Circus Hurts:

Exploring the Occupational Identification and Socialization of Pain Work of Aerial Acrobats

by

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to explore the socialization process of aerial acrobats to pain and how these workers (re)produce traditional Circus d/Discourses through occupational identity enactment. The two research questions posed in this study were answered through semi-structured interviews with 27 professional acrobats and the arts-based elicitation method of Photovoice. A phronetic iterative analysis revealed a subcategory of body work—pain work. Pain workers are those employees who are required to sustain, endure, and manage embodied pain to enact their occupational role. This study introduced a four-phase cyclical socialization process model through which pain work is enacted: (a) experience, (b) tolerate, (c) embrace, and (d) proselytize. Using a dramaturgical analysis framework, the findings of this study revealed aerial acrobats engage three front stage and three backstage identity enactment strategies that (re)produce institutional d/Discourses: (a) masking pain, (b) performing-despite-risk, (c) artistic sacrifice, (d) body-work double bind, (e) complicit anonymity, and (f) self-deprecation. The findings of this study carry theoretical and methodological implications for organizational communication literature in the areas of socialization, identification, and body work, as well as embodiment in qualitative research. Importantly, this study demonstrates how discourse simultaneously changes collective embodied experiences and social realities by portraying the vivid, tangible consequences on members. Limitations of the study and future directions of research are discussed.

Para mi madre y mis abuelos.

Gracias por darme todo lo que necesito en ese primer día en nuestra casa de Puga y Acal.

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INTRODUCTION

Pain is relative. The experience of pain is subjective, shaped by individuals' backgrounds, context, and past experiences (Cosio, 2020; Hadjistavropoulos et al., 2004; Linton & Shaw, 2011). Embodied pain—distinguished here from psychological pain—is a "normal feature of the human experience" (Cosio, 2020), and therefore is experienced by people in organizations. Given that through interaction "symbol becomes material; material becomes symbol; and neither stay the same as a result," (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 34), communication about pain influences how pain is experienced and the experience of pain influences communication about pain. Pain has been traditionally conceptualized as a subjective, sensory psychological-physiological experience (Kumar et al., 2016). However, given the symbolic-material relationship of embodied pain, the experience of pain should be analyzed as an interactional, co-constructed process that occurs between individuals. Specifically, research focused on the discursive construction of embodied pain in organizing can prove useful for understanding how pain is experienced in the context of work.

Organizational communication scholarship is guided by a "meta-model of communication as constitutive," such that discursively, communication shapes social realities (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 4). The materiality of objects, sites, and bodies in organizations, however, expose the limits of social construction. Bodies in particular, "reject the say of symbolism with their susceptibility to injury, illness, hunger, reproduction, aging, and death" (p. 32). But bodies are more than just brute physical facts (i.e., objective, physical matter independent of social construction; see Searle, 1997).

Ashcraft et al. (2009) label the body as a "communicative product" such that communication about the body can produce tangible and observable outcomes. Body work, defined as work that uses the body as an organizational resource or work that provides service to others' bodies (see Wolkowitz, 2002), is a useful context to observe how the way that the body is socially constructed generates material consequences on workers' bodies.

Moreover, contributing to the commodification of workers' bodies in organizing is the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy (Harris, 2017), or Cartesian dualism, which rests on the assumption that the mind and the body are two separate entities (Descartes, 1956, 1960). In organizing, the mind is associated with intellectual labor (i.e., producing a social reality) and the body is associated with physical labor. Based on these associations, body work can be fraught with incongruencies between how organizational members construct these occupations and workers' corporeality (see Michel, 2011). Given the communicative constitution of organizations and the influence of social construction on body work occupations, a study on occupational pain is warranted to understand how discourse transforms the embodied experience of pain.

Furthermore, the relationship between the body, identity, and identification has been analyzed from multiple theoretical perspectives (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Identification is a communicative process by which individuals create a shared sense of reality through symbolic interaction (Burke, 1950, 1969; Gossett, 2002). Relatedly, consubstantiality is defined by Burke (1969) as "a practice-related concept based on stylistic identifications and symbolic structures, which persuade and produce acceptance: an acting-together within, as defined by, a common context" (as cited in

