultural norms. The reception of feedback as a movement is performed can "produce a set of sensations in the body of the bearer, sensations that might eventually cause the subject to question the belief the gesture is supposed to

incarnate" (Noland, 2009, p. 40) and there is a recursive interplay between social structures that produce role expectations and the individuals who compose those structures and enforce expectations. Although role ambivalence is created structurally, it is not often resolved through structure. Instead, individuals rely on the interpretations of others and their own idiosyncratic interpretations to address the fit of a particular performance to the broader structure from which the performance emerges (Coser, 1966).

Although it is possible to give a gesture or cluster of movements a name, that process of categorization of movements should not produce a denotative understanding of what each movement or cluster of movements mean (Noland, 2009). Instead, bodily comportment through gesture, gaze, positioning, and other activities should be seen as symbolic and their meanings subject to negotiation during an interaction (Streeck, 1996). The meaning of a gesture is interactionally negotiated and made evident through the way a gesture is treated and related to by next turns of talk (Koschmann, 1999). Individuals can embody their own roles as well as manipulate their bodily performance to display expectations of the roles other interactants should adopt (Murphy, 1998; Jones & LeBaron, 2002). It is important to understand both the context of the gesture and the gesture itself. Goodwin (2007) asserts that gestures are environmentally coupled, in that they are linked to the other communicative elements present in the interaction, and that gestures are "built to be seen" (p. 202). Without an embedded context of other gestures and a surrounding environment, the meaning of embodied symbols would be inaccessible. The study of embodied communication cannot be limited to the study of how the hands move and must extend to an understanding of the objects that are created

or manipulated by the body in order to accomplish communicative goals (Goodwin, 2007; Streeck, 1996). Using Taylor and Van Every's (2010) concept of "thirdness" as the foundation of organizing, gestures are inherently organizational as the gesture (A), is coupled with the environment (B), to accomplish a task (X).

Mascot bodies

The way gesture is used to "accomplish highly specialized forms of turn distribution and organization remains surprisingly underexplored" (Heath & Luff, 2011, p. 276). This produces a limited knowledge of "how specific communication practices are quite literally written upon the body" (Trethewey, 2000, p. 1). "The human body is increasingly seen as being based in its capacities, its ability to undertake various operations and actions, i.e. as a *performing* body. Thus, the becoming body is turned into an ongoing project, managed by the individual" (Styhre, 2004, p. 104). In studying bodies in organizations, we ought to understand how the body performs in response to the interaction between individual and organizational goals.

The affordances of a human body when paired with the design elements of a costume allow for abstractions about a team to be made "real" (or, at least, as real as one considers a seven foot tall bulldog dressed as a railroad conductor to be). As the first, most natural, most real, and most material aspect of our identity (Mauss, 1973; Trethewey, 2000), the body allows simulacra to become "a social fact" (Noland, 2009, p. 19.; Cooren & Sandler, 2014) through the performance that uses "the most real and material aspect of our identity" (Trethewey, 2000, p. 1). Mascot performers are asked by their organizations to make their body visible through the animation of the mascot

costume while they perform their behaviors (de Certeau, 1984) to assist in making the organization more human.

Tracy and Trethewey (2005) propose challenging long-held beliefs about identity at work by provocatively playing with language. Individuals being asked what they "do", for example, can respond in a way that resists the common request for information about the paid work someone does by responding "I play with my daughter. I run 5ks. I volunteer" (p. 187). For mascots, this play occurs primarily by using their bodies in performance to emphasize their incongruous, albeit organizationally controlled, appearance. From initial appearances (Weigert, 1986), mascots are marked as a different type of body in the ballpark (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002) which invites them to explore the various relationships, and subsequent identities, that may be produced in their interactions with those in attendance. Mascots are a preliminary tool for understanding how organizations would like their values expressed as their looks designed by the organization and the occupational expectation that mascots not engage in verbal communication (Mumford, Kane, & Maina, 2003; MacNeill, 2009). The Round Rock Express recognizes this in the job description for the position of mascot performer, which includes the phrase "Spike is a key component to our mission by representing the Round Rock Express Baseball Club to the surrounding community in a positive and professional manor [sic]" (Round Rock Express, 2011).

Heath & Luff's (2013) extend the idea of embodiment beyond an individual's body, recognizing the artifacts available to them to accomplish communicative tasks. Organizationally speaking, employees can embody their work by incorporating their own

physical resources as well as the set and props of the workplace to accomplish organizational tasks and goals (Goffman, 1963). Mascots must regularly engage their bodies, spaces, and tools in order to manage their impressions.

How to be a mascot

Mascot performances "are high risk improvisations during actual games among a supporting cast of non-actors, with no script, no rehearsal and no second takes. And all of this takes place before an audience of thousands" (Giannoulas, 2014) and while a common MiLB cliché asserts, "the mascot is our biggest asset!" (Hill, 2013), what remains largely unknown to both organizational practitioners and scholars are the ways the mascot performer uses his or her body to improvise, maintain, advance, challenge, or modify the team's identity. For all the knowledge of the symbolic and monetary implications of organizational mascots, there is very little literature that specifically and practically explores how they prepare for their roles, perform, and manage worker and organizational identity.

Devantier and Turkington (2006) suggest that in order to be successful, mascots should "know your role and play it to the hilt" (p. 88). While this is a helpful suggestion, there are very few local, low cost resources by which a mascot is able to understand how to put those recommendations into practice. Devantier and Turkington provide contact information for professional organizations and certification programs for many of the occupations listed in *Extraordinary Jobs in Sports* (including golf ball diver, racehorse groom, and stadium vendors) but the only resource provided to aspiring mascots is mascot.net. An appendix titled "Read All About It", likewise, offers only two additional

readings for aspiring mascots. One is a guidebook for creating mascot costumes and the other is an index of mascots and nickname. Similarly, *The Professional Mascot Handbook* (Ahearn & Ballant, 1982) provides a list of eight attributes a mascot should have (enthusiasm, projection, anticipation, creativity, sense of humor, energy and stamina, perseverance, and talent and athletic ability) but little discussion about how to develop those attributes or put them in to practice.

Not knowing much about the everyday life of mascot performers has implications for both the individual performer and the organization. Without this exploration, there are few resources for potential performers to learn about the occupation before engaging in it, often referred to as anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001). Perhaps more troublesome is that they not be made aware of specific organizational expectations until they are terminated for violating organizational cultural expectations.

Similarly, organizations are left without resources, beyond their own experiences, to identify characteristics that contribute to mascot performer quality. Without the knowledge of what mascot performance feels like from the performer's embodied perspective, organizations are unable to develop those skills in current performers or recognize people who already have them. It is potentially dangerous to other organizational identity management activities to hire, train, or evaluate someone charged with being the face of the organization without this knowledge.

It is with this gap in the literature that the following research questions are presented:

RQ_1: How does a mascot performer develop an understanding of their organizational role and character's identity?

RQ_2: How do understandings about role and identity inform the performer's behaviors?

RQ_3: How does a mascot performer do the work of being a character for commerce?

RQ_4: How do workplace behaviors inform the performer's understandings about their work?

Chapter 2-An Autoethnographic Case Study: Method and Analysis

There has been little research done to explore the workplace practices of mascot performance. Recent television programming (Greenbaum, 2013) and book releases (Mass, 2014) suggest increased interest and access to the work of mascot performers but current scholarship on the topic is primarily limited to critical studies of offensive mascots or the economic benefit of mascots through merchandise sales or impact on brand attitudes. Although Spike is performed by a human, his costuming suggests he is not entirely human which presents methodological and interpretive challenges (Kirsey & Helmreich, 2010). This autoethnographic case study of the experiences of one Minor League Baseball (MiLB) mascot directly responds to the call to "consider when and how individual members of sporting organizations engage external audiences" (Kassing et al., p. 380) by linking identity literature and impression management literature to a unique context.

Qualitative methods are appropriate for researching underexplored phenomenon (Babbie, 2007). To richly understand the ways mascots do their work, methods should be selected that give provide emic and etic interpretations of the events in the ballpark. Autoethnography, analyzing one's own stories and field notes, is a method for collecting data about the interpretations of a performer during the performance. Video recordings allow notes to be taken during the performances which can be reviewed for patterns after the performances are completed, inviting new insights that may have been missed from first person analysis.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

With every research approach, there are tradeoffs made based on the type of data collected, how it is collected, and how it is analyzed. Qualitative research emphasizes the uniqueness of data instead of the number of subjects measured or generalizability of findings. This focus allows "human sciences…to become more human" (Bochner & Riggs, 2013, p. 198). There are some particular advantages to qualitative research including the increased clarity of informant voices, ability to generate data that is more complex, and the opportunity to manage data with more flexibility (Babbie, 2007). These advantages are enhanced by recognizing and being responsive to internal biases thereby creating a contrast against quantitative approaches, which have been, criticized as advancing knowledge "on the basis of *a priori* assumption and a touch of common sense, peppered with a few old theoretical speculations" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 29).

As this research focuses on organizational routines, made up of internal ideas, external performances, and artifacts, methodological choices should be made which allow for collection of internal and external data. Ellingson (2008) outlines numerous common criticisms of emerging qualitative research. They fall into two general categories: concerns for the discipline and issues of subjectivity. Concerns about the discipline include warnings that this type of work will not be published, or worse, will make communication scholars look lazy for selecting the easiest of potential subjects, themselves. For all of the benefits of this type of research, even some of its staunchest practitioners offer warnings to those engaging in it. Ellingson (2008) notes the difficulty in establishing qualitative research as valid in both social scientific and humanist arenas

as this type of scholarship is inherently blended and avoids staunch position taking in favor of potential interpretations. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), similarly caution that "such more open projects may not make academic life easier for those aspiring to be published in academic outlets calling for large numbers and a strict research design" (p. 1190).

In spite of these concerns, researchers must not shy away from this type of scholarship if they are to heed calls for: richer identity work that invites readers to feel as if they have engaged in the complex contexts of organizational identity construction (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), sport research that considers "when and how individual members of sporting organizations engage external audiences" (Kassing et al., p. 380), and provide a more robust understanding of the phenomenon than mediated depictions in literature (Mass, 2014) and on television (Greenbaum, 2013). Throughout this chapter, it is my aim to highlight the strengths of the different methodological choices made and argue that an approach that emphasizes stories and advocates for subjectivity enhances communication scholarship in this unique, underexplored context.

CASE STUDY

I have chosen to investigate a single case, my own performance as Spike, the mascot of the Round Rock Express in Round Rock, Texas. The Round Rock Express is a Minor League Baseball (MiLB) team that serves as the AAA affiliate of Major League Baseball's (MLB) Texas Rangers. I have performed as Spike for three complete seasons and, nearly completed a fourth before resigning to take a full-time assistant professor position in another state. As of the end of the 2013 season, I had performed in 217 of the

last 224 games played by the Round Rock Express at Dell Diamond[6]. My findings are based in three broad data sets: field notes, video recordings, and personal narratives.

Choosing to focus on a single case for data collection, like other methodological decisions, makes a tradeoff between values of generalizability and novelty. Case studies are theory-building activities that precede hypothesis testing on Wallace's (1971) wheel of science. Qualitative researchers may choose to gather data across multiple cases or explore the occurrences in a single case. These inquiries are a necessary foundation for quantitative studies to make claims of generalization that often rely on the theory produced through case studies (Campbell, 1975). As a qualitative methodology, the goal is gain access to actions and structures of individuals in order to describe and explain discovered relationships between people, behaviors, and structures (Charmaz, 2006). "The distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1981, p. 59). Such an approach invites the researcher to use multiple theories to interpret practices as well as seek out specific practices that test theoretical abstractions (Islam, 2015; Leviton, 2015).

Case studies that explore the dynamics in a single setting are often appropriate for explorations into novel topics (Eisenhardt, 1989). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003)

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[6] A home, regular season is ordinarily 72 games. The Express hosted an exhibition game against the Texas Rangers to begin both 2011 and 2012 seasons, 2 home playoff games in the 2011 season, and had 4 games moved from New Orleans to Round Rock due to a hurricane in 2012. Round Rock, although playing at home, was designated as the road team during the hurricane games. These additional games account for 8 additional non-regular season/non-home games played at Dell Diamond.

argue that although limiting the research setting to a single case appears risky, it is necessary for producing rich, nuanced understanding of organizations and identities. Exploring these uncharted areas in great depth is an advantage to case study research (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992) but case richness comes at the expense the ability to generalize across multiple cases. The aim of case study research is capturing complexity, specificity, and exceptions (McCracken, 1988) with the purpose of generating, instead of confirming, theory (Reinharz & Davidman). Thus, this research makes no claim to generalizability even among other MiLB mascots but, through deep description of occurrences that many readers would be otherwise unable to access, this kind of research produces theoretical insights that may be more internally valid and fruitful across broader conceptual categories (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ellingson, 2008). What is discovered about how mascots come to know their roles and play them to the hilt will likely have implications for workers who, while not wearing a mask and expected to remain silent at work, are expected to speak in the voice and move in the body of an organization.

Case studies cast a wide net around the culture or environment, allowing descriptions of findings and results to be drawn from multiple theoretical positions (Campbell, 1975). When organizations are treated as monolithic, the application of single theories in order to understand them is intuitive (Mumby & Stohl, 1996). An approach that considers organizations as the site of multiple interpretations, however, invites the application of a variety of theories (Campbell, 1975). Doing so displays the multiple ways a data set may be interpreted (Trujillo, 1992; Mumby & Stohl, 1996).

Case studies are made clearer when presented around conceptual frameworks or open-ended questions instead of chronological accounts (Yin, 1981). Case studies test explanations, not individual variables. Glaser (1992) cautions against the temptation to end qualitative data analysis once categories are described. Case studies, and other types of qualitative analysis, should endeavor to explain as well as describe. For communication scholars, this is especially true when exploring how meanings are negotiated or shared. It is certainly valuable to note *that* something is occurring, especially if it has not been noticed before, but even more so when the researcher explains *why* something has occurred.

Etic description and emic interpretation

When an action is performed, it can be described from an "etic" perspective by depicting the physiological characteristics of the action (Harris, 1990). It can also be interpreted from an "emic" perspective (Pike, 1990) by exploring what the action means. Front-line employees often develop hidden transcripts as a means of resisting organizational or occupational role expectations (Murphy, 1998). These hidden transcripts are "the interactions, stories, myths, and rituals in which employees participate beyond the direct observation of power holders (Murphy, p. 499). Emic analyses allow performers to express their own understandings of the activity (Tracy, 2000). In my stories, I endeavor to be faithful to the actions performed and offer interpretations of those actions by collecting self-report and videotaped data. I took notes during my performance as a Minor League Baseball (MiLB) mascot, elaborated on the notes verbally into an audio recording device, had video recordings made of my ballpark

performance, both the field notes and video content were coded to identify the understandings, practices, and artifacts that afforded or inhibited my performances (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

The distinction between etic description and emic interpretation is similar to the Geertz's (1974) interpretive method that delineates between "thin descriptions" that, when analyzed, produce "thick descriptions." An example of this difference is moving from the description of the contraction of eye muscles (thin) to having the cultural knowledge to understand what *kind* of action was occurring (thick): response to allergy, conspiratorial blink, mocking blink, etc.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is "an autobiographic genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 209) that gives access to the stories and sensemaking processes of an individual (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Weick, 1995). Collecting data as both the researcher and subject (Ellis & Bochner, 2003) gives readers access to stories that can only be produced from my "intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 443) in the work of being Spike that are inaccessible from other methodological means (Babbie, 2007).

By expressing these experiences, autoethnographies are positioned to comment on or critique cultural practices, contribute to existing research, embrace vulnerability with purpose, and create reciprocity in writing in order to compel a response (Holman-Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). These functions are accomplished by disrupting research practice

and representation norms, working from insider knowledge, maneuvering through subject's pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty, breaking silence and reclaiming voice, and making work accessible (Holman-Jones et al., 2013). Of these strengths, those most present in my approach are the sharing of stories that invite a response, a contribution to the discipline by amplifying the voice of silent performers, and subjectivity with a purpose.

Backstage access

Atkinson (1984) is optimistic that analyses of publicly available information only require a recording and interest to access findings about the topic that have been long concealed. When relying solely on public data and observations, however, a researcher is only able to gather "one version of the organizational reality" (Murphy, 1998, p. 505). What occurs in the view of the public at the ballpark is a way of understanding mascot performance but it lacks the ability to explain findings from an emic perspective. Access to these perspectives are important for increasing awareness of the relationship between a mascot and their team. It was through receiving backstage access that Trujillo (1992) was able to advance the understanding of ballpark activities and meanings. Interviews increase access to hidden transcripts of workers (Scott, 1990; Tracy, 2000) and improve strategies for worker resistance and identity construction. Mascot performers, however, are fewer in number than all ballpark or cruise ship employees. As a participatory researcher (Bergold & Thomas, 2002), I had access to the organization, its resources and my own understandings of what informed my performance and how I prepared and executed those understandings.

Disciplinary contribution

Earlier I invoked concerns that an increase in autoethnographic work may dilute the discipline (Ellingson, 2008). Autoethnographic work trades statistics from large samples in favor of voices, often from individuals with experiences that are not traditionally represented in academic research. Although research has shown the capital impact of a mascot on team revenues (Burgoyne, 1998; King, 2004; Lin et al., 1999), there is very little written in academic or popular literature about how mascots understand their roles, prepare to perform them, and bring them to life in the ballpark. Because performing as a mascot was part of my naturally occurring life long before I considered it as a potential site of research, I am able to examine features of the performance that would be likely be inaccessible to scholars researching my performance (Vryan, 2006) and bring traditionally silenced experiences of mascot performance into view (Langellier, 2003).

As researcher and subject, my aim is to allow the reader to "linger in the world of experience" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 431) without auditioning for the role, feeling their own sweat in the 100 degree heat of an August in central Texas, or smelling the costume after a 12 game homestand. The aim is to invite readers to value the stories as they allow for comparisons between experiences they may have had as members of organizations and experiences I have had as a mascot (Weick, 1995, p. 129). Although all readers are unlikely to have the experience of leading the crowd in singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" or signing autographs at a giant doghouse at the end of the third inning, it is likely they have experiences representing an organization through their speech or actions.

Reading my stories should create a dialog in the minds of readers as they find areas of similarities or dissimilarities and, perhaps, understand their own paid work experiences, their emotional labor, better as a result.

The collection of stories comes from the 2010, 2011, and 2012 seasons. I was not involved in active note taking during this time but, as I discovered research about role construction as understanding what may, must, and can be done (Strauss, 1959; Enfield, 2011), I began reflecting on those salient experiences from previous seasons and experiences outside of the ballpark that continue to inform my performance (Sparkes, 1996). Case study researchers are encouraged to treat storytelling as a valid tool for inquiry and the production of knowledge (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009; Yin, 1981) and while narratives of the past are incomplete reconstructions, they are "real" in that they inform my actions in the ballpark (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

Subjectivity with a purpose

All research methods operate on assumptions which bias or skew the interpretation of data. Autoethnography, unlike many other methods, invites the divulging of those biases at the outset so the reader is aware of the worldview or lenses of the author (Holman-Jones et al., 2013). Case study research is biased and subjective but Campbell (1975) argues that all methodologies require researchers to confront their own biases and contexts in their route to knowledge. When qualitative researchers position themselves as objective in their research, the analytical process is performed independent of emergent findings and is unlikely to produce "thick" descriptions (Geertz's, 1974) of human behavior. A reciprocal relationship that invites the researcher to depend upon the

data in determining the methodological course and answers to research questions yields the insights often unobtainable through less interpretive methods (Charmaz, 2006).

Detractors argue that findings do not generalize from the case method and that researcher bias keeps the data from being replicable, which makes autoethnographic findings speculative, at best Ellingson's (2008). My position is that bias can advance instead of hinder the findings presented. In this way, I hope to transcend Ellingson's argument that relies on counterpoints while still addressing her concerns along the way. I am specifically interested in autoethnographic writing that embraces its subjectivity in a way that shows the ambiguities, confusion, and struggles during the research process (Holman-Jones et al., 2013).

Autoethnographic writing separates itself from autobiographical writing in that it seeks explanations in addition to descriptions of occurrences (Giorgio, 2014). "We write Autoethnographies to make sense of the seemingly senseless, to deepen our understanding of self and other, to witness lived experience so others can see it too" (Giorgio, p. 407). The knowledge gained through human observation should not be immediately discounted as casual or limited. "After all, man is, in his ordinary way, a very competent knower, and qualitative common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing" (Campbell, 1975, p. 191). Qualitative researchers cannot claim neutrality; instead, we make clear the ways in which we, as researchers, have constructed the data (Charmaz, 2006) especially since any case study is a comparison of two cases: the culture observed and the culture of the observer (Campbell, 1975).

Divulging these biases is not a screen for rejecting the work outright. Subjectivity in autoethnography "creates a space for a turn, a change, a reconsideration of how we think, how we do research and relationships, and how we live" (Holman-Jones et al., 2013, p. 21). I had my own biases towards this line of research. I was initially hesitant to engage in a field with so few peer-reviewed publications addressing mascot performance. Even as I began cobbling literature from economics, critical studies, and performance studies, I was worried that there was no way a dissertation with organizational communication implications could be produced. Conversely, I was challenged by my adviser early on in the data collection to imagine what would change if the Express did not have a mascot. He furthered this challenge by suggesting that one answer to that question is that nothing would change. Instead of using my field notes, findings, and dissertation to confirm or disconfirm these assumptions, I committed to record everything without question for what would matter for the final project (Charmaz, 2006).

An Abductive Approach to Data Analysis

Abductive research generates conceptual categories and hypotheses from the data instead of collecting data with an idea of what might already be found. The researcher is encouraged to enter an environment without predetermined expectations and collect data without presuming what is or is not valuable to the research. Recognizing that approaching data without any *a priori* knowledge is highly unlikely (Eisenhardt, 1989), this approach invites researchers to incorporate insights that come from outside of the data, so long as it is introduced in a way that is intuitive and disciplined (Taylor & Van Every, 2011). Being disciplined requires the researcher to check findings from the data

against the data itself. In this way, abductive research treats theory as "an ever-developing entity" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32) instead of relegating the individuals being studied and privileging extant categories and explanations (Taylor and Van Every). Research designed to evaluate cases should integrate theory and practice repeatedly and throughout the process instead of simply working from theory to practice or the other way around (Leviton, 2015).

When organizational knowledge is produced by ethnographers and organizational members in parallel, opportunities for dialogue and interpretation of workplace routines are amplified (Islam, 2015). As an autoethnographer, I seek to incorporate theory development that occurred in my role as both researcher and subject. This dialogue occurred as I engaged myself in conversations about what being a mascot teaches me about organizational communication and what organizational communication teaches me about being a mascot. It is only after data are collected, that themes are identified and data is integrated into the themes (Yin, 1981) in order to avoid the unthinking reproduction of assumptions that can be avoided in abductive scholarship (Charmaz, 2006).

Reflection

One primary assumption that I carried unthinkingly was the idea that my work as a mascot mattered to the organization but did not matter for the purposes of organizational communication research. In preparation for, and throughout the development of this research, I went through numerous mental iterations of what this project could be about. In doing so, I developed a variety of what Shepherd and Sutcliffe

(2011) call “gists” which “enable the theorist to focus attention on salient aspects of the literature that signify a research opportunity and triggers subsequent stages of theorizing” (p.363).

I was initially intrigued by the role shifts that occurred as I went from being a professor in the classroom to a dad and husband at home, then onto the ballpark where I was an employee and then a performer. I also considered exploring Spike’s performance in relation to the spaces in which the performances occurred. While the notes may yield findings in that particular arena, I found the idea of organizational routines to be the most fascinating particularly as I learned of more recent conceptualizations of routines and the role they play in both supporting and subverting organizational identities. I then linked these ideas to earlier research interests I had involving the way university tour guides and admissions employees served as representatives of the university and the requirements placed on them in that specific line of work (Birdsell, 2012).

Like Tracy (2000), my research into mascot practices and the way they fit into organizational communication was not an intentional goal when I took the position. I took the position to make money in the summer between academic years. I did take some voice notes after my first full game ever, the exhibition against the Rangers, but decided against doing it every night because I didn’t think anything would come of it and hated the idea of listening to my own voice and sounding pretentious when talking about what I thought at the time to be a pretty frivolous thing. I humored myself imagining that I might one day write a book about management or customer service lessons I learned

while doing this work but did not think it would be class project worthy, let alone dissertation worthy.

Before I collected data, my advisor and I wondered what being a mascot was "like" and I explored literature on clowns and puppeteers. As I collected data, I shared my transcripts and early gists with my committee to see what might be emerging. In sharing stories with others who asked about my experiences, I found myself exploring the building of my own understanding of who Spike is expected to be and finding ways to connect that to scholarship of identity. Ongoing conversations with friends and faculty allowed me to identify potential themes of organizational routines and improvisation that might be fruitful and I began a process of reviewing that literature while transcribing and coding my field notes and video recordings to see how well concepts fit and where experiences fell outside of theoretical expectations.

Because of this openness, the results of this type of research make no claim to describing all that occurred. Instead, findings are placed into conceptual categories to see how things hang together. The scope of activities that occur throughout a season in the ballpark make it tenuous to claim comprehensiveness (Trujillo, 1992). Recognizing this, Trujillo invites additional interpretations of sporting activities as a way of understanding "ballpark, organizational, and American culture and, in so doing, become more enlightened students of the game, of our discipline, and of our society" (p. 367).

In discovering theory through this methodological paradigm, the researcher generates conceptual categories, or their properties, from evidence as it emerges dynamically through the data collection and analytic processes. Abductive reasoning

allows changes to analytic categories to be made even as the procedural goal is to isolate and define categories (McCracken, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997); metaphorically, once the target is established, it continues to move. Qualitative reasoning is not always abductive, it can be inductive or deductive (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011) but abduction allows researchers to modify research questions and adapt data collection methods throughout the process in order to achieve the primary goal of unique, novel insights (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Allowing interpretations to emerge and be tested in the midst of data collection may also provide clues for when data collection and analysis should begin slowing.

DATA COLLECTION

The team knew that my post-degree intention was to pursue a tenure-track position. In the likelihood that my future position would not allow me to continue my work as Spike, Laura asked me to collect data that would help them find and train a replacement. I took field notes after 56 games of the 2013 season. Since I am regularly on my phone during breaks in my ballpark performances, monitoring Spike's twitter account and engaging in non-mascot related activities like playing games and texting, I decided to use a list making application on my mobile phone in hopes that my note taking would be relatively non-disruptive for my coworkers (Babbie, 2007). I made quick entries into the application and used those as external stimuli while recording my spoken notes on the way to and from the ballpark for a total of 10.9 hours of audio.

Throughout the notes, I endeavored to react to the items on the list and elaborate on them instead of making preemptive decisions about what may or may not be relevant

to the final project (Eisenhardt, 1989). As I took notes, I began to think about conceptual connections that could be made beyond the preparation for hiring a replacement including made connections to previous performance experiences, potential literature that may be linked, and other insights that I thought would be fruitful in the analysis of the notes. Once transcribed, these notes totaled 395 pages of double spaced data. I coded the data using Atlas.ti software which allowed me to manage the numerous categories that emerged in a data set this large. Additionally, I reviewed video from six games recorded by a colleague in June and July of 2013. I coded the resulting 13 hours of video data by creating a list of nearly 2200 behaviors that Spike engaged in during his "on-stage" performances.

As a method that does not seek generalizability, there is far less concern for set standards of how much data is enough data. My convenience sample of note taking dates began on the date I received permission from the organization and stopped after I had recorded my thoughts regarding the last home, regular season game. Most notes were taken immediately after a game but, on occasions where the evening's activities left me too tired to take the notes, I recorded them on my way to the ballpark for the next game. Both immediate notes and narrated vignettes are considered valid as data sources for autoethnographies (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013).

Autoethnographic research is committed to methodological openness and views data collection as open-ended (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Reinterpretations are welcome as the author has experiences after and outside of the research field that provide insight into the data that has been collected. In this way, the quantitative amounts of notes

taken or hours spent in the field are less significant than the insights which can be drawn from them in the unique cases, so long as these insights both describe and explain the case (Eisenhardt, 1989).

CONCLUSION

This chapter makes a case for the use of qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis. Specifically, an autoethnographic analysis of my experiences as an MiLB mascot. Although only one case is presented, the depth of the analysis should advance understandings of the specific work of mascots and the broader context of front-line employees whether employed by a baseball team or not. Additionally, readers may compare my experiences to their own paid work and ask themselves what expectations their employers have for their ideas about work, performance of work, and the artifacts used to accomplish organizational tasks (Weick, 1995).

Chapter 3-Learning My Role: Origins, Preparations, Performances, and Responses

I was once told by a team executive that the mascot position is one of the most difficult to hire because of the importance of the symbol for a team. Many mascot performers, however, are hired based on their ability to endure the temperatures and odors of a mascot costume. If teams want their mascot to truly become the face of their organization, the mascot performance must do more than prove the performers physical endurance. Being energetic and clever (Devantier & Turkington, 2006) is necessary but not sufficient to create a character that is able to achieve the high expectations placed on performers. A more thorough understanding of how individuals prepared to become mascot performers and how they prepare to do their everyday work is necessary in order to recognize individuals who are likely to embody the organization in valuable ways. My performance stories have guided me through a process of understanding how to remain engaged with a variety of resources in the ballpark in a way that embodies the mission statement without putting the organization or the character in danger of losing face.

I will begin this chapter by exploring how difficult it is to explain Spike's identity. Then I will describe the ballpark and costume, common albeit necessary artifacts in the process of bringing Spike to life. The chapter ends with an exploration of experiences I have had which have modified my ideas about the organization, occupation, and Spike's identity. Specifically, how my preparation for future and assessment of past behaviors emphasize preparation of my work and the protection of my character, my organization, and its fans.

Much of the literature on organizational identity operates on an assumption that organizational identities are rationally created and introduced to external audiences through organizational communication such as mission statements, advertisements, and/or public relations campaigns. Cabantous and Gond (2011), however, suggest that it is “performative praxis”, the daily activities of actors “which turn theory into social reality” (p. 578). Like routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), performative praxis is supported and modified by material tools and cognitions developed from stated organizational positions.

Cabantous and Gond (2011) challenge the idea that organizations or their actors are rational-specifically, the presumption that actions taken by workers are always purposeful. If performative praxis is not as rational as previously suggested, the way to investigate performance is by investigate the relationships between the performer, the performance expected, and the cognitive and material resources available to him or her.

> “Cultural performance is the appropriate unit of analysis-perhaps we should say ‘focus of reflection’- for the interpretive researcher because it is self-consciously available for plumbing insights into cultural process...By construing performance as constitutive of culture, not simply one of its compartments or excrescences, the interpretive researcher has a heuristically rich but at the same time precise point of entry for cultural studies. Positivism can be resisted without sacrificing precision. Cultural performances are dynamic, ephemeral, volatile, but nonetheless framed, repeated, and recognizable events.” (Conquergood, 2013, p. 19, 20)

This “performance paradigm prevents the reification of culture into variables to be isolated, measured, and manipulated” (Conquergood, 2013, p. 17). Research from this framework should recognize moments of success and struggle in these relationships and

strategies developed by performers to balance creativity and constraint in the workplace (Conquergood; Eisenberg et al., 2014).

My development of Spike's role began before I was hired and continued to occur throughout my career as a mascot performer. While it is simple to say that Spike, as a symbol, may be central, enduring, and distinctive, my characterization of Spike is not as simple to explain and even more difficult to pass on to another performer. This became very evident when I had to train someone to be Spike for a few games I was going to miss.

During the season, I asked for a night off to see my daughter perform in her dance recital. I do not like missing games for a variety of reasons but one in particular stood out on the night I was training my backup. I describe it in my notes this way:

> Interesting night because we had a visit from Michael who will be my understudy for Saturday's game…So he was learning what it was to be Spike and asking questions and he asked really good questions about how Spike walks, the boundaries of the character, where to go, some places to avoid, little secret spots to get away if he felt like he needed to and just kinda talked about that kind of stuff.
>
> He asked me about Spike's personality and the best I could express it was that Spike's just an excited little kid who kind of just learned how to flirt. Others have asked me who Spike is and I've told them he's an amplified version of myself in high school. Sometimes it's easier to just explain the things Spike does or doesn't do. Spike waves the victory flag after games; Spike isn't a prankster, for example.
>
> He asked if I had any specific dance moves or anything special and as I thought about it, and the more I thought about it, especially with only one night to learn, and he's only understudying for one night, I ended up saying to him at some point, "you know the season ticket holders are gonna know it's someone different like the minute you walk out and the people for whom it's their first game aren't gonna know, or if it's their only game of the season or they only come a few times, don't pay really close attention, they're not gonna notice much different, they're just gonna know Spike is entertaining so it's not so important to me at this

> point that he emulate me. Training someone to be Spike but not wanting them to necessarily be exactly like me was an interesting and odd kind of position to be in.
>
> So then I wondered, with Michael there like, do I pull out all the stops? Do I do everything that he should see me do regardless of context? I didn't just because I thought, well he doesn't need to see everything. I did teach him the dance we do after singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame", I did remember to tell him that if we do win, which we didn't tonight, we lost by 2, go run with the flag and wave the flag. I taught him how to do Spike's autograph: all capital letters with a paw print dotting the "I" because I think that is something that's kind of important to be relatively consistent.
>
> I think I did do a couple things because he was there. He was telling me how he likes to do dance moves and these are some of his moves and so I felt kind of competitive like I needed to throw some in so, in the bottom of the 6th, there's a big rally and I made sure to get in some good hip-hop moves. I felt maybe like I needed to show him what I am at my best.

Training someone else to be Spike is difficult because it is not easy to reduce Spike's identity into a checklist of personality traits and common activities. It is also hard because training someone to be Spike involves, at some level, training him or her to think and act like me. Not everyone has the same motivations for becoming a mascot. In casual conversation with other mascot performers I've heard stories of people becoming mascots by accident, auditioning as a joke only to find out they were good at it, or former athletes who had suffered an injury that kept them from competition but they wanted to stay connected to the game. The story of my interest in and process of becoming a mascot fuels much of my early internal understandings of what mascots do. Reflecting on my own "origin story" allows for retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and narratively construct how my paid work as a mascot fit in my career (Inkson, 2006).

MY ORIGIN STORY

My origin story provides insight into how I came to recognize mascot performance as a form of paid work that I would be interested in doing. Creating this type of origin story allows individuals to organize their own life events in a way that leads to how they came to perform their current work (Inkson, 2006). This type of storytelling assist in uncovering structures and worldviews individual workers bring to the table even before the organization begins etching itself into their minds and onto their bodies. It is advantageous for employers to know how their employees think about their work to avoid organizational conflict (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987). This narration is advantageous to workers to mitigate "real self <-> fake self" concerns (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Awareness of how they "came to be" can articulate how the identity they understood before joining the organization and/or occupation can be nested in their current organization and occupation.

My mascot experience did not originate in Round Rock and it would be foolish to suggest that the building of personal understandings of occupational and organizational role expectations began when I began this position. By presenting my "origin story" I hope the you get a sense of how I see sport, and particularly baseball, fitting in my life, how I saw mascots fitting in the experience of sporting events, and how I incorporated those understandings into my own career as a mascot for my undergraduate university and for the Express.

Growing up as a sport consumer and performer

I grew up in a family of sport consumers and participants. Being able to participate in a conversation about baseball with my grandmother was a rite of passage. Even during vacations to a remote fishing cabin that seemed to pride itself on a lack of modern comforts, we had a radio. We may not have had hot running water or an indoor bathroom, but we could listen to Vin Scully tell us it was "time for Dodger baseball." That none of us liked, and some of us hated, the Dodgers was unimportant. When the game was on, we listened. My grandfather made the minute adjustments of the dial, antennae, and angle of the radio to catch what signal we could as the sun set and Grandma would tell stories of her experiences watching her dad work as a vendor at San Diego's Lane Field during commercial breaks. Part of being in the Birdsell family involved being a baseball fan.

Family celebrations and seasons are often marked by sports: my March birthday falls near baseball's opening day and the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, during which my family makes predictions on the "brackets" and the winner receives a candy bar and the ability to brag for a year. I watched both of my parents play recreational sports and my dad coached all but a few of the many soccer teams on which I played during elementary school. When we attended professional games we also found ways to participate as fans, keeping score and offering "advice" in the form of the occasional heckle. As I wrote one draft of this story, my wife was packing our children's bags for Christmas vacation and double-checking with me that she has all the appropriate team apparel to wear for games we will watch or attend on the trip.

Growing up in San Diego I watched the World Famous Chicken live many times and found his performances captivating. I attended a performing arts elementary school and got to learn about audiences, characters, movement, and the way a costume could be manipulated for dramatic affect. The idea of sports as entertainment was made real to me on Saturday mornings as I consumed as much professional wrestling on television as I did the sugary cereal I was not allowed on school mornings. I continued performing in high school theatre productions and attended most high school football games with my face painted in school colors while accompanied by a foam mannequin head on which I had placed a Mexican wrestling mask. Around the same time, I regularly attended Padres games in a brown friar robe with a rope belt and inflatable bat to emulate the "Swinging Friar" of the Padres.

In college, I reduced my involvement in organized theatrical productions but continued combining sport and performance as I dressed in assorted costumes for soccer and basketball games. I also increased my vocal contributions at these events prompting a soccer referee to threaten the section I was sitting in with a yellow card and an opposing fan to once shout "Did you forget to take your Ritalin today?!" in my direction. After developing a reputation for fanaticism, I returned from a semester abroad to discover that the university had purchased a costume and I was offered the opportunity to perform as the university mascot. I often wonder why they allowed me to represent the school in an official capacity. My best guess is that university decision makers wanted to find a way to keep me quiet and were betting on my status as the son of a faculty member to keep me from doing anything too embarrassing. I do not recall any conversation about what was

or was not allowed from an Athletic Director or Dean of Students but I do remember visiting mascot.net to learn how to prepare physically and how to avoid doing anything that would result in a penalty for my team. The website also had pages of do-it-yourself props and skits, some of which I recognized from The Chicken's performances.

Retaking the field

When I finished my undergraduate degree, I thought my mascot days were over. As I searched for paid work to do in the summers between semesters of my doctoral work, I visited the Round Rock Express website, hoping they might have positions. I saw that they had positions on the Party Patrol, the group responsible for on-field promotions and guest relations throughout the game. They were also looking for a mascot. The mascot job description, however, included expectations of off-season and weekend availability that concerned me. I was especially worried that the team might ask me to perform at community functions that could conflict with my classes or family activities. The job description also asked potential applicants to include a highlight video. The only video I had of my performances at the time was my mascot debut nearly a decade prior.

After applying for the Party Patrol, I got a call from Clint, the Director of Entertainment and Promotions for the Express. He asked if I would be interested in the mascot position. I was shocked that he was asking, as I had not included any indication of my previous mascot experience in any application materials. I shared those details that kept me from applying in the first place. He suggested we meet to discuss the position and we set an appointment.

What I thought was going to be a meeting turned out to be my audition. I arrived to the ballpark in a coat and tie as I had just taught a class and would be teaching again later in the day. Clint met me in the office and introduced me to David, an Account Executive who had recently been performing as Spike at community appearances, David took me to the control room to put the costume on and begin the audition. He then escorted me to a suite and I was asked to perform for Clint, Laura, the Vice President of Marketing, and Molly, who was responsible for ensuring that contracts with sponsors were upheld. I danced to music from a variety of genres for a few minutes and was asked to perform as if the team had just hit a homerun, a young fan was scared, or one of our players had been struck out at a pivotal moment of the game. They seemed impressed and asked me to sit down, remove the mask, and answer some questions. I tried to "show off" in my verbal responses as I had in my nonverbal performance and made sure to incorporate language about brand stories and organizational identification from my previous studies and work. After the interview was over, I changed back into my professorial costume and went to Clint's office where he told me that, provided I passed the background check, the job was mine and we would work together to figure out how to handle community events outside of the ballpark as they arose.

The training for my role took place during a high school baseball game being played at Dell Diamond a few weeks before the MiLB season was scheduled to begin. Along with the incoming Party Patrollers, I received the rules of the on-field promotions like the "Dizzy Bat Race" and the "Kraft Foods Grilltop Throwdown" and it was made clear that we were representatives of the ball club at all times. We then went to practice

what we had just learned and I was going to get a chance to rehearse in the ballpark. Because it was a high school game, neither team playing was "mine" so I tempered much of my performance as not to anger fans who might perceive my celebration for the actions of one team as an indication that I was not a fan of their team. Recognizing this validity concern, I asked Clint about the parameters of my performance. What is Spike allowed and not allowed to do? He assured me that I would be fine and he was sure that I would not do anything that, in his words, "obviously should not be done." I began my collegiate mascot career with very little training and few parameters from the organization and that trend continued into my professional experience.

Putting it all together

In my experience, being willing to be a mascot and having the ability to survive in the costume have been the primary qualifications for employment. During a going away party for Clint, who had originally hired me, I asked him what it was about my application that made him think I would be good as a mascot. He told me that he had asked every male applicant to the Party Patrol the same question and I was the first to take him up on it. As I look back on it, my concerns about the amount of time and quality the team expected from the job description were clearly lesser priorities than being in "good physical condition" and "able to work in a costume for long periods of time" (Round Rock Express, 2011).

For all the emphasis on front-line worker onstage performances, Guerrier and Adib (2003) found that these individuals are often given considerable autonomy with little managerial surveillance. This stands in sharp contrast to suggestions that

maximizing customer experiences "can only be achieved by a coordinated organizational effort" (Torres & Kline, 2006, p. 300). A combination of my own ostensive understandings of occupational expectations, combined with the learning experiences that built my understandings of the organization have allowed me to be successful. Artifacts are only part of what comprises an organizational routine but, since I cannot be Spike without a costume and a ballpark, these are vital pieces in understanding who Spike "is."

COSTUME

Although it is difficult to explain who Spike is, it is relatively simple to describe how he looks. Without the costume, I cannot be Spike. In addition to the costume pieces that the audience sees, I wear other clothing under the costume. In my notes and codes, I refer to these items as my "gear" or "equipment." The process of putting all of these pieces on is a transformative one for me in the obvious way, it changes how I look to other people, and in other, not as obvious ways. As will be seen first in the stories I share, getting into costume changes my internal understandings of who I am in the ballpark. Secondly, my gear and costume work together to protect the body and identity of both Spike and myself.

I have a hard time writing about "suiting up" for a game. Getting dressed for a game is one of the few moments in the ballpark that I had to myself. I rarely shared that time with others, even friends I made, like Corey, who shared locker room space with me. It was not out of modesty, there was just something about being able to put on my own music and put myself together. It was a time to reflect on whatever I wanted to. I perceived few demands on me in those moments and those were the last moments that I

would not be beholden to the stadium event for the next four or five hours. In my notes, I tell a story about a day I was at home, struggling to get excited for the game and my wife told me that, in these situations when I do not feel physically or mentally ready for a game, those worries vanish once I put on the costume. She is absolutely right. There is something about the costume being on that makes it "go time" but that also means that in those waning moments prior to putting on the costume, I can still be nervous, tired, angry, or self-conscious. That was the last moment I could be anything "human" before I became Spike. When putting on equipment or the costume, I am putting on my uniform, the reminder that I am at work/on the organizational stage (Guerrier & Adib, 2003).