Dousset, 2005, p. 21). Therefore, when individuals experience identification, they become consubstantial, having shared substance, with one another (Burke, 1969). Cheney and Thompkins (1987) define identification as "an ongoing process of identity-development" made toward a potential target of identification (p. 7). In the context of organizational identification, the potential target of identification is an organization. Some scholars have conceptualized organizational identification as a cognitive process rather than an interactive, socially constructed process. Mael and Ashforth (1995), for example, defined organizational identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to [a collective], where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the [collective] in which he or she is a member" (p. 104). However, organizational members understand and shape their behavior through other's impressions or representations, "making cognitive attachment a social and interpersonal process as well" (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 257). How organizational members enact identity, therefore, is shaped, influenced, or transformed through the discursive process of identification (Kuhn, 2006). Kuhn and Nelson (2002) argue a duality of identity and identification such that discursive acts "not only build individual identities but also produce, reproduce, and/or transform the very identity structures on which they are based" (p. 7). The relationship between identity, identification, and the body is observable in body work. Ashcraft et al. (2009) note that identification "lends order to the body's raw material resources" (p. 32) and therefore identities are enacted by bodily performance.

As this study is situated in an athletic-performative context, it is important to note the juxtaposition between the social construction and material limitations of athletes' bodies with enacting the identity of athlete (i.e., athletes need to use their bodies to play

and are limited by injuries, which prevents them from enacting a positive occupational identity, Zanin, 2018). Given this disjunctive, an in-depth qualitative exploration can reveal how workers' bodies and embodied experiences are co-constructed in organizations, specifically when analyzing physical pain as an occupational requirement. Research has been conducted to analyze the experience of types of psychological pain at work (i.e., emotional labor and burnout, see Riforgiate et al., 2021) or in the context of managing other-pain (i.e., patient-provider communication, Bullo, 2020; Dangott et al., 1978; Haverfield et al., 2018; Rowbotham et al., 2015; Ruben & Hall, 2016). However, a goal of this study is to analyze pain as a *requirement* of work rather than pain as a *byproduct* of work. In organizational communication research, embodied pain and the way individuals experience pain as central to work has not been conceptualized, identified, or operationalized. Answering the call to integrate the body as an interactional entity in the co-construction of organizations (Harris, 2017; Styhre, 2004), a key objective of this study is to explore how workers' embodiment of pain is made prominent through their *occupational* identification.

Whereas the organization is the target of identification in organizational identification, occupational identification is an interactive, socially constructed process through which individuals "construct their sense of who they are and what they do in relation to their jobs" (Ashcraft, 2005; Ashcraft, 2007; Meisenbach, 2008, p. 263). Moreover, Ashcraft (2013) defines occupational identity as "an evolving co-construction of the nature of work, which reflects the embodied identities" of workers (p. 7). The social performance of identity, or identity enactment, is how workers continuously form, strengthen, maintain, or revise their occupational identity (Ashforth et al., 2008). In body

work occupations, occupational identification rests on workers' ability to perform a certain corporeality. Furthermore, by engaging pain as central to the process of occupational identification, this study can provide insight on how discourse influences workers' occupational identity enactments.

By integrating occupational pain, the findings of this study can be used to expand theoretical assumptions of social construction and materiality in body work occupations. Zanin (2018) found the presence of a body commodification d/Discourse within an athletic healthcare context promoting an ideology that "bodies and bodily performance are economic goods" (p. 276). Building on this research, this study can illuminate how discourses of body commodification related to embodied pain are reproduced by workers through their performances of identity and the corporeal effects of these discourses on workers. Moreover, as the scope of this study is situated in a performative-athletic context where performance is imbued into the occupational role, workers may mask or suppress natural bodily reactions as positive identity enactments. Therefore, the research outcomes of this study can be used to contribute to body work scholarship in two ways: (a) integrating occupational pain in a body work context and (b) studying a performative-athletic context. To accomplish these research goals, this study is situated within the context of Circus as an institutional entity to document the occupational identification processes for performative-athletic body workers.

A Case for Studying Occupational Pain in Circus

The institution of Circus is identified as a body work context in which pain is not readily observable by spectators but is expected as a feature of circus performers' occupational identity enactment. Given the many plausible opportunities for performance

that Circus offers, a circus context is useful for analyzing a specific occupational performative role. As part of their performance aesthetic, aerialists (i.e., acrobats who perform gymnastic feats in the air) may enact emotional labor in the form of concealing discomfort, pain, or effort to appear graceful and effortless (Tait, 2005, 2006). Broadly, emotional labor is the expression of manufactured, inauthentic emotions to create acceptable public displays that fulfill organizational and individual goals (Hochschild, 1983; Miller, 2007). In this context, spectators of circus performances may not readily understand the degree of athleticism required of aerialists. Taken together, circus aerialists perform feats of extreme athleticism while masking the effort they exude for the sake of performance aesthetic.