How I put my costume on seemed unremarkable to me until I heard a story about the first time someone else saw me prepare. Prior to my being hired, most community appearances were done by whoever in the office could do it. Often times this meant a member of the sales staff or Tim J. Tim was in charge of baseball operations and community relations. He would drive us to appearances where I would perform and he would be my handler. We often remarked that we saw each other on Saturdays more than we saw our families and loved ones. Our first community appearance together was at a mall and we took the "Spike-mobile", a converted passenger bus that allowed me enough space to get dressed on the drive.

As we drove, I changed into what I later began referring to as Spike's "gear" which are articles of clothing that are not seen by the audience but advance my performance. This includes a speedo or a pair of compression shorts under a jock strap and cup with a pair of basketball shorts for my legs. As this was our first meeting, I had

much of this on when I arrived to the ballpark so that I did not have to be exposed in the van. Once those were on, I put on a pair of black kneepads and red, knee high soccer socks. Over my career as Spike, I would add other kneepads in white, red, royal blue, and navy blue and royal blue or red socks, and basketball shorts in the same colors, all of which correspond to the Express team colors. With the gear on from the waist down, I changed into an athletic t-shirt designed to wick moisture away from my skin, put on a skull cap to absorb the sweat coming from my head, and a pair of “Rec Specs”, prescription goggles with an elastic strap to keep them from falling off my head. At this point, whether in the ballpark or on the way to a community appearance, I usually put the bottom half of the costume, the overalls and feet, on and then wait until a few minutes before it is time to leave the backstage area to put on the upper half.

With most of my gear on, I transition to putting on costume pieces. I start with Spike’s navy blue and white pinstriped overalls, with the team logo embroidered on the chest. I pull them up to my waist and then pull the pant legs up to just below my knees so that I can place my feet into “Active Ankle” braces. I began wearing these braces after spraining my ankle during a pickup basketball game years earlier. In addition to keeping my ankles from rolling in ways they should not, they also add some girth to my legs to help keep Spike’s “feet”, the large, foam slippers with fur fabric velcroed to them, from falling off when I run, jump, or kick.

Spike’s head is a large foam and fiberglass shell with fabric on the outside. Occasionally an adult will tell a child “you don’t need be scared of the bear” but most people recognize Spike as a dog, with brown fur, jowls, and a toothy grin. Although there

is some confusion about Spike's species, I have never heard someone question his occupation. In addition to his pinstriped overalls, he wears a pinstriped conductor's hat, a bandana around his neck, and a denim long-sleeved shirt with pearl buttons. If you search for "Train Conductor Costume" on Google, these costume pieces are what you are likely to find.

Spike looks different from the inside. When I put my head inside of his, there is a bike helmet bolted to the shell so that our heads move together. My eyes look out of Spike's mouth, which is lined with mesh so that I can see out but it is difficult for others to see in. I use a chinstrap to fasten on Spike's head so that it is far less likely to fall off while diving, violently shaking my head, jumping up and down, or doing any of the other physical activities throughout the game.

Although counterintuitive, it is best to put Spike's head on first. This allows the fur neckpiece to be better tucked into Spike's collared denim shirt. If the fur is not tucked into the shirt well, my human neck can be easily seen during the course of my performance. My neck and ankles are similar in this way but wearing any kind of neck wrap, team-colored or not, increases the heat I already experience and adds more thickness to my neck, making it difficult to button the top button of the shirt that I rely on to hold the neckpiece in place.

My coworkers are sensitive to potential exposure as well and quick to assist me in maintaining certain elements of the costume to protect Spike from being outed.

> …for the end of Spike's Rules, I did a dizzy spin. I just kept spinning and spinning and spinning and then I stopped myself and acted dizzy and fell down. I was a little bit dizzy, not as dizzy as I played off, certainly. I was spotting when I

> was in the head so I wasn't super dizzy but a little dizzy and then right after that, Tyler and Rob both ran up to me and needed to tuck my clothes in- my shirt into my overalls and my neck into my collar and I acted like I was being tickled…

With the head on and fur secured with the long-sleeved shirt, I tie Spike's bandana around my neck tightly enough so that it can also help in holding the neckpiece in, but not so tight as to restrict my breathing. I tie it in a square knot so that it does not get any tighter as I perform but can be loosened quickly in case of emergency or just so that I can get it off quickly during a break.

The last costume pieces I put on are the furry, four-fingered gloves. If I put these on first, it would be incredibly difficult to put on the rest of the costume. I lose a lot of fine motor control as the fur impairs my ability to hold on to small objects, the thickness of the material makes it difficult to sense if I am actually holding something or not, and having to move my ring finger and pinky together requires me to be more aware of how my hands are doing the things they ordinarily do without much cognitive effort on my part.

I hold on to the cuff of my shirt as I put on each glove so that the elastic inside each glove's wrist can wrap around the shirt. This is another attempt to avoid being outed as a human by a gap in the costume pieces. If a gap does appear, I am careful to address it quickly. Once, during an autograph session, the clasp of the Sharpie marker was caught on a string of my glove and I had to rip it out. When I did, it ripped open a hole in my right hand glove that I could get my thumb through so then I had to be careful with it until I could swap the gloves.

Although I was already attune to the importance of keeping my own body concealed, I heard multiple iterations of a story about a time a former Spike performer was exposed when he grabbed onto the back of a vehicle the Grounds Crew was using and as the vehicle drove off, his gloves were stuck on the bumper. He was able to wriggle his hands out of the gloves but had to walk back to the locker room with his arms crossed and his hands tucked into his armpits. Although he tried his hardest to move quickly, a few fans asked for high fives to force him to choose between violating the expectation that he give fans high fives and the expectation that he remain covered.

Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) point out that workers must regulate their bodies in order to be seen as professional. This regulation places additional burdens on women who must reduce the likelihood of overflowing, emotionally or physically, in order to be viewed as professional (Trethewey, 1999). In a similar way, in order to be a professional dancing dog, I must prepare to abscond my true species affiliation by keeping my human parts hidden.

As I mentioned at the outset of this section, I had not given a second thought to the way I prepare for a performance. Only a few months ago, I heard that when Tim was asked by Patty, then his girlfriend, now his wife, how it went with the "new guy" during my first performance. One of the things he mentioned was all the gear that I put on before putting on the costume. When he and others performed as Spike, it was common to put on the costume over a pair of underwear or shorts and an old t-shirt. It got me wondering. I recognize that my "gear" does not change what Spike looks like but I think it does

change who I understand Spike "is" and who I am as a co-worker, performer, and professional.

Getting into costume to perform as Spike involves putting on items to protect myself from injury and exposure. It also protects me, as an employee, from the perception that being a mascot is both "dirty work" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) and "not a real job" (Clair, 1996). Mascot work can be considered dirty based on the amount of deception and the high likelihood of interacting with the filth of the performer's own sweat and costume pieces that cannot be tossed in a washer and dryer between each game (Ashforth & Kreiner). Additionally, there is no specific licensing required for the work (Clair). Although there are skills that make some mascots better than others, a primary qualification for Spike is the endurance to perform "in a costume for long periods of time" (Round Rock Express, 2011). The uniform might be an etic marker of a dirty, "not real" job (Guerrier & Adib, 2003), but the emic meaning I make from my preparation may insulate me from allowing those concerns to be incorporated into my internal understandings of who Spike is by offering an alternative interpretation of what mascot work is.

Preparing the "gear" I wear and putting on the costume work together to protect Spike's identity by protecting me from injury and exposure and marking a clear shift in who I am in the ballpark. This shift is further emphasized by the fact that I do not wear the gear for any other reason during the season. It is exclusive to performances as Spike. This process of preparation and protection allows me to perform with less concern for injury or exposure, allowing me to commit cognitive resources to anticipate performance

possibilities and evaluate the responses to my actions in light of what Spike may, must, and can do. I undergo a similar process in preparing the stadium, another necessary artifact for Spike's performance, for the stadium event.

TAKING THE FIELD

I consider my workday to begin with my arrival to the ballpark about two hours before the game's first pitch. Most games are scheduled to begin at 7:05 so I pull in to the ballpark around 5 o'clock. My first stop is to drop off my duffle bag with any gear I have brought from home for the evening and a gallon of diluted Gatorade. As I drop my duffle into my locker, I can see my pregame checklist written in blue dry erase marker on the inside of the locker door:

> Wipe dugouts
> Plant flag

I wrote these two tasks a few years ago after a failure to dry the dugouts before a game resulted in a painful slip and fall. When the team received the Whataburger flag, I decided to place it in a space on the third base side used by the grounds crew to keep supplies for the field maintenance they provide during breaks in the game.

After those tasks are accomplished, I pick up a copy of the game script and begin annotating it for my handler. When there are multiple elements occurring soon after one another, I get to decide what happens in between them. I will decide whether a break should occur or if I stay out to perform. Some nights there is a gap between my promotional responsibilities that is not long enough for a break in the locker room and I have chances for more interactions. Sometimes I even make a note of these possibilities

in the annotated script so that I do not have to verbally explain these to my handler while in the ballpark. When there are only a few outs in between a promotional activity, I often stay near a dugout so that I can hop up to perform when the game calls for it or I feel like it. Nights with a lot of moving from place to place result in more travelling to locations and less dugout dancing or game reaction.

These pregame activities echo the themes of protection and preparation that emerged from my reflection on getting dressed for a game. By doing what I can to limit the likelihood of injury and letting a coworker know how to help me through the evening, I can commit to the performance. An upcoming chapter will explore, at length, the performances themselves. In both my notes and my experience annotating the scripts, some spatial and temporal patterns emerge. The annotation of the script informs my performance for the evening by establishing expectations for when and where Spike should appear, coordinates those future actions with my handler, and attempts to build shared assumptions about how to orient ourselves to each other and within the time and space of the ballpark (Schein, 2004).

Illustration 3.1: Sample Game Script.

6:05 to CF

Time	Activity / Promotion
Pre-Game Super Series Parade	
Middle 1st	
Crowd Shots	
End 1st	
Tweet Winning Photo	
Papa John's Kids Games - Racin' Spike on a Trike	All PP Helping - Pizza is the Finish Line - Take Trikes to shed
15 Years of Memories	
Middle 2nd	
Burrito Shuffle	
Taco Bueno Home Run Inning	
Ballpark Rob Spot: Groups & Party Areas	
End 2nd	
Golden Chick Big Kids Games - Pony Hoppers	ALL PP Helping
Glen PA: Railyard + Stars & Stripes Hat	
Middle 3rd	
Birthday Parade	Spike in LF
AT&T Call of the Game	Merica
Birthdays & Groups	
End 3rd	
Spike's Autographs - "Spike's Doghouse"	Spike's Doghouse
Community PSA - Chasco Community Partner	PET Austin
Middle 4th	
Chicken Race - Red Wins	Charlie, Alex, Enrique - Chickens | Rachel & Lauren - Finish Line
Presenting Sponsor & Media Recognition	Budweiser, KVUE, 102.3 The Beat
End 4th	
Spike Injury Video	
Hair Guitar	
Middle 5th	
Rowdy Time - Spike & Party Patrol on the field	Charlie, Lauren - RF | Enrique, Rachel - LF | Alex - Getting Dizzy Contestants
Flex Cam	
End 5th	
Dizzy Bat Race - 1B side	All PP Helping | Rachel & Lauren - Getting Contestants for 30 Sec. Showdown
Dirtiest Car in the Lot	
Middle 6th	
30-Second Showdown: Booty Shakers	Rob - Emcee | ALL PP - Contestants + Kleenex Boxes
Smile Cam	
End 6th	
Chicken Dance - Party Patrol on Dugouts	Charlie, Lauren, Alex - 1B | Enrique, Rachel, Spike - 3B
Ballpark Rob Spot: Chistmas in July	
Middle 7th	
Take Me Out to the Ballgame	Charlie, Lauren, Alex - 1B | Enrique, Rachel, Spike - 3B
Cotton-Eyed Joe	
End 7th	
Winning Photo Announcement	
Glen PA: Upcoming Games	
Crowd Dances to Apache	
Middle 8th	
TDS Video	

[GUN] → 3B

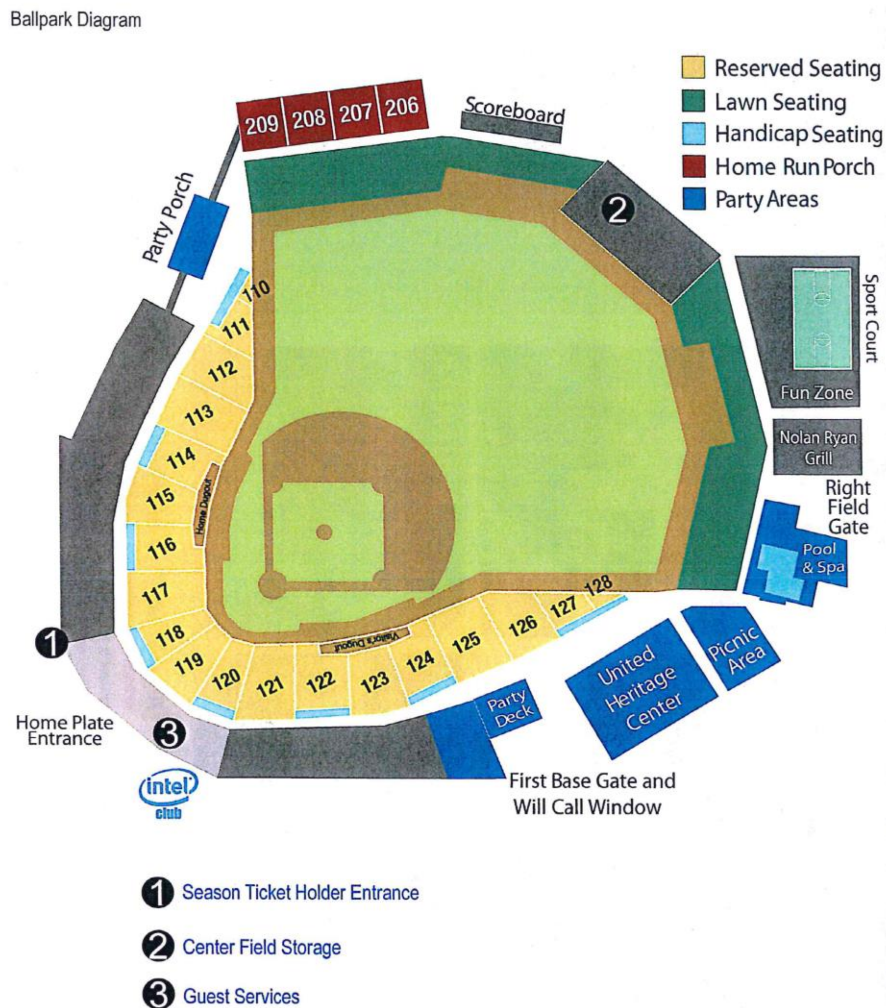
Common spaces and activities

Spike's workday begins when he leaves the locker room. Once I am suited up in the locker room and pregame activities begin, I alert my handler that it's "time to go to work" and walk past the dumpsters on my right, beer kegs on my left, and turn left into a concrete corridor across the threshold of a gate that announces "not an exit." Along the way, I clap five times and thrust my arms out to my sides, a move I developed to make sure that I began each game with action an energy. Even on days when I felt lethargic putting on the costume, this move was a physical reminder that the curtain has been pulled back and I am on stage.

Although I am a human performing as an anthropomorphic animal, the types of space I commonly occupy are very similar to the spaces that appear in animal performances. The spaces animals perform in are classified as enclavic or heterogeneous (Szarycz, 2011). Enclavic spaces are those that are self-contained with clear boundaries to mark the human/animal dissimilarity. They are traditionally designed for gazing and are often paired with areas for viewers to spend money. The animal is often presented at rest in these spaces (Szarycz). My enclavic space is near section 124 at Spike's Doghouse, an oversized doghouse located next to the "Railyard" team store. Heterogeneous spaces are places where animal performances appear as "natural" (Szarycz). As simulacra, there is no natural space for a mascot but in order to manage and maintain the idea that the ballpark is Spike's natural environment (Round Rock Express, 2015b), I claim the field, dugout, and seating areas as heterogeneous, albeit shared with players, fans, and coworkers.

Within the ballpark itself, I frequent some areas throughout a typical game more than I do others. While coding my notes, I labeled the location of my various activities and found that I am regularly on the first or third base side of the ballpark. Although my first location on most nights is the field, which serves as the stage for Spike's pregame activities, once the game begins, I am only on the field for a maximum of 90 seconds during scheduled promotional activities that occur at the half-inning breaks.

Illustration 3.2: Ballpark Diagram.



During the early parts of many games, I am usually located on the first base side. Many of the on-field elements that involve Spike like “Racing Spike on a Trike”, “Shirt Shag”, and “Flickin’ Chickens” begin on the field near first base, as determined by the game script, so it is convenient to jump onto the field from seats near first base in order to be in position for these activities. “Spike’s Autographs” also occur on this side, in front of his doghouse.

The third base side is where much of my later game activity takes place. The on-field elements that occur later in the game rarely require Spike to participate. Those late-game elements that Spike is asked to participate in, like the “Chicken Dance” or leading the fans in singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during the seventh inning stretch, do not occur on the field. There are members of the Party Patrol performing these elements on both the first and third base dugouts so I am given the freedom to select the side I would like to join. Because Spike’s locker room, where I take my breaks, is closest to the third base side it is more convenient to do my late game activity on that side instead of walking all over the concourse to get into position near first base. I also plant the “Whataburger Flag” on the third base side so it is accessible at the end of the game.

Even in those moments during the game when Spike is not required to be in a particular place, Spike can often be found on the first and third base sides of the ballpark. There are other areas that Spike makes his way to only when he is requested or required to be there. These include center field, behind home plate, and the suite level and Intel club. Centerfield is the place that the grounds crew stores many of their tools and vehicles for maintenance of the field. Access to the area is limited to employees and guests. My

reason for being there is usually to prepare for and lead pregame parades, the birthday run (also known as the birthday parade or stampede), and other special entrances (used car night, Boston Marathon tribute).

People sitting behind home plate receive less attention for a few reasons. There is no dugout to jump onto and because of that, it is not as easy to get away when I need to for a break or a promotional element. It is also where scouts and player families often sit so I presume they are less interested in mascot antics than "ordinary fans." Similarly, although I spend quite a bit of time walking through the concourse, I rarely stop to use it as a performance space. The concourse is really two walkways: one interior, from which the field can still be seen, and the exterior, which has a few picnic tables, areas for guests to smoke, and the exit gates. I normally travel via the interior concourse because there is more traffic, more opportunities for interaction, and I can better monitor the game. When things are incredibly busy or I am in a rush, however, I may move to the exterior concourse. In addition to lacking a clear performance space, the concourse can become clogged and inconvenient for many fans when I do stop to perform.

Another reason for not spending much time on the concourse is lack of visibility. If I am going to be sweating in a costume, I might as well be seen. An expectation of all workers is to remain engaged (Goffman, 1963). Vendors in the ballpark can demonstrate their engagement through cries of "PEAnuts, Crackerjack HERE!" and "COLD WAHDAAAAAAA" while food service employees can demonstrate theirs through the smells of grilled ground beef that waft from their stand. Without a sound to make or a product to prepare, Spike can only demonstrate his engagement visually. This need to be

seen may also explain, in part, why Spike spends so little time on the suite level or in Intel Club or United Heritage Center. They are spaces that I have limited my appearance to being “by request only” as my own understandings of the importance of being seen play a role in the amount of time I spend in these locations. These locations are more exclusive and there are fewer people who may witness my performance. At the same time, fans in these areas are waited on by catering staff members who often request that Spike visit one of these locations and I rarely decline that invitation.

Just beyond the outfield wall in both left and right fields is an area very much the opposite of the suite level. Commonly referred to as “the berm,” it is the Dell Diamond equivalent of lawn seating at a concert. Fans may stretch out a blanket or towel on the grass on a first-come, first-served basis. Since sitting in the berm is less expensive, the berm can become quite crowded. Although performing in this area would result in Spike being seen by a large number of people, I don’t spend too much time out there as it is the area furthest from my locker room so travelling out there can, at times, take an entire half inning. Unlike the concourse, which has an inner and outer option, there is only one walkway in the berm and very few escape routes. Performing out there introduces additional risk that so much of my preparation is designed to protect against. Heading out to the densely populated area with no seats or stairwells to serve as barriers, fewer coworkers, particularly ushers, and more children, leaves Spike exposed to more opportunities for being overtaken by well-meaning families requesting photographs and, on occasion, the young fan who wants to find out if Spike’s “real” by punching him in the groin. If I am overtaken by any of these elements, it becomes difficult to get to prescribed

areas for in-game elements without asking my handler to explicitly tell fans "Spike has to go." This is a phrase we try to avoid and I work with my handler to think of dog-themed ways to explain my departure like "I need to take Spike for a walk" or "Spike's going to get some treats" in hopes that fans don't feel that their desires were ignored in order to meet an obligation to other fans or a sponsor.

My interpretation of my own origin story as a mascot performer and the affordances of necessary artifacts like the costume and the ballpark contribute to an internal understanding of who Spike is able to be. Without the organization, however, these understandings do not have the opportunity to combine in performances. The upcoming chapter will explore specific instances from the field notes I collected during much of my third season with the Express. My experiences prior to that season, however, are incorporated into the ongoing understanding of Spike's identity.

AVAILABLE ACTIONS

As with any role, understanding who Spike is involves answering questions about what Spike *must* do, *may* do, and *can* do (Strauss, 1959; Enfield, 2011) In some cases, answering them also required understanding their inverse: knowing what must *not*, may *not*, and can*not* be done. Answering these questions about Spike also assists me in performing correctly (Wakin, 2012) when encountering new experiences in the ballpark by projecting what may be done or could be done in the future.

When using the term "must do", I am emphasizing those behaviors that are required in order to remain employed. Conversely, engaging in "must not do" activities results in rebuke and, possibly, termination. The "may do" dimension refers to activities

which are permitted or allowed but not required. “May not do” activities are similarly rooted in this sense of having permission to engage in “Behavior A”, “Behavior B”, but that choosing to perform neither would not be treated as a violation of tacit employer/employee expectations. I use “can” to refer to that which is possible, usually in the physical sense. If something violates affordances of my body and costume or physical laws, it would be deemed a “cannot” even if the organization would allow them to occur were they possible.

Must do

Organizations expect members to give their bodies over to the tasks and goals of the organization (de Certeau, 1984). Organizations often make explicit the following rule: Bodies must be engaged. Workers, in response, find ways to “successfully maintain an impression of due involvement” (Goffman, 1963, p. 60). Involvement in impression management is especially important to my work as a mascot. It is virtually impossible to go unnoticed anywhere in the ballpark. Conversely, if there is an activity in the ballpark that fans might expect Spike’s presence, his absence is noticeable. An organizational story is often shared that the ownership group was very “hands on” in the design process of the stadium and they did not want a ballpark where players could use underground tunnels to get to and from the locker room without being seen (Hill, 2014). Similarly, Spike enters directly onto the outer concourse and wears a mask that is tall enough to collide with some of the ballpark signage; there are few places Spike cannot be seen.

My memories of ways other mascots I have seen perform have remained engaged helped fuel my understandings of occupational expectations. Early experiences in the ballpark also made it clear that I was expected to be always ready to perform.

> The starting pitcher in my first game, an exhibition game against the Texas Rangers, was Michael Kirkman. Very early in the game, a batter hit a ball that ricocheted off of his forearm, injuring him and requiring a pitching change to be made. There was a long, unexpected break in the game activity while a trainer checked on him, a coach came to talk to him, and the manager decided to make the change. Once the change was made, a new pitcher had to make the 350 foot jog from the bullpen to the pitcher's mound and was given time to warm up on the mound.
>
> I had just returned to the locker room for my break when this all began and, once it became clear that there would be such a gap, a call came over the radio from Clint. "Clint to Spike's handler, can we get Spike back out there? We need something to keep the crowd in it."
>
> I took a big gulp of Gatorade, put the costume back on, and out we went.

Earlier, I discussed the way I work to prepare each game script to give clear instruction to myself and my handler about where I need to be and when I need to be there. Even this script, however, does not trump the primary "must do" that Spike be seen and engaged in "make work." In only my first game with the team, I learned that Spike is expected be ready to perform at all times, even at times when a performance was not anticipated.

Must not do

There are things I have learned I must not do no matter how engaged I am in them or how much they prove I am in the process of "make-work." Entertaining the audience is easier than entertaining the fans while satisfying the organization. It is easy to forget in

the midst of a game, the fans are not the only members of the audience. The organization is watching too.

> As I walked casually from the locker room I was pulled into a wave of boos. They were not directed at me. Our pitcher had just been ejected. I had to be a part of this. This was my first experience with a heated crowd. This was going to be fun.
>
> I ran down the aisle and leapt onto the dugout. Stomping down the painted concrete, I swung my arms with determined indignation. Upon my arrival at the corner of my stage I lifted my right leg and leaned to the left (I am playing a dog after all).
>
> I wish I knew how the crowd responded but my senses were instantly attuned to the pronounced yank I felt from behind. Had my performance, combined with the arousal of the player's ejection, inspired such excitement that a fan felt compelled to join me in my defiance?
>
> No.
>
> It was David, an Account Executive, shouting "Stop! Get Off!", an admonition that echoed in his radio as Clint, my boss in the control room, continued to add his instructions.
>
> I jumped down, shrugged my shoulders, found the field access gate just beyond third base, and clapped as the ejected player walked into left field and up the stairs to the locker room. Spike continued to smile but I was afraid I was about to be ejected for more than the remainder of the game.

As my origin story indicates, I tried to gather information about the parameters of my performance before I worked my first game but the responses about what was and wasn't allowed was often ambiguous or altogether absent. I got the impression that because I had done well in my audition (no behavior that would disqualify me from getting the job or potentially harm the team), the assumption was that I would always continue to do well (no behavior that would cause me to be disqualified from the position or cause harm to the team). Even if someone performed for a whole season, there would

still be instances, like a player injury, fan injury, or other game delay that fall outside the "expected" activity of baseball. Responding to these, especially when they are first time occurrences, is difficult without a worker and organization discussing or negotiating behavioral expectations.

Lifting my leg in the direction of the umpires occurred very early in my work at a time when I believed that my role was primarily that of a crowd microphone. I have been a fan of professional wrestling for nearly 25 years and on the few occasions I have spoken to professional wrestlers, I have learned two lessons about their performance. First, the worst thing from a crowd is not boos, but apathy, no response at all. Second, nothing you do to elicit cheers or boos is "cheap" if the crowd's reaction is "real." In a way, I thought my job was to sense the crowd reaction, embody the underlying sentiment, and perform in a way that would display my own expectations of the way other fans should behave (Murphy, 1998; LeBaron & Jones, 2002) thereby encouraging them to experience similar emotions. If I had been very successful, they would display their own emotions nonverbally (Friedman & Riggio, 1981).

Operating from this perspective, however, resulted in a loss of face as my performance was cut short. Being the face of the ball club requires me to be the standard-bearer for appropriate crowd response. As guests move from being customers to being fans, they look for examples of behaviors they can adopt to indicate their fan identity (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Allowing the crowd to establish the standard reduces my ability meet occupational expectations and organizational positions (Hindmarsh, Reynolds, & Dunee, 2011; Mirivel, 2011) that the Round Rock Express "promote

America's national pastime in a safe, fun, friendly and exciting atmosphere that allows fans and players alike to enjoy the game…[and are] devoted to providing all of our fans with affordable, family-friendly baseball" (Round Rock Express, 2015c).

May or may not do

The "always on stage" expectation caused me great anxiety in early performances of Spike. The anxiety was highest when the opposing team was batting. Throughout the game, I am expected to be in place for the next promotional element three outs before a scheduled activity. Often times this places me behind a dugout or near an on-deck circle while the opposing team is batting. When opponents are at bat with one ball and two strikes and they continue to foul off pitches or two batters are walked one right after another, the game can move pretty slowly and I have very few game moments with which to interact without appearing antagonistic to the opposing team or umpires.

While I must be engaged, waiting to react to home runs, stolen bases, strikeouts, and other exciting moments is a recipe for precisely the disengagement Goffman warns against. The primary consequence of this disengagement is that I appear that I am not working or I do not know what I am doing (Koschmann, 1999). By virtue of my size and incongruity, I am a more visible member of the ballpark community but I am unable to display my engagement through speech or changing my nonverbal expression. Even blinking is impossible so if I stand still while watching the game, Spike appears to be staring into the distance instead of "making work". Neither fans nor the organization want to see a motionless mascot.

I came up with a few "go to" moves that I may do to remain engaged in "make work" activity (Goffman, 1959). One of them is simply scratching behind my ears. Since I only do this when there is little game activity to arouse the crowd, I am often able to hear fans a few rows back pointing out the action to other fans in attendance or just laughing amongst themselves. I also find times to "conduct the crowd", often after a foul ball when there is more time between pitches, by trying to get one section to cheer louder than another and then joining the voices from both sections into a wave of sound. A well-timed clapping routine is another way I try to break up the monotony of the other team being on offense.

The important thing for the building of ostensive knowledge is that I learned that staying involved is a "must" but what I "may or may not do" to stay involved is up to me, so long as I avoid "must not" actions. I have explored the dangers of the autonomy granted to me through the "lifting the leg" story but that autonomy also has benefits. No organizational member has dictated to me how I should engage the fans during pregame activities. I have received no instruction on the "proper" way to celebrate a homerun or lament a strikeout. Having demonstrated my own competence through the audition process, it has been largely assumed that I can develop my own repertoire of those activities that I may or may not do throughout a game or a season.

A key element in developing "may do" activity is to remember that the game event and stadium event are different (Williams, 1977). Although the game may not always offer activities that afford a high amount of make work, the stadium event involves a variety of activities that are more predictable than what happens on the field.

These opportunities exist through the incorporation of other game employees, the fans, and the ballpark itself. When the predictability of these resources was altered late last season, I explored new opportunities that were not as reliant on what occurs on the playing field.

Towards the end of the 2013 season, there were a number of weather related delays that occurred while I was performing. I initially viewed these as inconveniences as it was late in the season, I am paid by the game and not the hour, I was getting rained on, I had a second job to report to at 8 am the next day, and so on. While other employees huddled together to commiserate, fans moved collectively to covered sections of the stadium concourse. I remained in the stands to be "on" but doing so is impossible in this scenario if I only choose to be engaged with game activity. I began grasping for any other resources available as my traditional spaces and audience were modified.

> A soaked stadium can be a dangerous place. The slick concrete is a tripping hazard and we modified many of our promotional activities to reduce the number of fans chasing after t-shirts on a slippery surface. The combination of a glossy, painted dugout and large, fur covered feet with very little traction makes performing on my traditional stage more dangerous and more difficult. Then I wondered "what is all this slipping around *like*" and quickly imagined Spike as an ice-skater. I slowly crawled onto the dugout and began my cautious, mannered interpretation of a speed skater. This activity can only be accomplished in this kind of weather, with dugouts prepared in a particular way.
>
> Most actors, when their scene or play is done, have another character who takes over the action or a closing of curtains to mark the completion of their part. In most of my mascot activity, and especially during a weather delay, no one in the ballpark knows precisely when the game will resume. After my "mascot on ice" experiment, instead of giving the stage up to the next act or watching the curtain close, I began searching for something else to do. Although I could have taken a break, there was no telling when the delay would end and the team was in the midst of a rally. We also had a promotion at the end of the interrupted inning so I needed to be available as soon as the umpires allowed us to continue.

Having such an increased level of uncertainty surrounding that evening's performance was quite beneficial for my understanding of who Spike may be. By taking advantage of an opportunity to explore less predictable "may do" activities, those which are permitted but not required, I discovered new movements that later became incorporated into my repertoire (Dickinson & Travis, 1977).

As fun and advantageous as these opportunities to perform in new ways are, there are still some physical limitations that keep me from exploring certain performance possibilities. Determining what I must or must not do and may or may not do in my performance is largely a decision made between myself and my employer. What Spike *can* do, however, rests largely in my own physical abilities or limitations, how they are amplified by the costume, and how they allow or limit my ability to co-construct my role with the audience.

Can and cannot do

It is not uncommon for workers engaged in "dirty work" to hear the question "How can you do it?" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). I get that question a lot. One of my favorite ways to move the question away from a discussion of how badly I smell or how hot I get is to let the inquisitor know that, in some ways, working in costume keeps me from doing some of the emotional labor, particularly the management of my face, that is required in other occupations (Hochschild, 1983). From my notes:

> …more extra innings…I like to be there for the last out and so I get very short breaks in between and sometimes I stay out for a whole inning and sometimes I'll duck in to just take the head off for an out or two. We finally won so I got to run down the dugout and wave the Whataburger flag and then we did all of our post

> game promotions on a Friday night, the lucky roll and the fireworks. It was all with maybe 200 people still there to witness it…It was an exciting end of the game, the fans were into it but it was just that weird extra innings kind of twilight moment where people were excited to see us win but they would have rather have seen us win in 9…I was beat and knowing that I had stuff to do this morning and had another game tomorrow, because yesterday was the first game back, was kind of a tricky thing to navigate but it's one of the joys about wearing the head is that no one can see how tired I am so it's all good.

I never have to worry about smiling. Spike's unchanging expression allows me to have an angry look on my face or keep my mouth wide open while breathing heavily and most members of the audience are none the wiser. At the same time, there are some actions that I am able to do when I am not in costume that are more dangerous, difficult, or virtually impossible when I am suited up.

My performance experiences prior to becoming a mascot include dance and theater experience but no gymnastic training. Subsequently, I cannot do a backflip or a cartwheel. The giant conductor's hat that Spike wears on his head, however, even restricts people who have tumbling experience from doing those things as well. The hat stands too tall for most people to place their hands on the ground while upside down, an important part of a cartwheel, and also requires any would-be backflipper to increase their vertical leap by over 18 inches to complete the flip. Once, at the end of my first season, I decided to do a simple forward roll only to realize while upside-down that all of my weight was being supported by my neck and head while strapped in to the helmet bolted to the inside of Spike's head. Those brackets were clearly not meant to support 190 pounds and I felt them each snap out of the fiberglass, requiring a costly off-season repair.

The proportions of the costume make ordinary activities difficult. Spike cannot, for example, easily slip a t-shirt over his head. The need to recognize and respond to these affordance issues can produce performances that otherwise would not have been considered. Similarly, the increase in size between Spike's hands and my hands along with the change from five human fingers to four furry fingers makes it difficult to grip small objects, including reattaching costume pieces that malfunction during the game.

> At one point, on the dugout too, my shoulder strap was falling off and …it kept falling off so at one point during all the celebration and stuff I just, I just took my hand and thrust it off and then kinda rolled my shoulder and just that simple shoulder roll got people like "oohh oooohhh" and I got some cat calls for it and stuff. It was pretty funny.

Creating relationships with my body

The costume alters my ability to do many of the things I can do when I am not in costume while also altering how I perform my emotional labor. The lack of verbal interaction with fans also requires me to use my body to establish relationships with people in the ballpark. Just like people whose work and life do not involve wearing a costume, I can change Spike's characterization based on the relationship I am trying to create (LeBaron & Jones, 2002). My movements create and define particular performance areas from the moment I leave my locker room. Instead of being able to recognize, greet, or tell a joke to a fan with my words, I must perform these interactions nonverbal. Like verbal communication, what nonverbal communication is allowed during relationship building is contextually bound (Duck & McMahan, 2009).

> At the conclusion of the 3rd inning fans are invited to meet Spike at his doghouse behind section 124 near the team store where he signs autographs for the next half inning. This announcement, as expected, results in a number of children and

families lining up for an autograph, photo, and often a high five or hug from Spike. At the end of the line stand two women in their mid-twenties waiting patiently with a male acquaintance. Once the children move on they ask "Can we have a picture?" As if the age of the requesters did not already change the interaction, the fact that they are actually voicing a request marks this moment as different from the previous autograph interactions. Families do not usually ask for a photo. They call Spike's name to get my attention just as I finish autographing a card or baseball and then call their child's name and snap a photo.

I rise up and walk towards the women. I do not normally advance toward children out of fear that they will be scared but since these women are not children and have requested my presence, I abandon this concern.

Putting an arm around each shoulder, the male acquaintance indicates he is ready to take the photo. Sometimes one of the women will admonish me to smile. I tilt my head to one side. Spike's expression does not change but the fan chuckles in recognition that the movement has enhanced the smile I already display.

As soon as the photo has been taken I thrust myself forward as if a rope has pulled me by the waist toward the camera. I quickly turn to each woman and alternate pointing and pinching my fingers together like a crab. Neither of them has pinched my backside but there I stand, accusing them both while they begin to accuse each other and the male acquaintance offers his own prediction as to who would have done such a thing. They walk away laughing and I duck into the team store for a brief moment of conditioned air before heading back onto the concourse.

I am confident that this sequence of actions would be a "must not do" moment if I activated it with younger fans. How, then, do I perform this in a way that entertains adults, even those mere feet away from children, without eliciting a chorus of young voices asking parents "What's he doing, Daddy?" The short answer is that while Spike continues to display the same face and wear the same clothes, I have attempted to alter his role by changing spatial and interpersonal relations.

The process of shedding a former identity often involves the shifting of style and self-presentation. Physical changes to the body can be dramatic and the way the body is

carried can mark the departure of a former role (Fuchs Eubach, 2001). Standing and moving towards older fans nonverbally marks our relationship as older fans rarely respond fearfully to Spike. As I walk towards them, I have reoriented in preparation for potential changes in relationships and gained the attention of my interactional partners in preparation for my gestures (Streeck, 2012). I also often point to the women as they approach and to the camera just before the photo is taken in order to mark the three individuals who are joining me in the performance and, implicitly, marking others nearby as *not* part of the performance. Pointing at each woman after the pinch that did not happen reinforces that what is happening is just for a few fans. The relationships I create with adults allow me to perform different behaviors that build toward a new role for Spike even though he looks the same in every still photograph.

Building these brief relationships with fans in attendance is possible because of the simple actions involved but not every performance of the "pinch bit" results in laughs or even recognition that something out of the ordinary has occurred. Because meaning is made by both performer and audience, I cannot decide what something means. At times this results in performances that I asses as having been unsuccessful. A few of these experiences will be explored more in depth in the upcoming chapter on performances. When a fan offers an assessment of my performance, it reinforces the idea that I cannot completely control the interpretation of my performance. Because Spike is my responsibility, this lack of control was initially frightening. At times, however it is to my advantage. One example came when I found myself struggling to decide how to respond to a fan inquiry.

"Who do you think will win? Spurs or Mavs?" asked the fan a few rows up, on the first base side, behind the on deck circle. A simple enough question in everyday interaction, until I tried to answer.

In asking the question, the fan provided no nonverbal options by which I could respond. Sometimes presenting a question like this, a fan will use the symmetry of their body to create a "Mavs side" or a "Spurs side" (Calbris, 2008). Responding with an affirming point to the correct side of the fan's body was not an option. Since I do not work for either organization and was not wearing the colors of either team, pointing to myself was not an option. No one in a nearby section was wearing NBA apparel. Pointing to someone else was not an option. My brain raced as I thought about recognizable members of each team. "Tony Parker is French." I thought. "Could I mime the Eiffel Tower? Can I squish my conductor's cap into a beret? Dirk Nowitzki has long hair. Could I move Spike's jowls toward the back of the mask in a recognizable way?"

What should be mentioned in all of this is that I did not care what the answer was, I just needed to answer.

I held up one furry finger in hopes that the fan would remember that he had mentioned two teams and would interpret my finger as an indication that I had selected the first team in the list. His response suggests he thought I wanted him to wait (not an outrageous interpretation of a raised finger and a tilted head) "Oh, you need a minute to think about it?" After what felt like hours I pretended to dribble and shoot an imaginary basketball.

"DIRK NOWITZKI?! Yeah, Spike. You're my dog."

Because of the limitations on my verbal communication, there are some queries I am left unsure how to respond to. Although there may be a few primary facial expressions (Ekman & Friesen, 1971), there is no facial expression or posture that makes clear one's rooting interest in the NBA Finals. When I cannot express meaning as clearly as I would like, I can rely on my co-performer to fill the gaps in our communication. This story elaborates on the reconceptualization of mascot from "emotional mimic", the kind of thinking that got me yanked off the dugout early in my career, to "relationship-establisher." Simply aligning with the fan through miming a basketball experience

appears to have been all he needed to interpret an answer. From this perspective, the miming of a specific activity or emotion is not as valuable as the embodiment of friendship, camaraderie, and shared fandom with fans in attendance. Coser (1966) understands roles as "always referr[ing] to a relationship" (p. 179). Moving from responder to relator is an increase in abstraction, which can result an increased complexity for the performer, but this theoretical knowledge applied to the NBA Finals story has informed my performance to more common experiences in the ballpark such as fans asking me to help them find their seat or children asking what size of shoe I wear.

DISCUSSION

My career as a mascot at both the collegiate and professional levels began with little formal training. Over time, I developed my own preparation strategies and internal understandings of what a mascot should be. When talking with coworkers or friends about being Spike, I find it difficult to succinctly explain who he is. Part of the reason for this is the lack of an explicit discussion of what Spike may, must, and can do. Another part has to do with the ability of identity, even that of a fictional character, to shift when internal understandings are brought to life through performance. Just as human beings answer the question "who am I?" by developing internal understandings of self, performing those understandings for others, and assessing the results of the performance to determine what should change in future interactions, my understanding of Spike's identity occurred through preparation, performance, and assessment.

Relationships are central to my everyday performance of Spike. The next chapter will explore at greater depth the people with whom I form relationships and the

conditions under which I choose to disassociate from people in the ballpark. Perhaps one of the reasons it that the mascot position is one of the most difficult to hire is because of the emphasis placed on an individual's willingness to engage in dirty work instead of engaging in character development. If teams want their mascot to truly become the face of their organization, the mascot performance must do more than prove the performers physical endurance. Teams and performers may be able to harness Enfield's (2011) "may do, must do, can do" understanding of role establishment as a foundation for exploring current mascot performance and develop it in a direction that best meets the needs of the organization and the performer. Performers should be aware of the way their own stories have built this type of understanding and its implications for their everyday performance.

Understanding an identity as relationally informed requires workers and organizations to develop means for evaluating improvisational performances so that being a good workplace performer is not fundamentally linked to how well someone assimilates to prescribed behaviors. If workers are only prepared for predictable situations, they may not develop the tools to improvise new behaviors on behalf of the organization. Recognizing identity as dynamic and interactionally constructed instead of fitting into dictated verbal and nonverbal practices is a necessary first step in enhancing organizational communication practices. The second step would be learning how to prepare to improvise (Moorman & Miner, 1998b; Weick, 1998).

Any organization or performer seeking to adopt this role development process should recognize that role understandings about the masked character are incomplete if not checked in the mirror of an audience (Strauss, 1959). I can, and often do, dance in my

kitchen while washing dishes to try out new moves but these moves are not what makes Spike who he is. Having an animatronic mask that could modify its facial expressions may increase the possibilities for a costumed performer (Johnson, 2012) but increasing what the costume can do is only a small part of the equation. A training binder that included a complete list of every action that could occur in a baseball game and the expected response to it would still be insufficient for understanding how Spike's identity works through relationships and stories (Browning, 1992). Establishing and evaluating routines that combine artifacts, internal understandings, and performances is necessary for organizations and performers to better understand a mascot's identity.

Chapter 4-Embodying the Organization: Artifacts, Costars, Enemies, and Improvisation

A mascot performer who knows their role is only half-equipped to be a good mascot. The next step is to "play it to the hilt" (Devantier & Turkington, 2006, p. 88). Actions must be taken to bring Spike to life. As the embodiment of the organization (Keller & Richey, 2006), I am a figure animated by the organization while also animating the organization through my performance (Cooren & Sandler, 2014). These performances are both with and for an audience. The presence of others in the performance invites unpredictability and increases the improvisational nature of the performance. During my performance, I receive feedback from my body, my co-workers, and fans that invites modification of my ballpark routines. A modification to the performative elements of the routine has the potential to modify understandings of who Spike is, who I am, and who the Express is as an organization for me and my audience.

This chapter explores how I do the work of being Spike: the ways I perform as a representative of the organization, the resources I use to accomplish my performance, and the way the performance modifies my personal understandings about my work and identity. I begin with a description of ordinary pregame activities. Most of these activities are performed on the field and are more like performing on a stage. I am less able to attend to audience response to my performance at this time. After discussing these ordinary experiences, which can be reproduced, largely unchanged, and relatively mindlessly, I investigate the ways I perform in the voice of the organization during improvisational interactions with others in the ballpark. I will present two frameworks

that categorize the activities that can occur in the ballpark and the people who are eligible to participate in ballpark performances. Finally, I discuss instances when I had to make a decision between performing as Spike and reacting as Jeff. Beyond the ordinary and expected parts of my performance, there are performance threats in the ballpark that often catch me unprepared or unprotected. When these emerge, I am put in a position to quickly determine which stakeholder interests to protect and how to better prepare for the future.

Pregame Performance

There are certain activities that have become fairly ordinary in my performance. The game script helps me in establishing an idea of what kinds of activities to expect and prepare for at that night's game. My experience informs my preparation for interactions that are common but not necessarily scripted. These include responding to frightened fans and incorporating coworkers and fans into my performance throughout the game.

It is fairly common for participants in research about routines to believe that they are simply re-preforming a routine when it is often the case that the performance is changing (Pentland & Feldman, 2005). Throughout the data, there are multiple instances of me describing activities as "straightforward" or "pretty straightforward." This is especially true in moments where I have not been intentional about changing a routine. My pregame activities are where most of these "pretty straightforward" occurrences are reported. Other moments that receive this unremarkable gloss include "Spike's Autographs", performing on the dugout for the "Chicken Dance" and "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Each of these moments are performed in spaces, either on the field or on

the dugouts, which place Spike in a space ordinarily inaccessible by fans. These elements also occur every night and the execution of them is more similar to an onstage play than a face-to-face interaction. As such, they are more predictable and I receive less direct feedback about what individual audience members enjoy about the performance. When activities invite more “character doing” than relationship building, I become less intentional about modifying these performances and they became less noteworthy in my note taking unless something occurred to disrupt the predictability and create a more improvisational moment.

Intentional modifications of my performance are noteworthy. There are times when I challenge myself to make a change to elements that occur nightly. Spike’s Rules is an example of this. Performing Spike’s Rules is one of the first things I do after taking the field during the pregame activities. This pregame element is performed in combination with the public address announcer. I find it fascinating that this element combines Spike as the “face” of the organization with the PA announcer as the “voice” of the organization. Together, we communicate on behalf of the organization to address the three primary stakeholders indicated in the team’s mission statement:

> By employing the best staff in minor league baseball, we have continually laid a foundation that helps us take care of the three groups of people who allow us to work in and for the game we love: our fans, our sponsors and our players.
>
> We are devoted to providing all of our fans with affordable, family-friendly baseball. We offer our sponsors maximum exposure through a unique environment of marketability. Our players are given the best opportunities to achieve their goals through the exceptional facilities, qualified personnel and professional atmosphere we provide.

> As an organization, we, the Round Rock Express, are dedicated to this mission and we will settle for nothing less than achieving and growing these goals.

The team mission statement identifies sponsors, fans, and players as primary stakeholders. At the outset of Spike's Rules, Spike's sponsor is recognized. The team mission statement includes the phrase "We offer our sponsors maximum exposure through a unique environment of marketability." At the mention of the sponsor's name during Spike's Rules, I often tug on the sleeve of my shirt that has the sponsor's logo embroidered into it. Early in my work with the team, Clint, the former Director of Entertainment and Promotions who hired me, told me the dollar amount of the sponsorship. Although I have had no conversations about what I ought to do in my performance in order to recognize that contribution, I interpreted from that conversation that I did have a responsibility to perform in a way that honored the sponsorship. Since fans and the ballpark cameras have been directed to focus their attention to me, and Spike is characterized, in part, by respect for sponsors, I include this gesture in my performance. This reinforces the idea that sponsors ought to be recognized.

As the rules continue, fans are reminded to "keep a heads up for bats or baseballs that might enter the stands" and to not "stand against or lean over the railings at any time." I usually look into the sky on the words "heads up" and mime leaning over a railing to add a nonverbal component to the disembodied voice of the public address announcer. This was a move I began doing in my first game after Clint had told me what

the previous performer used to do during these announcements[7]. Keeping the fans safe is a high priority for the organization. This admonition to stay aware emphasizes keeping the fans safe. Although the fine print of the back of the ticket indemnifies MiLB teams from injuries that occur as the result of foul balls and other items that may fly into the stands at any time, the organization is one that recognizes the importance of fans leaving with a positive story to tell (Hill, 2013). Of all the rules performed in pregame, "be aware of foul balls" is the only one that is repeated 90 minutes later, before the game's first pitch.

One weekend afternoon, a Sunday as I recall, I was just lounging around the house when I got a call to see what time I planned to be at the ballpark and, more importantly, could I come in a few hours earlier so that the team's General Manager could drive the "Spikemobile" to the home of a young fan who was recovering from oral surgery after being struck by a foul ball during a game. We drove nearly 45 minutes for Spike to deliver a gift basket and for the GM to reiterate that whenever the bill came for the surgery, it should be forwarded to the team. Although the team mission statement does not explicitly address the safety of the fans the actions of team personnel to emphasize it in pregame and follow-up in cases of injury to fans suggest that safety is a key component in presenting "affordable, family-friendly baseball" (Round Rock Express, 2015c) and one that should be attended to in Spike's behaviors.

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[7] While many season ticket holders knew I was a new performer by the change in Spike's body type (I am taller and leaner than my predecessor), it was important to Clint to maintain some sense of continuity in what Spike does.

We conclude Spike's Rules by telling the fans to "sit back, relax, and enjoy the game." This is another point of emphasis for the fans but, instead of orienting to their own safety, it indicates how they should behave relative to the game. Specifically, it speaks to the understanding that, as the mission statement indicates, "Our players are given the best opportunities to achieve their goals through the exceptional facilities, qualified personnel and professional atmosphere we provide." Fan have a role to play in achieving the organizational mission as their behavior contributes to a professional atmosphere.

As Spike's Rules conclude, I become more intentional about taking an opportunity to play and improvise. The announcer ends by elongating the word "enjooooyyyy" during which I spin in a circle, another move inherited from my predecessor. As the announcer concludes with "the game!" I finish with some kind of pose or movement that I find personally applicable to the evening. Sometimes my pose punctuates an activity that will occur later in the evening (fireworks or other promotional elements) but many times I use that moment to let some of my own personality out, oftentimes for the benefit of those in attendance who know me outside of the costume. When my family attends a game, I make the "I love you" sign, index finger and pinky pointed in the sky with ring and middle fingers held down toward the palm and thumb extended horizontally, towards their seats. When friends I have met through a local professional wrestling promotion attend, I often strike a pose made famous by a professional wrestler. Sometimes, these more recognizable poses are recognized by fans who do not know Jeff but can identify the pose, as occurred when I moved and posed in a

way made famous by “Macho Man” Randy Savage shortly after his death. A group of men who appeared to be my age or a bit older approached me on the concourse later in the evening and asked “Did you do the Macho Man turn?” and I nodded and pointed my finger in the air. “Alright Spike!” they responded and I got the impression that they appreciated both the tribute and the ability to connect with Spike beyond the ordinary activities of a baseball game.

Although I am occasionally able to build a relationship with fans through these personal gestures, I primarily do them to break up the monotony of Spike’s Rules, which occur every night, and introduce my own personality into one of the few sequences that I was instructed on how to perform. Ending Spike’s Rules the way I want to can be interpreted as somewhat subversive but sol long as I stay within the “may/must/can” parameters, I do not experience rebuke. Front-line employees of many kinds have developed ways to speak in subversive voices while still upholding the appearance of compliance or conformity to organizational and occupational expectations (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). My ability to communicate as/about myself instead of as/about Spike or the team could be seen as a transgressive act in an occupation that has historically valued the secrecy of a performer’s identity. I have, however, been sensitive to avoid direct contradiction in order to avoid the kind of censure I experienced when I pretended to urinate on an umpire. I may perform however I see fit, so long as the performance “fits” with the organizational goals. Since I perform in a standardized set of elements and environments, however, I do what I can to modify the experience for myself and others.

Since stories are over when they are forgotten (Strauss, 1959), I want my performances to last as long as they can in a positive way. Spike is designed to be memorable through his incongruence with any other person at an Express game. Not every memorable experience, however, is desirable. A scary experience for a fan might be memorable to them but certainly not in a way that the organization would like the experience to be remembered. The game script establishes expectations for my performance but I developed some of my own. When I perform, I want fans to have a positive, memorable experience by showing them something they did not expect to see when they came to a game. I usually hear gasps and "whoa"s when I do a split at the end of a dance routine. When I ask a fan to dance and then execute some salsa moves or a moonwalk, I hope they are surprised that it felt like a few steps with a decent partner instead of an awkward dance with a person in a bulldog costume.

CHANGES IN ARTIFACTS, CHANGES IN PERFORMANCE

Another way to produce incongruity is to "play the world backwards" (Goffman 1971, p. 312) by do things with artifacts that are not "supposed" to be done. One of the ways I play the world backwards is by interacting with ballpark resources in manners other than they are designed to be activated. In some cases, I perform clear violations of ballpark rules by jumping over a metal railing from one suite to another on the second story.

Predictable changes to performance space

The changes to my performance space can also be "man made." Between every season, adjustments are made to the ballpark. One of these changes before the 2013

season was the addition of hand railings between sections. These were placed down the center of every aisle to assist fans walking up and down the deep, wide steps from their seats to the concourse. I first saw them as an imposition and had to retrain my body to move around them in order to keep from losing face as a performer. If Spike truly lives at the ballpark, as his doghouse on the concourse and the team website suggests (Round Rock Express, 2015b), it does not make sense to have him tripping or running into things. I initially treated them as handrails and they helped me get up the steps when I was feeling tired towards the end of games. Then, I began wondering what else these railings could be and took advantage of moments when the occurrences in the game allowed the environment to teach me instead of trying to control it (Crossan, 1998). I flirted with finding ways to transform them into horses, ladders, hammocks, and dance partners. All of these are deviations from social expectations of these objects (Peacock, 2009).
I started by using them as a simple way of drawing attention to myself by climbing on them.

> Got a HUGE ovation when I jumped over the rail and then I run up, we have these new hand rails between the aisles, so I've been jumping on top of 'em like they're turnbuckles in a wrestling ring. That has really allowed me in pregame, and other times, to get a larger ovation from anywhere in the ballpark instead of having to use the dugout tops. I didn't think I'd be a fan of them at first because they impede my movement and my ability to get from one section or another but they've actually been pretty cool, I've been able to utilize them a couple different ways so that's' fun.

Then I started exploring what else they might become, like a horse, a train, or a bed.

> There were some pitching questions, 'cause Martin Perez walked a bunch of people, or was throwing a bunch of balls, and so they played kinda the (singing) "duh duh duh duh" like western-ey song. So I did something I've been meaning to do…I just hopped on the rail, the new rail, and rode it like a horse and kinda held

> my reins, did a little lasso gesture in there with my arm one time and then started waving to people and acted like I was falling off and I had to grab back onto the reins and folks seemed to like that.

Sometimes they were not anything but rails but my response to them was outside of the expected.

> Then went out of the Railyard because I thought that we had Rowdy Time in the middle of the fifth and, so this was all happening very quickly. I run out of the Railyard, run down the first base side in time to see an Express player get a triple and so then I was running up and down the rails. I did a new thing with the rails like I was running laps around the rails and, 'cause he had made a triple so I did it three times.

Playing the world backwards is a way for employees to interact with their environment and improve their role performance by creating unique experiences for stakeholders. Because it is backwards, however, it does not come naturally. Not every front-line employee's objective is "be remembered" but creating a salient positive experience is a part of what organizations expect from front-line employees (Tracy, 2000). Flight attendants, for example, attempt to turn the mundane pre-flight safety instructions into something memorable by inserting jokes and disrupting the expected (Murphy, 1998). At the same time, these memorable performances must be filtered through the may/must/can in order to protect against speaking in a voice the organization or the performer does not want heard.

Unpredictable changes to the ballpark

When discussing the experiences I have had that establish what Spike "may do" in the previous chapter, I mentioned a time that the game was put on hold due to inclement weather. There was a string of games during the 2013 season with extreme

rain. Most of the time, the biggest weather concern at an Express game is the heat but, for these games, we were dealing with downpours that caused “field condition delays. I have been watching baseball my entire life but had never seen the umpires call the Grounds Crew onto the field between batters in an inning so that they could pour dry, absorbing clay into the muddy troughs created by players on the base paths.

When the game is put on hold, it changes the ballpark from a place where fans could experience the game event and the stadium event, to one in which the only activity available for attention is the stadium event. Clint told me once that minor league baseball is a lot like a theatre that hosts a travelling show. When the show is not being performed, however, the spectator and mascot roles are disrupted. Unique material and meteorological conditions in the ballpark change the conditions for my performance, which can leave me unsure of how to respond.

> Umm, oh so it started to rain a little bit and…people were clustered up on the concourse…It was autograph time but it was so claustrophobic, there were so many people on the concourse and people just …kinda gathered around because they happened to be in the area, so they kinda hovered around. It was really, I, I was, I felt like trapped and really stuck there and I thought it was gonna last forever…
>
> …there was a field condition delay and…so we did the autographs then on the way back then realized that we did have time for a little tiny break and walking through the concourse, it was so hard to get through anywhere, we ended up taking the outer concourse, um, I –the note I took is that the game had never been more of a backdrop. It was a “Thirsty Thursday” and just the sense I got was that it had turned into a “let’s have drinks and chat on the concourse while at a baseball game” –or with a baseball game in the background and, you know, baseball in particular has an ability to be kind of a background sport but this was just insane and and very very strange and different um and so, yeah, “let’s just play in the rain near a ballfield” instead of “let’s go to a baseball game and and watch this thing happening” and so that put me in a weird spot cuz what am I supposed to do in that situation?

When I did go back out, the novel performance conditions invited behaviors that were highly improvisational, with little time between the planning and execution of my movements (Moorman & Miner, 1998a).

> So we took a real quick break and then went back out for "Rowdy Time"…It was raining and so I did, like, some ice skating on the dugout, and the manager for the other team got himself ejected for arguing. One of his players slipped on the on the dirt, all sortsa stuff so the –I "ice skated" on the dugout, that was fun. The manager getting kicked out was kind of a weird moment. I kind of waved "bye" to him but I couldn't really, you know, I don't really want to get in trouble with the league and so I didn't make a huge ordeal about it or like point at him to say "What are you doing? What are you thinking". I did turn to some people very –in a very small way- and kinda made a crying motion in my eyes but that was kind of that was kind of all I did.
> Then during that field condition delay we had a lot of time so we played "Fins" by Jimmy Buffet and so I got to get up on the dugout and kinda do a whole interpretive dance. I do a literal dance interpretation of the words of the song. But then there were songs, you know like just "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and "Little Flower in the Rain" and all this other kinda stuff and after a while I was just los- at a loss of what to do. I was like swaying back and forth and, you know "put your hands up and sway", that's all I really had and I think that's a product of the the same type of music going over and over and over and also that it was the third night that we kinda had to do this game and I was just out of stuff.

In this situation, I began putting on the show I was used to producing but it did not seem to fit the circumstances so I started searching for an alternative to "on stage Spike" and found it in "relationship Spike."

> At one point there were some kids next to me and I did something wrestling related and they recognized it and so then I was just kind of posing with them to see if they could guess what wrestler I was emulating…so I did John Cena, I started a "Yes" chant with them for Daniel Bryan, I did Randy Orton, I did uhhmm I can't remember who else I did, CM Punk, so, yeah.

Running out of "Spike" things to do resulted in me doing some of my own "personal" gestures, drawing from the gestural reservoir of professional wrestler movements that has been built in my head over 25 years. It was those borrowed gestures

from my experience that allowed me, as Spike, to establish a relationship with young fans. The change in weather resulted in a changed performance space and changed my performance in a way that emphasized Spike's relationship building possibilities (Eisenberg, 1990). It is easy to image an organization that values predictability and control writing a prescriptive "Mascot Training Manual" designed to dictate mascot behavior with a section titled "bad weather scenario." This approach would reduce the complexity of the ballpark environment and the resulting improvisational performance behaviors (Crossan, 1998). At the same time, this approach would most likely not admonish a mascot performer to do wrestler impressions with kids that might be interested in playing along.

The previous stories show how some changes can be anticipated while others are unanticipated. Recall from the last chapter that many of the promotional elements of the evening are scripted. Spike's performance, however, does not begin and end with the scripted promotional elements. There are interactions that are not scripted or controlled by the team but that are likely to occur on most nights. Table 4.1 outlines some examples of these types of interactions.

Table 4.1: Potential Mascot Activities.

	Scripted	Unscripted
Anticipated	Spike's Rules Chicken Dance Autograph sessions	Scared kids Incorporating others
Unanticipated	Missing cues Trying too hard	Injury Attack Weather

The beginning of this chapter focused on the scripted, anticipated activities like "Spike's Rules" during pregame or the autograph session at the end of the third inning. These activities often occur during breaks in the game and regularly put Spike in a position to perform for a majority of fans at the ballpark. What is not built in to the script are the interactional experiences that occur between Spike and others in the ballpark. As I developed more understandings of life in the ballpark, I began to anticipate some of the more common interactions such as a child being scared of Spike or running into season ticket holders, coworkers, or friends. Sometimes, even an element on the script that we have done hundreds of times becomes highly improvisational when something unanticipated occurs. There were, however, some experiences during the 2013 season that were both unscripted and unanticipated. As this chapter continues, I will be describing how I prepared for, improvised, and performed these instances.

Anticipated but Unscripted

The ballpark is primarily a site of entertainment (Hill, 2013). Trujillo (1992) identifies the way that the ballpark experience is packaged for television where directors and producers of the media event (Williams, 1977) hope for a great game because 'For the production to be a great show, it has to be a great game." (Trujillo, 1992, p. 361). As a Minor League Team, we rarely broadcast on television and a common MiLB cliché is that "when our fans leave the stadium they may not know who won the game, but they know they had a great time (Hill, 2013, p. 1). I learned very early in my mascot career that relying on game activity puts me at the mercy of balls and strikes and may result in me not being physically engaged, beyond my mere presence. My performance is a blend

of being prepared for just about anything that can happen on the diamond and knowing what to do when there's "nothing" happening on the diamond.

As the embodiment of the team's voice, my choices in how the fans are entertained are done by speaking in the voice of the team. I am able to do this however I like so long as I do not say something wrong. Whereas the previous chapter explored the ways I have come to understand what is "right" or "wrong" for Spike to do, this chapter explores ways in which I use organizational resources to bring the team to life through performances. Sometimes these performances are prepared in advance and sometimes they are highly improvisational. In either case, the lessons of those performances are integrated into my internal understandings of what Spike may, must, and can do.

Frightened fans

There are stadium activities, like "Spike's Rules", that occur every game and are anticipated in the game script but there are also interactions I anticipate but are not explicitly scripted or built into the schedule. One of these activities is being in a position to manage fearful responses to Spike. As I move through the concourse, I am often clapping or offering my hand for high fives as orientation gloss, proving that I am still engaged in interactions with others (Goffman, 1971). Responding to a frightened fan became so commonplace in the notes that, like other activities I found to be "fairly straightforward", I referred to them in a shorthand way. In this case, I stopped talking about the specific steps I take to respond to a scared guest and instead refer to "activating a scared sequence." A thicker understanding of these responses, however, suggests that my response to fans who appear reluctant to engage with Spike is less of a linear

sequence, and more of an interactional toolkit containing a variety of movements that can be arranged in the way I think will work best for that fan and moment.

Because frightened fans are a relatively common part of my experience as a mascot, I am able to prepare for adaptions of my own performance. It would be counterintuitive to anticipate frightened fans and do nothing to prepare for them. In order to properly speak in the voice of the organization I incorporated new artifacts into my costume and new movements into my performance. Whether I activate these adaptations I response to their request is often a function of the time I have to interact with a fan before my next scheduled activity and what I perceive to be the desires of the fans around them or other fans waiting. Parents will often verbally indicate the goal of the interaction (a photograph, hug, autograph, high five, and so on).

Part of maintaining the family-friendly atmosphere that the mission statement calls for involves recognizing the way my performance should be modified for various audiences. I suggested in the last chapter that I can alter my movements to build different relationships with different groups. Conversely, failing to alter my movements for particular audience members has negative consequences. If Spike does not change in response to a frightened child, the child may begin crying and running away from Spike. This is disastrous for the organization when one of the primary goals of a mascot is to build goodwill amongst younger fans (Lin et al., 1999). Additionally, Parents of these younger fans may reconsider an Express game as an entertainment option if children see Dell Diamond as “that place with the scary dog-man”.

Recognition

In order to explain the interactional toolkit for responding to scared fans, I will discuss the ways Spike finds himself in a position to frighten children in the first place, the verbal and nonverbal responses from young fans that indicate they are afraid, and the range of responses available to me. I recognize that children are scared through their communication when Spike is around and respond with my own. I perceive a child is scared when they move away from Spike, move more slowly when Spike is nearby, or stop moving at all. If a parent is carrying them, they often begin burrowing their face into the parent's shoulder or push against the parent's body to try to get away. Verbally, they might scream "no" or begin to cry before I even see them. In response, I engage in multiple nonverbal responses to try to lessen their concerns. These moments occur throughout the ballpark. Sometimes children run in to Spike when they are not expecting it.

> It was "Kids Run the Bases" so I went over to Section 125 and gave high fives to all the Junior Sluggers in line. Took 'em for the run, did my Kirk Gibson celebration and then there was one girl who was soooo frightened. She came around second base and got about halfway between and then she saw Spike and she just screamed and turned around and ran away into the grass towards the pitcher's mound and started crying so another employee had to scoop her up and I just turned around and covered my -covered Spike's eyes. I felt so bad and I didn't know what to do at that point.

In this instance, the surprise of Spike's appearance likely contributed to the girl's response. In many of these cases another adult, often a parent or team employee, will step in to mediate. Other times, however, fans are scared by Spike even when they originally wanted to come see him.

> There was a little boy, Cole, who, I guess, had been talking about Spike all game, but then when it came time to take a picture he was not having it and so we took a picture with mom in the middle and that seemed to work out a lot better.

Sometimes the frightened fan did not make the request but Spike ends up where they are.

> Then we got asked to go to the Maxwell Suite so we went there. I was planning on going up there anyway 'cause the kids were hollering at me before the game and…there was a girl who was scared of Spike but she decided to hide right in the door frame and so I had kids inside who were like "Spike, come here, take a picture with me" but I had this girl who was scared so I kinda scooched by, you know, like a bank robber with my back to the door, but I was really worried about that and about her not responding well to that at all.

Response

Whether the frightened fan initially wanted to interact with Spike or not, my response to their fear is through finding ways to reposition them or reposition myself in order to reduce the amount of potential contact or interaction. When time allows, I go beyond the basic repositioning and work to bring a young fan in to contact with less frightening elements of Spike in hopes that their concerns will be reduced.

> So we took a nice long break then went out for autographs and after autographs, um , we had, like I said, oh we had one little girl who was pretty scared and I worked with her for a long time to like high five and then I kind of tried to have her pet my cheek and then I let her go In to the doghouse and I stayed out and like she looked around the family stayed for a while and so I wasn't sure how much to push it or just let it go but I think she enjoyed it.

In the previous story of Cole being scared, I repositioned him away from Spike. In this case, I repositioned the fan closer to Spike and elements of Spike's world. By inviting them to be a part of the show instead of an audience member, I hope to reduce their anxiety and leave them with a positive, lasting memory (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987; Lin et al., 1999).

Embodying safety

The adaptation I made to my costume was the inclusion of squeakers that are sold as replacement parts for dog chew toys. These items are not visible to audience members as I keep them concealed in the front pockets of the overall pants and the breast pocket of my button down shirt. I originally purchased the squeakers to serve as a distress signal for my handlers but they did not serve that purpose very well. Instead, they became a very helpful tool in letting scared fans feel less scared of me. My impression is that they work to establish Spike as something not to be scared of because what scary thing makes a squeaky noise? This action is a circumspection gloss, which attempts to provide "gestural evidence that [my] intentions are honorable" (Goffman, 1971, p. 129). I often combine this sound with movements like covering Spike's eyes or tiptoeing away from the area. Since Spike does not speak, I sought out a way to make noise in a way to generate sound that "fits" the character and "fits" the organization. Although my desire was for it to serve to announce, "I'm in danger", I reappropriated the resource to communicate to others "I am not a danger". The value of these is emphasized in the few moments when I was unable to use the squeakers.

> Umm there was also a kid who was a little bit scared in the Railyard [team store] and I realized that, because the costume had been washed, I hadn't put in my squeakers. I told myself to do it but didn't do it and so I kinda went for 'em and was hoping to get 'em and then I didn't have them to let him know that everything was ok so I was kinda cursing my lack of squeakers there.

Throughout the seasons, I also found myself doing something for the first time and then incorporating it into my physical repertoire to deploy "for another next first time" (Kuhn, 2014, p. 246) as similar situations arose (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992).

“Unless the performer has the move, step, or gesture in his or her repertoire, it is not likely to be evoked in the thrill or thrall of the moment” (Mirvis, 1998, p. 587). One of these developed gestures is to exaggerate the placement of my own arm.

> One thing I noticed during autographs and just in general that I’ve been doing a lot lately is that when I have a little one, even little ones not too scared but especially when they are more scared, is that I’ll take my close hand…and arm that’s closest to them, and I’ll put it way behind my back. Almost extreme to the point where, if you took a picture of me, it would look almost like I had had my arm amputated. I think one of the things that’s scaring them is the thought that I’ll grab them from behind. If I put my hand way back and let them see that my hand is going way back then I think that they are less afraid that it will creep forward and find its way to their shoulders…I’m guessing they’ve seen me take pictures with so many people with my hand on their shoulders which is my usual go to pose.

The second is to use an artifact, in this case the free autograph cards we provide during “Spike’s Autographs”, in a way that is different than they may expect.

> Took a nice long break after Trike Race and then went out for autographs. Autographs went as autographs usually do. There was a scared girl that I kinda slid my card to and that’s kinda a move I’ve developed.

In this case, I am attempting to decrease the distance the child needs to be standing from me in order to receive an object that the organization wants her to have. I have heard stories from friends who know I am the mascot that their child took the autograph card home and hung it on the refrigerator. I hope that making Spike a constant presence, in the child’s home and on their eye level, is beneficial to the team. I once joked with a supervisor that, in order to justify what the team pays me, I need to convince 10 to 12 fans to come back to the ballpark during each game. This is one way I attempt to build the fan base and increase return guests.

Sometimes I do get feedback that my performance is working from the child or the parents.

> Little dude who was scared of me and not interested but later in the game was totally giving me a hug and a high five which is always a lot of fun for me to see them start enjoying Spike by the end of the game.

Whether I adapt through improvisation or preparation, however, not every performance I give will turn a child from frightened to playful. In the case where a child is still reluctant to interact with Spike, I measure success through the response from parents. Hearing people remark to others in their part "can you send the photo to me?" or "are you going to post that to Facebook?" suggest to me that I've created a positive experience, perhaps even one that ought to be shared with others.

Even though there is no place in the script reserved for interactions with frightened fans, my experiences suggest that it is an interaction I ought to prepare for. The amount of control in these performances is lower because of the more one-on-one, as opposed to one-to-many, nature. Performing more relationally increases the likelihood for interruptions or "alternative pathways for action" (Barrett, 1998, p. 609) by both the performer and audience members. When these interruptions are incremental, it invites ongoing improvisation between the mascot and the fan/family. The results of these improvisational moments can then be adapted and adaptations adopted for future use in creating positive, memorable experiences.

TURNING PEOPLE INTO PERFORMERS

Before moving on to discuss the unanticipated experiences from Table 4.1, I would like to further explore the way I incorporate others into my performance. During

my anticipated, unscripted activities during a game, I regularly encountered other people with whom I could improvise and incorporate into the performance. In some cases, these were coworkers who would be expected to join in in order to maintain the charade of Spike as being "real" (Goffman, 1959). Other cases involve fans who, although not expected by the organization to join in, engage in improvisational performances with me.

In some cases, our improvisational performances reach what Eisenberg (1990) calls "jamming", temporary connections allowing autonomy and interdependence to co-exist with the potential of producing a feeling of being "in the zone" (p. 149). Jamming well requires skill, structure, setting, and surrender (Eisenberg, p. 139) and the following stories describe instances where those requirements were met to some degree. Jamming is interactionally constructed and as I reviewed the notes from my performances, I identified a few different types of interactional partners who provide the connections necessary to jam.

Coworkers

The first group of potential performance partners are my coworkers. Many of my coworkers could also be classified as "front-line employees." Although they may not be dressed as bulldogs, they are wearing a uniform and have the potential to serve as the face of the organization for fans. Food and drink vendors in the stands wear neon green shirts. Vendors who work behind the counters on the concourse wear white polo shirts. Ushers wear red polo shirts. Party Patrol members wear red t-shirts with "Party Patrol" screened onto the front. Each group has its own set of occupational and organizational expectations. Some of these coworkers became unique or named throughout our time

working together. Other coworkers are recognizable by the type of work they do but remained relatively interchangeable as co-performers. This is very similar to jazz musicians who may be members of a specific band but who also have jam sessions with other musicians (Meyer et al. 1998). Throughout my career, I have found a way to incorporate every group into my performance. They may be vendors, ushers, or Party Patrollers, but they are all potential cast members in the stadium event who, through improvisation, can shed the baggage of their everyday organizational life and become participants in, instead of subjects of, a highly structured environment (Eisenberg, 1990).

Table 4.2: Types of Coworkers.

Known by name	Rob, Tim, Julia, Meredith, etc.
Known by role	Vendors, Grounds Crew, Bat Boys

During the 2013 season, Tim often lead children who were having birthday parties at the ballpark into some of the backstage areas of the ballpark so they could participate in the "Birthday Parade" as they waited, they received the mundane instructions for how to proceed:

> …So Tim's beginning to say "alright listen up, in however many outs we're gonna run on the field, you're gonna follow Spike. You're gonna do whatever he does. He hates to hear this but you're going to copycat him at which point I plug my ears, but just follow Spike, stay behind him, parents don't run out to the field, we've had parents run out wave, take pictures, unless your kid won't run without you doing it.

Like Spike's Rules, another instance of employees giving instruction to fans, I play with the instructions. Spike reacts to them and creates a performance with them. This is done in a way that does not violate expectations so that the voice of the

organization remains one that invites a good time even in the face of rules/expectations. My reaction to Tim's "copycat" plays on the rivalry between cats and dogs. He did not originally notice my plugging Spike's ears until fans started reacting to me doing it behind him and he turned around. Since noticing it, he incorporated it into the birthday run instructions.

Tim and I performed the "copycat" multiple times throughout the season. What began as an improvisation became incorporated into our common performance. I had similar experiences creating ceremonial pregame handshakes with Rob throughout each of our seasons working together. Tim, Rob, and I were regularly scripted to be in the same place, at the same time, saying more or less the same thing but we sought alternative routes to accomplish the interactional and organizational goals, sometimes even trying to paint "ourselves into corners just in order to get out of them" (Peplowski, 1998, p. 560).

> Umm, oh at one point Rob, I was coming back from right field after first pitches and Rob had an extra ball and so he put up his hand, like to stop me, but I didn't know if he wanted our high 5 right then and there and he's like "No no" and then he put his hands at his sides and kind of wobbled back and forth. I didn't know exactly what he was doing, I just put my hands at my sides and waited and then realized he was gonna bowl this little uh baseball to me so he bowled it and he went a little bit left, to my left so his right, so I kinda shuffled over a little bit and let it tap me and as soon as I felt it tap my foot, I collapsed in a heap. That was pretty funny.

This "bowling" interaction began late in the season and was repeated a few more times before the season ended. On some level, we did it to stay engaged in "make work" but also to explore ways Spike and Rob could interact in unexpected ways. When I only know people by their role, the performances we produce are often one-time experiences

that, while successful, I do not attempt to reproduce because I do not perceive it would be successful again because the setting or the skills of myself and my co-performer do not allow it to be. One of these interactions occurred with a lemonade vendor.

> uh last night, I don't know if I mentioned this but I t thought it was really funny so I can't believe I didn't but, um, there were a bunch of kids at some point sitting on the dugout or near the dugout all kinda leaning over it and one of them had a cell phone and they were watching a movie on a cell phone while on, like, the best and also the most dangerous spot of the ballpark. so I went down behind 'em and I actually had to get up on the dugout and I debated stepping on one of their backs and getting on the dugout but I thought "I'm sure, there's 4 kids I'm sure the one I step on will have had a back injury or something" so I kinda stepped around 'em and then I saw what they were doing, I was like forget this so I reached in and grabbed the cell phone and I had to wrestle it away pretty kid but once I did I ran it up the steps and gave it to the lemonade vendor and I tried to make it look like I dunked the phone into the lemonade but I certainly didn't want to damage it cuz I knew it wasn't their phone to begin with anyway, um so then I just give it to the lemonade vendor and kinda put it in one of his tray cups and he starts shouting "CELL PHONES! CELL PHONES FOR SALE, HERE!" and I thought that was hilarious, it was great.

In my four years of paid mascotting, I had very few, if any, an out of costume interactions with anyone from the vendor team but even in a relationship with minimal disclosure (Eisenberg, 1990) we are still able to work together to create that moment and others (like me borrowing the cotton candy stick or using a plastic souvenir bin as a bass drum to begin some clapping in the crowd). In addition to the coworkers in the areas fans have access to, I also incorporate on-field coworkers like Bat Boys and Ground Crew workers. These coworkers have responsibilities on the playing surface and I can count on them being in a few common areas during the pregame activities. Because I can predict their location at particular times in my performance, I developed a few potential "bits"

that can be performed, provided they are willing to surrender and play along in the moment.

> And then I had the mic in my hand and "Lose Yourself" came on and…the camera was on me for a little bit so I really hammed it up but then went and got one of the bat boys to do it.
>
> There was a pregame cart out there for the grounds crew and at one point I hopped on the back of it and let him drive me away and then I kinda waved to people and blew kisses and then I started rowing like I was in a rowboat rowing backwards and people were kinda laughing and got a kick out of that.

Fans

Although not everyone in the ballpark is a co-worker, they are all potential co-performers. Since most of my coworkers are dressed according to their work, I identify fans by recognizing they are not wearing a specified uniform or costume. There are certainly more common ways to dress in the ballpark but if I do not recognize someone as a co-worker, primarily through their dress, I classify them as a fan. Fans can also be incorporated into improvisational scenes. Some of my favorite moments in the ballpark are when fans are not just watching my performance but they actually become cast members in the performance. In some cases, an ongoing relationship allowed me to count on certain fans joining in the performance. Other times, I selected fans who I did not recognize to join in the show.

As I coded the field notes and recorded performances, I began classifying the types of fans I saw myself interacting with. After coding, I realized that I classified fans based on two dimensions. The first was similar to the way I accounted for coworkers, being known by name or known by role. The additional dimension involves their

presence in the ballpark. This dimension applies only to fans because coworkers, whether names or not, are always present in the ballpark. Unlike coworkers who are expected to be in the ballpark, even if they are interchangeable, fans are not scheduled by a manager to show up to the ballpark for any given game.

Table 4.3: Types of Fans.

	"Always" there	Not always there
Known by "name"	Baseball Jan, other season ticket holders	Wrestlefriends, Flea guy, Player families
Known by role	Promotional contestants, birthday runners, anthem singers	General fans

Baseball Jan

"Baseball Jan" has been a season ticket holder of the Express since the team began. She can be found in her seat on the aisle a few rows up from the visitor's on deck circle, listening to the radio broadcast on her headphones while keeping score. During road games, Mike Capps, the Express radio broadcaster, often refers to the fans listening in Bastrop, Texas and he is talking specifically about Baseball Jan. If "Cappy" says something during a home game that Baseball Jan disagrees with, she will shout a correction towards the broadcast booth. These interruptions are sometimes picked up by the radio microphones. During pregame, Jan is often on the field with a nice camera and will take pictures of players, fans, and sunsets over the ballpark that she posts to Facebook and are sometimes printed and framed as gifts for other fans or employees.

That Jan is present at almost every game, has access to much of the ballpark (including the field), and is willing to play along makes her easy to incorporate into the performance. The performances we create together have consequences for future interactions.

> …and then Baseball Jan, something happened and I got on her case and was teasing her about it and like throwing her out of the game and she turned her hat backwards and I got up on the rail and kinda puffed my chest out and stuff.
> …
> Ballpark Jan was around pregame and I kinda begged off Ric Flair style like put my hands up "no no no" cuz of what we had done yesterday…

She is not required to go along with my performances in the way that I expect coworkers like Tim, Rob, or other Party Patrollers to be:

> …Ballpark Jan was down there and I didn't think she was much of a dancer and there was kind of a country song. I grabbed her and started to two-step with her and she said "I'm not much of a dancer Spike." Then she actually pretended that something was going on in the dugout. She's like "I gotta get Scott, I gotta get Scott" and I don't know who Scott is but that was pretty funny because it didn't really look like there was anything going on that she needed to attend to.

and although she is a recognizable part of the stadium experience, her participation is the result of paying to be part of the experience instead of someone who is paid to put on the stadium event. Subsequently she is not as beholden to expectations that her participation be done in appropriate ways that would be approved of by the organization.

> While I was over there, uh, there was a potential pitching change or just a mound visit and so I went up on the uh rail cuz I was just on the –at the on deck circle, I wasn't at the uh dugout so I couldn't do the the zombie shootout thing so I just rode the little rail like a horse and one of the fans goes "Well you can tell he's been snipped" and he's sitting next to Baseball Jan kinda taking –uhh- taking notes on everything and so I was like, alright, he's game. So I went over to him and I started getting in his face and I ejected him and Jan says, "You can't be ejecting him, Spike" I went to her and started, you know, nodding up and down

> getting mad at her and she turned her hat around, it was perfect, umm so that was great.

Contestants

Jan is one kind of fan. I can count on her being there for most games and she is identifiable. There are other fans who, as a type, are at every game but they are interchangeable. These are individuals who participate in our in-game elements as contestants, birthday runners, national anthem singers, or the like. I try to incorporate their presence into my activities.

> …there was a men's choir that was performing the national anthem so I got them to clap along…to make quite a bit of noise and I got a pretty good ovation for the umpires when they arrived.

Because these individuals are usually on the playing field, engaged in a promotional element, being put on under the Express name, I feel hyper-aware of how many performance possibilities exist during our brief interactions.

> …so then came back and had a quick break because we had Racing Spike on a Trike and I thought the kid was going to give me a run for my money, this is this tricycle race promotion, but he somehow, something happened and he ended up in the wall and he couldn't get out so I actually hopped off the bike at the third base side on the express dugout, ran back and pushed him across the finish line which I think was a good thing but it made me think about the incredibly improvisational nature of this job and that I'm performing but a lot of times my co-performers aren't in on the act. We didn't plan that, I was never trained/we don't have a training for what to do if the kid spins out and can't get control of his trike. That's not something we train for but it's something that, on a lot of levels, has a lot of potential responses: how do the owners want me to deal with this, how would the fans want me to deal with this, how would spike, given his character profile and nature deal with this, how would I want my kid to have this handled and all sorts of stuff so ran back and did that and I think, kind of saved the promotion a little bit and pushed him across the end…

In this note, I articulate the way mascots cannot possibly train for every potential interaction and, even if they were, the position/perspective of the multiple potential "trainers" would modify responses. This is a far lower stakes experience than the cruise ship employee who was offered money and harassed by a passenger (Tracy, 2000) but it also illustrates the way front-line employees are expected to respond "correctly" in the face of conflicting stakeholder interpretations of what is correct. How, for example, would a group ticket sales manager expect the mascot to react to the previous story? How might that expectation be different from the person who runs "Spike's Jr. Slugger's Kids Club" or from the parents of the child participating in the promotion? It could be argued that the interests of each of these stakeholders should be validated in Spike's response but what behaviors would uphold each interest is not immediately clear to the performer and certainly not one that can be scripted out in training.

Unique fans

There are times when fans stand out to me but are not regular attendees. Like Baseball Jan, they become "named." Unlike Baseball Jan, I cannot count on their attendance at most games. Some of these fans know me outside of my costume. Others have a built a relationship with Spike but not with Jeff.

It is not uncommon for people I know through my graduate program or leisure activities to attend a game. When they do, I do what I can to make sure we interact and try to give them something "extra" from the experience.

> I was upset that I had forgotten to acknowledge the Strouds during my first trip to the first base side so I went straight to 123. Scott had told me he'd be there tonight in that section in passing and I'd made a note in my phone to remind me. I began

> moving slowly down the aisle to see if I could see him or Talia. I didn't and then something happened in the game that made me hop onto the dugout. I took that opportunity to really "ham it up" and danced even more to something I ordinarily would treat fairly normally. I always like to give fans who know me a good reason to say "I know who that really is." Scott was coming down the aisle and found me and we shared a hug and he pointed to his group and I gave an index finger wave to Talia before going back to the rest of the crowd.
> …
> And then I went over to the Intel Club because Stephanie, who is a UT student with me, she had posted on Facebook that she was at the game with her husband so I went out onto the Intel deck there and said "hi" to them and was sure to put up a "Hook 'Em Horns" so she knew it was me.
> …
> …so a couple high fives and pictures then ran over and caught Becca and Daveon [friends I made at local professional wrestling events] and made sure to give them a little goodbye, thanks for coming. We did the "wolfpac", we call it the "dogpound", which we stole from the wrestling NWO Wolfpac little symbol which is kind of like a "Hook 'Em Horns" except the middle finger and ring finger are extended touching the thumb.

The fans who only know Spike often become "unique" through their contribution to the performance. When fans make their presence known to me, they stand out and I try to let them see that Spike not only sees them, as I do with many fans, but also recognizes them. In one case, a fan began making jokes about Spike having fleas and, following the "yes-and" rule of improvisation (Meyer et al., 1998), we began interacting based on that suggestion.

> Then I went down to the third base on deck circle and the Solarte babies were there and somebody said "look he's got a flea" and pulled it off me and put it in his mouth, but just pretend, and I acted repulsed like I was throwing up and "yuck" and then I started scratching all over the place and he thought that was funny. The little ones didn't really get it so much but he thought, uh, he thought it was funny and I thought it was funny.
> …
> Uh the guy who made the jokes about me having fleas was back on the third base side at the, um, on deck circle and so I went over there and I heard him talking about fleas and pulgas, 'cause he was doing some in Spanish, and I lifted up one

> of the jowels and pulled at –and pinched something out from it and handed it to him and he took it and pretended to eat it so that was pretty funny.

General fans

Performance presumes an audience and I never once arrived to work to be told there was nobody in attendance that night. Even a game that was relocated at the last minute drew some fans. The smallest crowd I recall was one during a game that was relocated from New Orleans to Round Rock because of a hurricane. Although one specific fan might not be in a particular seat, there have always been fans in the seats, available to be incorporated into the performance. During the hurricane game my goal was to give a high five to everyone in attendance. Whether the crowd is large or small, some fans are easier to identify as potential performance partners, making me more likely to incorporate them into my activities.

> When the final out was made to get out for Shirt Shag I was kinda stuck because the fans were sitting in the first row behind the well that had the big, fake Whataburger fry box thing…I didn't want to step down and squash it and destroy that so I went ahead and stuck out my hand to the fans who'd previously been awesome to me and were high fiving me and stuff. I put my hand out, he grabbed it, and then I went up and walked on the rail and kind of balanced my way down and jumped off it then turned around and saluted him and then ran to my spot for Shirt Shag

Incorporating fans is a way to make practical activities memorable for fans but also for helping me improve nights I do not feel like I have done enough during a game.

> I hadn't done much actual performing. I hadn't danced on a dugout except for Chicken Dance, I hadn't done anything really fun or wacky or anything that the crowd could remember. I felt like I was doing a lot of hits and spots but not a lot of show and story so I decided to stick out there…I got to do my hip hop dancing and then we loaded the bases so I got to do the "All Aboard" shuffle. At one point this older woman kinda liked my moves and so she was dancing along so that was great 'cause I got to play off her.

I have explored Spike's role using the metaphor of ventriloquism and there are times when Spike animates the team and performs on their behalf and other instances when the influence of the team on me has modified the way Spike is "voiced." What is left out in the use of that metaphor is the involvement of the audience in bringing both the organization and Spike to life. The story about my wife's observation that my worries about not being physically or mentally ready for a game vanish once I put on the costume and many of my other stories describe how interactions with customers and coworkers infuse my performance with life. At the same time, relying on communication from and with others to fuel my performance can put me into scenarios that are unanticipated.

Throughout my coding, I tagged a variety of events with the code "failure." Some of these failures occurred when I did not completely prepare with others to accomplish our shared tasks. This type of failure usually happens when an activity is scripted but something unanticipated happens in the execution of the scripted element. Other failures take place that are both unscripted and unanticipated. These regularly correspond with performance threats and I am placed in a position to manage how I respond and, often, whose identity I choose to protect while responding to the threats.

SCRIPTED BUT UNANTICIPATED

Sometimes, for any number of reasons, an element is delayed or cancelled. Just because an element is written down does not mean it is going to happen. Although this changes the evening's schedule a bit, it is rarely done in a way that becomes noticeable to fans. On the other hand, sometimes an element is added to a script and that addition is not

prepared for. Lack of preparation does not always result in failure but it can result in a scramble to modify a performance.

> …I'm in the locker room, we're getting ready to, you know, go out to autographs casually in the middle of the 3rd inning with about an out in the top of the 3rd we got a call from Tim saying "Hey, uh, is Spike coming to this birthday run?" and I was like "Whatttt? I didn't know we had one" and it's a whole big thing but, whatever. So I got dressed as quickly as I could, got out there, and I actually went to third base 'cause I didn't know when the inning was gonna end and just waited at the third base…in the aisle just behind the camera bay. As soon as they got that last out, players are still running off the field, and I was sprinting onto it and ran out there…The birthday kids come running out and they all just kinda swarm past me and I kinda swim right through 'em like a school of fish and then I turn around and find the front of them and uh run them in a loop. I was hoping that worked too and then I stuck around and took some individual pictures and some group pictures with those kids because we missed it beforehand and I didn't want their experience to be that they got, you know, 30 seconds of running around and no pictures to prove it.

In other cases, an element can be scripted and going along as planned until something unanticipated causes us to make quick decisions about how to proceed.

> ...It was raining and the tarp was getting pulled and even during the parade there was some confusion about whether or not the little leaguers should continue walking in the parade. Meredith was getting told one thing by somebody and she was calling up to the booth with Derek to check about it. I made the call not to listen to the person on the field saying that we had to do something and then I was kinda shouting at her and trying to coordinate that without talking even though that was something that absolutely had to be spoken about. I couldn't mime anything out but it all worked out in the end…
>
> …All those suite visits put us a little bit behind and so Rowdy Time was rapidly coming up so I sent Rachel, my handler, to get the gun and said "just meet me at the top of the stairs" well she meets me at the top of the stairs but there's no gun and so I was like running down the stairs shouting at her "where's the gun?" and she says "Julia has it" so then we're running down the concourse and I'm, like, literally jumping into the wall and scooching myself past people to umm to get there. I see Julia, she's got the gun, I grab it out of her hands with a spin move so I can keep running down and we make it just in time for the final out, ummm, so we had to work for it but the game took care of us…and we had to work for it.

Some of the worst failures are the result of my own attempt to do more than my competency allows (Eisenberg, 1990). In my desire to produce a novel performance, there are times when I overcomplicate a performance opportunity and the performance falls flat. This was most often the case in the "Racing Spike on a Trike" promotion where I ride an adult sized tricycle around part of the field in competition with a fan. The expectation is that Spike always loses so I challenged myself to come up with performances that give a good reason for the loss. When these reasons were not communicated well with my co-performers, or became too convoluted to accomplish without any kind of rehearsal, they did not produce the crowd reaction I was hoping for.

> National anthem came and went, nothing too spectacular and then we took a break until "Racing Spike on a Trike." We got a hold of some bananas from the clubhouse and my handler ate 'em up and I had three banana peels that I could drop. With my fur hands I could only manipulate one of 'em out of my hand and onto the field. Then I had to go back to driving because to try to take something out of my left hand with my right hand while riding this tricycle -I had a pretty sizeable lead and then I just realized that it wasn't working so …the last two…I just dropped on the field and then crashed into the dugout like I had gotten distracted by dropping the bananas and the kid passed by me and then Rob grabbed the back of my tricycle, helped me up, and then like shoved me across the finish line…
>
> …then we went in for a break, came out for the Trike Race. Last minute I got an idea for the trike race and I kinda went up to Aimee and I explained it to her real quickly through the head out in the crowd, uhm which I dunno if that was the best idea, but anyway. I get out there and they say "Go!" and I just start running without the trike and I turn back around, I go up over to some kids and I climb up and high five 'em. Then I turn back around on the rail and put one foot up and I put my two fingers into my mouth like I'm gonna whistle for -like the lone ranger- and Aimee's already running with the trike and I kinda hop onto it. I don't do it the full "lone ranger hopping on silver from the balcony" or anything but I kinda hop down and hop onto it and then do the rest of the race. I think my describing it makes it sound better than it was but it was still something goofy and funny and Derek was freaking out "Spike, that's not how it's s'posed to go, you're not s'posed to do that" that sorta stuff.

UNSCRIPTED AND UNANTICIPATED

So far, most of the stories I have shared have displayed my activities in a positive light. When kids are scared, I work to reduce their fear. When the crowd was small, I worked to make sure my engagement was still high. In exploring the ways my work has been done well, I have selected instances that I describe in the notes as having "worked" or "worked pretty well." Part of what makes the instances work is that fans were incorporated and our improvisation appeared successful in entertaining my improvisational partner and the audience members around us. However, when front-line employees "encourage the guests to let their hair down and have fun…they are helping to create the problems that they will have to clear up" (Guerrier & Adib, 2003, p. 1410).

Unlike most performers in the visual and performing arts, Spike crosses boundaries by stepping from the stage, into the crowd, and back (Peacock, 2009). This is a clear violation of the rules Spike lays out in the beginning of the game and signs posted throughout the ballpark cautioning fans against accessing the dugout or the field. Most of the time, my boundary crossing is performed without incident. I can cross from the dugout, to the seats, to the field, and back. Although a stranger, I am invited to interact physically with fans through hugs, high fives, and putting my arms around people for photos. There are, however, moments when fans reciprocate and cross boundaries by inviting themselves onto the dugouts or physically interacting with me in a way that is not welcomed. When they do, unique challenges are presented and I must adapt my performance, and adapt it correctly, on the fly. In rare/novel moments like these, I am once again faced with decisions about whose interests to best serve as I determine how to

respond, repair, or retaliate (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). That experience informs the internal understandings (as we saw in the last chapter) and can modify future performances.

Protecting myself and others

Keeping the fans safe was one of the few direct instructions I received from Clint. Preparing and protecting myself, my audience, and my organization are significant parts of how I understand my role and Spike's identity. When potential violations occur, I am put in a position to respond by making a decision about whose safety to privilege. Even when we invite fans to be on the dugout or field for a promotion, we ask them to sign a waiver indemnifying the team from potential injury. Likewise, I signed a similar waiver agreeing that the team is not responsible for injuries I may suffer in a fall from the dugout. A fan in "my" space is decreases the overall safety. Additionally, if other fans see his behavior encouraged, they may decide to climb on the dugout at some other time, putting themselves at risk. My response to these types of threats have to balance the safety of myself, the transgressing fan and other fans in attendance.

> Towards the end of the game I'm on the dugout and I go to high five some kids towards third base side and I turn around and there is some idiot in a red polo shirt and a Boston Red Sox hat with a beer in his hand. I look at him and then look into the crowd and there's a guy, one of his buddies, holding the cameraphone, ready to snap a picture of his buddy on the dugout with the mascot in between batters and stuff. I was like "no, no, no." So I tried to, like, guide him down and he interpreted that as "Hey, come closer to me." So then I grabbed his arm and gave a little bit of pressure and started walking him off the dugout. All this time, I'm looking for an usher that never showed up and he's going "Hey it's cool. I thought you were a homey! I thought you were a homey!" At that point, I didn't even care if I spilled his beer all over him or the fans in the first three rows, I was throwing him off the dugout. So I got him down by the arm. He didn't take much pushing to go off the edge but at that moment, there's no performance anymore, it's "Get this person off the dugout, this is unacceptable." Redshirts [ushers] never came and it actually caused me to stay away from that section. It kept me from going

> near that aisle for the rest of the game. There wasn't much of the game left but I certainly had to confine my performance to the other side of the dugout 'cause I was not interested in interacting with him and every time I went and looked over my shoulder to see if the Redshirts had done anything or what was going on, he was kinda staring at me. Just slouching in his seat staring at me with his beer so I don't know what's going on. I asked Julia to have him relocated. I don't think anything came of it but it was frustrating to say the least.

Being prepared puts me at ease that I do not have to constantly wrestle with questions of my own personal safety during a performance. Feeling safe and prepared helps create the structure required to play, improvise, and "jam" with audience members (Eisenberg, 1990). A fan on the dugout violates the structure and puts me at risk of injury. Part of the illusion of Spike is that he is never injured. Even if the performer is in pain, Spike's face continues to smile. The San Diego Chicken brags in his online biography that "he has performed at more than 8,500 games and amazingly, has never missed one due to injury or illness" (Giannoulos, 2014) but this does not mean he has not performed while ill or injured. Spike will be at the ballpark whether I am there to perform or not. If I am not Spike, someone else is and that stops me from earning a game day payment and puts me at risk of being upstaged by my replacement. On the rare instances I retaliate, it is when I feel that my ability to earn my pay and my position are being put at risk.

> …then as I'm walking around a couple other things happened. I give a guy a high 5, I verify this with KC to make sure I didn't overreact. He grabbed my arm and yanked it backwards. It really hurt my shoulder um yeah at the moment, not a lasting pain but I turned around and swift kicked him right in the butt. My phone note is "break my arm, I'll kick your butt." We did it right in front of where I know police officers usually stand so I was pretty confident that it was gonna be alright even if he tried to come back at me but it was ridiculous. Just a high five and he grabbed it and yanked it back knowing, precisely what it would do. I

> presume this is what he and his buddies do all the time and, you know, he was with a bunch of his buddies too so um, yeah, that was just -not pleased about that.

This retaliation is not limited to adults. I also took retaliatory actions when children crossed boundaries and threatened my protection. This particular retaliatory act resulted in making a child cry, an effect I so desperately try to avoid most other times.

> Then we had "Kids Run the Bases" after the loss and the one memorable thing is that as this kid ran around the first time, I put my hand up, and he punched it right in the palm of my hand. Didn't feel great but I get that. It happens. Whatever. He runs around again and I see him coming and so I pull my hand away from him so that I don't get punched in the hand again, then I just start high fiving other kids. Well, he turns back around on the 3rd base line, comes back up and punches me in the lower back between my spine and my kidney. That didn't feel good. I was like "ok, whatever, he's done" but I keep an eye out. He goes around, makes another lap, comes in, and I did the same thing. I get my hand away 'cause I don't wanna get punched but this time I turn and look and I see him stopping about halfway down third base and coming back to me with his fist cocked. So I'm like "no." So I start walking backward, I put my hand up…to stop him and he swings. I "Ole'" him and then I grab him by the upper arm and walk him over to the photographer well. I go ahead and put him in the well and then close the door. I make sure it doesn't latch but just kinda put him in the well and then walk away. Well I guess Cade said that he stayed in there for like a couple minutes trying to figure out how to get out and I was like "Trying to figure out how to get out? It was easy to get out." but he –I guess he came back out and he was crying and he cried running from the well down to the -the dugout so I was like "Well, shouldn't have been punching me." Who knows the conversation he had with his parents after that but you're only s'posed to run the bases once anyway so, there you go.

Protecting the experience

Protecting my body at the expense of the fan experience is not something I regularly do and reserve retaliatory actions for only the most egregious violations of my safety. In some cases, I protect the organization, and the experience it provides, at the expense of my own body. I have games where I start my performance sore, tired, or with a stomach ache but adhere to the idea that "the show must go on."

> My pregame meal was a bit rushed it was a meal I've had before but I had a bit of a stomach ache for most of the game only one time I remember that happening and of course when that happens to me, my goal is to ensure that no one can tell that is the case. I don't talk with people about it I go about my normal routine as best I can. It's actually easier to do when my head is on because that face is unchanging so no one can know by my posture at least I hope not so there you go.

During some games, I get hurt in ways that I did not expect to. Although I wear a cup to protect my genitals, it is no guarantee that injury will not occur, especially when I modify a performance.

> There were no aisles free for my dive but I was able to scoot past someone in the very first aisle and then I thought "There's no way I'm making that jump all the way up onto the dugout so let me use these arms of the chairs" and I took two steps on those and because I was focusing on making sure I didn't slip and fall off those, what it ended up being was just kind of this flop onto the dugout and even then that one hurt the most. I flopped right onto my junk, so that wasn't fun.

Because I see this dive onto the dugout as an important part of my pregame performance where Spike "takes the stage" for the first time, I continue to engage in the activity even at the risk of injury.

> umm, then did a pretty good dive, my cup was a little bit off so I got a little stomach ache umm but other than that it was just fine.

Even in the ordinary activities in the ballpark, there is a risk for injury. Although I may not modify my performance at all, a small change in the ballpark can produce great pain.

> Um and that is that I started uh went out, you know, pregame high fiving people, got ready to do Spike's Rules and Derek said "remember to keep your head up" and I pulled- I put my head up and something flicked, either a piece of the infield clay or something from inside the head- flicked into my eyeball and and really hurt uhm like not an eyelash, like a legit rock or something and so I don't know – I –I –I kinda wish I had it video tape but I just closed that left eye annnd even my right eye, keeping it open was painful, and I couldn't rub it or reach in and address it at all uhm and so I did Spike's Rules and for part of that I w- closed

> both eyes and just did it, I just did Spike's Rules with my eyes closed. Um so talk about a job being that you could do blindfolded. Uh and I'm hoping nobody noticed the difference and for enjoy the game, then, I knid of popped my head up and did like a quick peekaboo to make a little joke about the eye that was hurting on my face that nobody had an idea about.

There are also times when I am injured with no impact at all. A simple movement can produce a great deal of pain without warning.

> uhh before the game –or, no before autographs there were a bunch of kids screaming down to me when I was waiting for autographs to actually begin at the end of the third inning, umm, or in the mid- yeah end of the third inning and uh so I saw these little kids screaming for me, clamoring for m- and I was like OK I'm gonna get up to the party dec- uh party deck, yeah the party deck on first base side and uh and they were screaming for me so I finally went up there and they weren't there by the time I could get there they were like- the family was like "ohhh, you know, it's gonna be fine, you know, it- they'll be right back" or whatever so I waited, …but uh the kids came back and they were mortified, they were so scared uhm screaming, hiding behind legs and skirts, umm and and the worst part of it all is that I turned to try to let them know that I wasn't scary and somehow I tweaked my leg, my right thigh uh up high, kinda where it connects not all the way to the connection with the hip but just up high and it hurt bad and uh and so I had to manage the rest of the night with that with that leg umm it wasn't it didn't persist too much into the rest of the evening but for a good 20 minutes it was hurtin'.

And then there are times when I cannot hide that something went wrong, even though I try to.

> When I tried to get off the field, I tried to do my leap over the railing and I was having some problems with my right glove, my right hand, just getting a good feel for the traction in it and stuff like that. So, when I went over, my right hand gave out a bit and I kinda crashed over the railing a little bit more than I normally do. It wasn't a fall…but I certainly didn't land as gracefully as I normally do and subsequently had to explain…that I was kind of ok. "Are you ok, are you alright" they asked and so I brushed myself off and did my running dive onto the dugout to let them know that I was ok and I tried to make the dive a little bit more dramatic than normal so that people saw that I was ok.

DISCUSSION

As routine literature (Feldman & Pentland, 2003) suggests, the "in the moment" modifications I make to my performance have consequences for my future performances. The creative residue that remains from creative play (Weick, 1998) influences future activations of my routines. If something did not work the first time, I am able to make adjustments for the future. Conversely, there are performances that worked in their first iteration but I was unable to reactivate with similar success later.

Performing an improvisation so successfully that it becomes jamming is not something that can be done at will but that does not mean it is the product of pure luck and cannot be prepared for (Eisenberg, 1990). By engaging in "yes-and" behaviors that I do not try to overcomplicate (Meyer et al., 1998), improvisational interactions can "work" for the mascot performer and those who become co-performers and accomplish the individual and organizational goal of creating positive, memorable performances.

At the same time, the process of "knowing your role and playing it to the hilt" invites some reflection on those instances where the non-organizational role is played in order to protect the performer or the experience for others. Recognizing changes in the setting and the occasional violation of it when raindrops or fans decide to interrupt the ordinary activities can assist the performer in understanding how performance experiences can be reincorporated into their own role understandings. Additionally, anticipating these violations might extend role understandings beyond what may, must, or

can be done and into what *might* be done when alternative pathways for action are created (Barrett, 1998).

How I do the work of being Spike incorporates my own understandings of who Spike is as well as the affordances that material resources provide and understandings that co-performers bring to the performances. These are most often implicitly worked out through interactions. Sometimes the co-performers volunteer themselves for a part in the show and other times my performance invites them to join in. During those times when individuals perform in ways that violate my desires for a prepared and protected ballpark, I respond in ways that attempt to manage the multiple identities that inform my performance.

Chapter 5-Who is the Mascot and What Does He Do?: Discussion and Implications

The intent of this research was to better understand a specific type of front-line employee, a baseball mascot. Specifically, I endeavored to describe the routines that I developed in order to know my role and play it to the hilt (Devantier & Turkington, 2006, p. 88). This study advances understandings of how sport organizations communicate with external audiences (Kassing et al., 2004) and how employees understand their role when their primary tasks are to speak in the voice of the organization and, in doing so, perform as characters for commerce (Tracy, 2000). Kuhn (2014) suggests that researchers adopting the communication as ventriloquism lens should speculate on the "emergence, cultivation, and perpetuation of structural forces …that do not merely contextualize communicative action, but form the conditions" (p. 247) for their performance. My autoethnographic investigation of my experiences as Spike, a Minor League Baseball mascot in Round Rock, Texas, combined my memories with coded field notes and video recordings of my performance to address how I create, recognize, and respond to these realities through four research questions:

> RQ_1: How does a mascot performer develop an understanding of their organizational role and character's identity?
>
> RQ_2: How do understandings about role and identity inform the performer's behaviors?
>
> RQ_3: How does a mascot performer do the work of being a character for commerce?

RQ$_4$: How do workplace behaviors inform the performer's understandings about their work?

DEVELOPING PERSONAL UNDERSTANDINGS

In both academic and industry environments, knowledge about the role of a mascot is limited. Much of the organizational communication scholarship available conceptualizes work as "bodiless" (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008, p. 138) in order to reduce "disgust over alien bodily practices" (Farnell, 1999, p. 349). This aversion to reading worker bodies as communicative tools to accomplish organizational tasks leaves results in a gap in organizational communication literature (Holman-Jones et al., 2013; Monaghan, 2004; Trethewey, 1999; Styhre, 2004).

The importance of mascot work is diminished in industry and the academy because it is at the same time not a "real job" (Clair, 1996) and "dirty work" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Mascot work is not "real" because it is often temporary, requires no certification of skills, is not conducted at a natural time, and, in my case, underutilized my knowledge and skills and was not my primary means of support (Clair). It is also "dirty" by physically, emotionally, and socially tainting workers who perform as mascots through exposure to extreme heat and bodily fluids, primarily sweat, while engaging in deception in a service role by acting as if Spike is "real."

In addition to cultural discourses that produce understandings of mascot work as dirty and unreal, there are also economic and sport discourses that struggle with how to talk about mascots. Mascots are valuable economic tools for baseball clubs as they create symbols for consumption by fans (King, 2009) and provide a link for younger fans to

build brand loyalty (Lin et al., 1999). Like so many organizational symbols, however, there is no clear method for calculating how much revenue is generated as the result of a mascot or how mascot activities might be modified in order to maximize revenue. From a sport perspective, the mascot can be viewed as peripheral to the game event (Fox, 2009; Gorn, 2003; Lukes, 2000; Nathan, 2014) because as difficult as it is to calculate the return on investment in dollars, it might be even more difficult to determine if mascot performance and the audience response improve or diminish the performance of the home team.

In spite of discourses that minimize mascots and the work of being a mascot, there are some clear benefits to organizations who use mascots to interact with stakeholders. Recent work in multispecies ethnography emphasizes the way objects traditionally considered as peripheral could be repositioned and interpreted as central to the understanding of a culture (Kirsey & Helmreich, 2010). Mascots, by design, can be made to always smile and many do not communicate verbally. Unlike human representatives, it is highly unlikely mascots will communicate through speech or facial expression in a way that is not in coordination with the organization. The data I collected also indicate that mascot performances are at their best when they are interpersonal activities. I ended a game more satisfied when I had co-created experiences instead of doing the same steps in the same elements from the night before. When I received feedback from supervisors, it was more common to hear about how a family's experience was enhanced through our interactions than to hear that someone really enjoyed the way I did the "Chicken Dance."

A participant in Trujillo's (1992) work remarked, "baseball is a game that was designed to be played on a sunny afternoon in Wrigley field in the 1920s, not on a 21 inch screen" (p. 362). Baseball romantics would likely argue that the experience of attending a live baseball game is the best or even the only way to truly watch a game (Bick, 1978). Looking at the parts of the game you enjoy, they may argue, is much better than watching the media event that is created for you on television. Critics might argue that it is precisely this need for in person engagement with the product that keeps baseball from being America's game (Nathan, 2014). MiLB front office employees often remark that "We want to be the front porch of the community" and, in an era when teams devote resources to the development of mobile apps to engage fans in the stadium event, mascots continue to serve as low-tech embodiments of this desire.

Without a mascot, certain revenue generating elements would likely not be as appealing with another front-line employee in the role. An usher signing autographs in front of the team store or the Birthday Parade being led by the Group Sales Manager would not likely have the same allure. Additionally, it would be difficult for the non-mascot employee to avoid being seen as lazy or weird. A non-masked employee would have "real work" to do in the ballpark that would go unaccomplished if they were engaged in the kind of frivolities and people are regularly suspicious of others who play the world backward without the benefit of a mask (Goffman, 1971). For all the incongruity of the costume and mask, it may be the best way to make these activities feel as if they fit in the environment through the cultivation of "a certain strategic ambiguity in their identities to accommodate the diverse preferences of their members and to

provide latitude in action and in the potential for change without being accused of contravening core principles" (Ashforth et al., 2011, p. 1151; Eisenberg, 1984).

Organizations certainly have cause to be wary about mascots but not because their return on investment is incalculable or because mascot performances can be as frivolous to game activities. They should be most concerned about the way those discourses have inhibited understanding mascots as powerful organizational symbols who are trusted to communicate organizational identity and speak in the voice of the organization. Identity is not established by an organization or individual alone but, instead, emerges at the seam of social structures and individual psychology (Strauss, 1959). Conceptualizing organizational identity as something that can be created by an organization to express central, enduring, and distinctive values (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), should be done with the recognition that organizational identity is dynamic and coproduced by organizational members and stakeholders. If organizations put front-line employees in a position to speak in their voice by performing on their behalf (Cooren, 2012) they should be clear about what that voice must, may, and can sound like, what kind of performer the employee is, and develop their improvisational skills to respond to unanticipated scenarios.

When mascot performers have limited resources to understand their work, as was the case in both my unpaid collegiate and paid MiLB mascotting career, knowing my role and being able to answer the question "Who is Spike" was largely left up to me. Allowing workers to rely on their own occupational and organizational expectations may result in differing interpretations about the role of a mascot and the behaviors that are

produced from those interpretations. As I showed in my origin story, my understandings stemmed from my identification with a family of sport consumers, what I saw other mascots do, my fascination with professional wrestling, and my behaviors as a sports fanatic in college. Sometimes my developed understandings coordinated with the organization's expectations but other times they did not. When there was dissonance, I risked performing in ways that could have cost me my job and reflected negatively on the organization's identity.

Personal Understandings Inform Performances

Mascots are part of a broader category of front-line employees. These individuals are closely associated with an organization by being responsible for animating and voicing its identity (Torres & Kline, 2006; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). The on-stage nature of these employees invite Goffmanian interpretations of their practices. Focusing on practices alone, however, ignores the ostensive and artifactual dimensions of organizational routine construction (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). When front-line employees are not invited to explore their own role understandings, they are often put in positions where they feel the need to perform in the voice of the organization at the expense of their own voice. Cruise ship workers who are made uncomfortable by the unwanted sexual advances of a passenger, for example, are made increasingly uncomfortable having to choose between on-stage expectations that she keep the passenger happy and off-stage expectations she holds of herself (Tracy, 2000). Being put in this type of situation regularly can result in employees feeling fake at work and has negative ramifications for both individuals and organizations (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005).

In order to extend Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor (1959), this research invites the exploration of what kind of performer a mascot is. Some performers have more agency in composing their role while others are at the mercy of a director or script. Using Cooren's (2012) metaphor of communication as ventriloquism invites a question that explores this tension between structure and agency: If organizational communication is like ventriloquism, who is the human and who is the dummy? Does the organization have its hand up the back of the worker or is the worker the performer who opens the organization's mouth? The answers are not neither simple nor mutually exclusive (Cooren & Sandler, 2014). Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) allows for understandings that position mascot performers as constantly navigating between the type of performer they are and how they recognize both structural and agentic concerns as they communicate in ways that balance creativity and constraint (Eisenberg et al., 2014).

Type of performer

Mascot performance blends front-line employee expectations with roles ordinarily performed in the visual and performing arts (Szarycz, 2011). Although there is no completely analogous experience to being a mascot, mascots share features with actors, clowns, dancing bears, and other types of performers. Completing the phrase "being a mascot is like…" invites both literal and metaphorical interpretations of occupational and organizational expectations that informs the ongoing acts of performing, modifying, and understanding an employee's work (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987).

Actors

Actors are provided with texts and can make choices in how to respond to their texts. They "can treat the text either as a set of suggestions for a character…suggestions which cannot be ignored, but leave him much freedom, or he can treat the text as a bible which, once understood, will tell him how to act" (Sennett, 1977, p. 197). Some actors prefer to abdicate their control in order to avoid letting the actor be seen instead of the character. "I want to be out of control, as an actor, I want them to have the control, otherwise it's going to become, predictably, my work, and that's not fun" (Nicholson in Kubrick, 1980).

Clowns

Mascot performers are, in many ways like clowns. Peacock (2009) emphasizes the agency of clowns. His primary argument is that clowns are different from other performers because they are allowed to play and define the boundaries of that play on their own, without a writer, director, or organization instructing them. By being responsible for their own identities, clowns achieve an "awareness of their awareness" (Peacock, p. 10) which allows for connections with the audience by crossing spatial boundaries in ways often not afforded to other performers. Clowns are granted a great deal of agency in both the development of their own clown identity and the way they may critique the environment in and audience for whom they are performing (Peacock). Some baseball mascots have had formal clown training (McGuire, 2002), which allows them to reenact everyday life activities through their own, often childlike, logic (Baer, 2008) and usually encourages failures in order for performances to achieve a sense of sincerity even

in the midst of comedy (Purcell Gates, 2011). Learning to clown through what would ordinarily be embarrassing mistakes is a way to disrupt the disciplined embodiment of many social situations (Purcell Gates, 2011). By opening themselves to failure, clowns are able to improvise and play in their environment.

Like mascots, clowns "play to order" (Peacock, 2009, p. 9) and when they do, they do so in a way that meets expectations of structure while also adapting in the moment to audience response. The interaction between audience and clown results in what Peacock terms "genuine play", that is, when a tone is created which influences the clown's performance (Peacock). At the same time, there is always a sense of otherness about the clown that suggests they do not fit into the environment. This otherness is created particularly through their play and costuming.

A second way this “play frame” (Bateson, 1972) is activated is through clown costuming. While mascots are not afforded the opportunity to choose how much of their face may be seen or voice may be heard, there are ways that performers may use their bodies in order to transfer information that is not just related to the organization. Like mascots, the “real” face of a clown is often obscured through makeup or a mask. In doing so, the audience must find a new way to interpret the clown, as they are less able to rely on facial cues. Additionally, it advances the notion that clowns, although sharing a space with the audience, are not part of the audience’s world (Peacock, 2009). This grants freedom to the performer as, without their face, it is clearly the clown, and not the performer, who is playing. It is also liberating in that clown performance is often perceived as a peripheral elements to the main storyline in which they appear (Beeman,

1981). Mascots, like “run in clowns” (Peacock) give the audience something to pay attention to in between the things they came to the event to pay attention to. During these run-ins, both clowns and mascots may offer commentary on the event itself by engaging in supportive or subversive behaviors (Brightman, 1999).

Dancing bears

Contemporary mascot performances can also be strikingly similar to dancing bear shows, requiring “nothing more than a minimal cost for the purchase and upkeep of the animal actors, a few simple props, an easily transportable performance space, perhaps a bare-bones script, and some degree of training” (Szarycz, 2011, p. 160). The audience to these shows needed to bring a sense of humor, a feeling for the extraordinary, and a morbid curiosity as the performing animal exhibit its ability to perform physical behaviors that appeared to be either impossible or vastly different from its usual movements as to be absurd or comical.

The spaces in which performing animals are displayed are similar to those Spike occupies. Stages in animal performance must be carefully managed, facilitate transit, and contain objects around which performance may be organized or boundaries blurred (Szarycz, 2011). Because of these three qualities, the stage often becomes “cluttered with other actors playing different roles, is full of shifting scenes and random events or juxtapositions, and can be crossed from a range of angles” (Szarycz, p. 161). In order to manage this clutter in my own performance, I categorize actors by type of coworker or type of fan and anticipate many of the shifts and crossings that can occur. When I do not

anticipate these correctly or something surprising occurs during highly managed performances, I am required to improvise.

PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVISATIONAL AND INTERACTIONAL

In order to play my role to the hilt, I express my internal understandings about my role through play, improvisation, and jamming with the individuals and artifacts around me. The performance is not limited to others “in the know” nor am I required to play with props in expected ways. I treat both co-workers and fans as potential co-performers and, provided we all commit to listening for ways to advance the scene and do so within our own competency levels, we can improvise successfully. The minimal disclosure that occurs between myself and many of my co-performers contributes to an environment where jamming can occur (Eisenberg, 1990).

Weick (1998) suggests that one way to improve improvisation in organizations is through improving how members listen to one another. Although speaking in the voice of the organization is certainly an important aspect of performing as a mascot, listening with the ears of the organization also enhances my performance. In order to create memorable experiences in the ballpark, my performances should not be presented as unidirectional. Listening and incorporating feedback into my performance assists in building relationships with fans and allowing the experiences to contribute to our understandings of the organization’s identity.

There are many resources and artifacts made available to me in order to accomplish these relational performance goals with external audiences, even if my voice is rarely one of them. Performing nonverbally invites me to move and feel in the body of

the organization. As I discussed in the chapters, putting on the costume is a turning point for me. When I am in costume, what I do is what Spike does. Spike's actions are my actions. Spike has access to people and places in the ballpark in ways that Jeff does not but that access comes with a price. The things I do in the ballpark are not just reflections of me but of the organization as well.

Many people doing frontline work are expected to "maintain an organizationally prescribed mask" (Tracy, 2000, p. 95). I am literally wearing an organizationally prescribed mask and there is a chinstrap that keeps my face from ever being seen. Spike and Jeff are not seen in the ballpark at the same time and there is very little organizational expectation that Jeff continue to exist when Spike is performing. This is both a liberating and troublesome experience. On one hand, I rarely feel a tension between my "real" self and my "fake" self as Spike is always a role. At the same time, when I do feel the need to perform on Jeff's behalf, particularly in times I perceive a threat, there is a risk that those actions reflect poorly on the organization, as I am not able to remove the mask to address those threats as a human. Front-line employees who are not literally masked are likely to experience the troublesome nature of this tension without the benefit of a disguise.

PERFORMANCES INFORM PERSONAL UNDERSTANDINGS

As the embodiment of organizational identity, my performance of Spike attempts to support the team's stated mission to "take care of the three groups of people who allow us to work in and for the game we love: our fans, our sponsors and our players" (Round Rock Express, 2015c). Spike's identity and, by extension, the identity of the Round Rock Express might be central, enduring and distinctive (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) but it is also

performative, interactional, improvisational, and liminal. Shifting from interpreting a culture through its objects to actions to an interpretation based on interactions generates findings that move away from exploring what figures are "being" to what they are "becoming" and who they are "becoming with" (Kirsey & Helmreich, 2010, p. 546). My performance is evaluated by those who participate who reinforce or challenge my interpretation in their response. This allows alternative and competing identities to coexist. Recognizing that organizational identities are not "had" so much as they are "done" positions them as being difficult to manage in traditional ways (Eisenberg et al., 2014). There are, then, an infinite number of opportunities to negotiate organizational identity between organizational interactants as well as within individuals. The way a fan responds to me might have me reconsidering who Spike ought to be. The way I respond to a fan may have me questioning if it was the right thing to do or whose interests I was privileging when I did it.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As an autoethnographic study built from a single case, this research was never intended to introduce generalizable findings. Instead, it invites readers to consider how theories of organization and the role of front-line employees in performing organizational identity might be extended in light of the stories I have shared. In addition to the theoretical value, this research might specifically be applied by organizations with front-line employees, especially sport organizations who employee mascots, and the mascot performers themselves.

Implications for organizations

This research gives clear directions for the empowerment of front-line employees (Chebat & Kollias, 2000). Improving the way front-line employees understand their relationship-oriented work and increasing their improvisational skills will allow front-line employees to better recognize and perform their routines. Doing so allows organizations to be responsive to immediate concerns presented by audience members and checks organizational identity claims against that incorporate feedback. A central, enduring, and distinct identity can also be a flexible, dynamic, and responsive one that creates relevant distinctions rooted in relationships.

Front-line employees are under equipped if they are only given insight into a single dimension (ostensive, performative, or artifactual) of organizational routines. The dimensions are recursive and both feed from and inform the others even if they are not explicitly developed. If organizations fail to communicate about how they expect front-line employees to combine the dimensions, however, the organizational identity being performed into existence might not coordinate with a preferred identity or the organization's stated mission.

Endorsing an interactional approach to organizational identity does not require asking each worker to create nearly 24 hours of video and audio recordings exploring their work. It does, however, require an organization that invites reflection on work being done instead of work that is left to do. Workers can be turned into theory builders by creating spaces where they are free to introduce scenarios where they found themselves unsure of how to best meet personal and organizational expectations. Responders to this

kind of sharing, however, should not quickly seek to give a prescribed answer and add one more page to the "What do I do if…" section of a training manual. Instead, these spaces should offer opportunities for workers to "play" with potential responses in low-risk environments where they could discover the interactional toolkit they prefer to use in order to address common problems in a way that is both true to their personal identity and consistent with expectations that they perform professionally.

Front-line employees have the potential to be powerful organizational symbols and although there is no established measure for evaluating precisely how much capital is generated through their presence, a poor performance may cause considerable damage to the reputation and revenues of a team. Organizations may be able to articulate the specific behaviors a worker should not engage in, in my case this was articulated by physically pulling me off a dugout, but such urgency is not always apparent in developing what should be done. I encourage organizations to better articulate the role expectations placed on workers by proactively collaboratively outlining what must, may, and can be done instead of simply recognizing what must not, may not, and cannot be done. It may be more difficult to articulate who the organization "is" than who it "is not," but such affirmative articulation will likely improve audience the abilities of audience members to carry organizational identity understandings forward.

Mascot performers, along with many other front-line employees, combine skills from a variety of other types of performers. This draws performers with a variety of skills and backgrounds to the work. When the characterization is developed, the performer should be included in order to ensure that expectations do not fall outside of the

affordances of the costume or abilities of the performer. As such, organizations should position the role as one that, most importantly, requires the ability to make good decisions in improvisational performances instead of one that can be accomplished simply by surviving the heat and not minding the smell of the costume.

Implications for workers

Organizations, increasingly, are expecting workers to represent the organization at all times. This expectation is extending to offline spaces and even onto employees who are not explicitly told to "live the brand" but are expected to nonetheless (Keller & Richey, 2006; Takeya, 2006). This changes the world of work because it is no longer sufficient for workers to do their discrete tasks at work, they must also constantly be engaged in bringing the organization to life. Expecting service employees to be excellent at their often labor and body intensive jobs while also performing the knowledge work of correctly performing organizational identity is formidable and can result in problems for workers when they are asked to privilege their embodiment of an organization over their own personal identity (Tracy & Tretheway, 2005).

This research suggests a way to mitigate the daunting task of having to perform "blue collar" work with "white collar" expectations. While organizations often make the "must" and "must not" elements of workplace expectations clear, workers should be equally clear in voicing the limitations of current props and costumes so that organizations can recognize the way structural conditions might inhibit workers from executing their dual roles. At the same time, organizations regularly leave performance options, specifically what "may" or "may not" be done ambiguous for strategic purposes

(Eisenberg, 1984) but workers who find ways to mentally prepare for scenarios and reduce the number of unscripted and unanticipated activities that could occur at work will be better equipped to respond to even the most outrageous scenario. Knowing your role and playing it to the hilt also involves thinking about how you will think about possibilities beyond the immediate time and task.

Implications for mascots

Much of my desire in pursuing this research was to make my experiences accessible to others who are interested in performing or understanding this type of work. I would like to close by addressing current and future mascots in the first person. This type of work has too much symbolic potential to be limited to instructions for how to make a costume or an index of the types of mascots that exist in America (Ahearn & Ballant, 1982) and, in the absence of more specific information, asking aspiring performers to invest their own capital before being hired only increases the cultural taint of being a mascot performer. When we are asked, "how can you do it?" (Ashforth & Kriener, 1999), you should know how to answer in ways that emphasize the value we bring to our teams and our fans.

This work is improvisational but you will not be making something from nothing. You are combining existing resources in innovative ways to produce memorable experiences for your audience and co-performers. Ask yourself questions that increase your ability to jam with them (Eisenberg, 1990). What resources and co-performers are available in the setting? Are you surrendering to it? Do not try to do more than your competency allows.

Mascots play many roles and you have varying responsibilities while you are performing so pay attention to the decisions you need to make. Sometimes you are Bozo the Clown, Louie Armstrong, Sandra Bullock, a dancing bear, or just you. Sometimes you are a combination of all of them at the same time. As you consider what that means, think beyond what may, must, and can be done in the moment and think about all the things that might be done, even if you'll only be able to choose one in the moment.

As you perform, the number of experiences you classify as being unanticipated and unscripted should shrink, as you are made more aware of your own possibilities and what the stadium event can throw at you. There will probably never be a comprehensive list of all that could occur during the game. Even if the list existed, the presence of others may modify each iteration of those scenarios. Ultimately, the job is too taxing to run through a systematic decision making process for each scenario so you have to rely on your routine development. When you do decide on an action, listen for the response and adapt future performances as a result. Doing so will allow you to develop and test your own theories about mascot performance. Theory development is not reserved for researchers nor is practical application exclusive to workers (Islam, 2015).

You will also face situations where you cannot protect all of the parties involved (team, fans, character, self) and you have to make tough choices. I hope when your team chose you as their mascot, they did so because they believed in your ability to make those choices and committed communicating with you before, during, and after you make those choices. If all they wanted was someone who would wear the costume and stand where they were told, please make a copy of this research and give it to them. They are missing a

great opportunity to create an environment that lives up to the lyrics of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” (Norworth & Gillman, 1993), an environment that allows fans to “root, root, root for the home team” and invites them not to care if they “never get back.”

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