Beyond its performative-athletic characteristics, the Circus is an institutional entity with a rich cultural history. By analyzing how members (re)produce dominant Circus Discourses as part of their identity enactment, the findings from this study can be used to explore how aerialists engage in bodily performances of occupational pain. Circus scholars claim that Circus has transformed how bodies are perceived through the feats of strength performed by its acrobats (Jacob, 2018). Circus sideshows, displaying oddities, curiosities, and people whose bodies deviated from what was considered "normal," expanded perceptions of the human body. In its least flattering description, Circus has been an avenue to witness "the ultimate exploitation that results from human exhibition" (The Ringling Circus Museum, 2022). As the spectacle of Circus has expanded the social construction and public perception of the human body, Circus is a valuable context to analyze body work, occupational identification, and occupational identity enactment.

The following chapter reviews four main bodies of literature and contextualizes them within the scope of this study: (a) organizational d/Discourse, (b) body work, (c) socialization and (d) organizational and occupational identification. The chapter concludes with the proposed research questions of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational Discourse and Circus

Organizational discourse has been researched across various academic disciplines (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, 2014). To facilitate a consistent conceptualization of discourse in organizational research—as well as bridge the various dimensions in which the term 'discourse' is applied—Alvesson and Karreman (2000) produce a distinction between *discourse* and *Discourse*. While lower-case "d" *discourse* attends to the micro-level uses of language within a specific social context, upper-case "D" *Discourse* refers to the larger, dominating uses of language that reflect organizational culture and ideologies. This conceptualization of discourse and Discourse assumes the discursive construction of organizations, positing d/Discourse as "the very foundation upon which organizational life is built" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 6).

Importantly, in their review of discourse analysis in organizations, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) outline the ways in which the study of language and organizations needs to go beyond general linguistic approaches of discourse analysis to capture "how discourse processes shape and are shaped by organizational constructs" (p. 4). Consequently, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) explored the relationship between discourse and organizations and proffered three orientations to approach the discursive construction of organizing: object, becoming, and grounded-in-action. These orientations assume, respectively, that organizations are embedded with discursive features, have emerging formative Discourses, and are discursively constructed and reproduced, such that organizational processes should attend to the

interplay of all three orientations. Further explorations of the discursive construction of organizations have been conceptualized in the study of how communication constitutes organizations (CCO) (Boivin & Brummans, 2022; Boivin et al., 2017; Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren et al., 2011; Putnam et al., 2009; Schoeneborn et al., 2014; Schoeneborn et al., 2019) and the relationship between discourse and materiality (i.e., interaction with the physical properties of organizational artifacts, see Ashcraft et al., 2009).

Concerning the body, Ashcraft et al. (2009) posit that "communication is an embodied act" (p. 33) and therefore the body is both experienced and transformed through communication. However, while discourses can influence the transformation of the body, the individual's body and their "performances of identity" (p. 34) remains constrained by its material properties. Additionally, embodiment scholarship (see Ellingson, 2017) posits the body as "the material self that is constructed through interaction with other bodies and material objects" (p. 13). Thus, a study focused on the construction and reproduction of d/Discourse in Circus and the embodiment of the aerialist identity can provide a crystallized analysis of how these discourses are (re)produced through occupational identification. To start, the following section provides a historical overview of the institution of Circus and its various iterations over time. This information provides the reader with foundational background knowledge necessary to understand the dominant Discourses that govern Circus, the cultural identity of Circus, and how these influence the perception of circus bodies.

The Institution of Circus

The origin of the circus is almost as complex, mysterious, and entertaining as the circus itself. Thought by many to have surfaced in the 18th century (Victoria & Albert

Museum, 2021), some Circus scholars claim that the circus can be traced back to Roman times (Jacob, 2018). In 1768, Philip Astley, known as the "father of modern circus," established the Astley's Riding School in London featuring equestrian acts, acrobats, and clowns (History of Circus, 2022; Victoria & Albert Museum, 2022). The term 'circus,' however, was coined by fellow business rival Charles Dibdin, who replicated Astley's performance offerings and opened The Royal Circus. In the late 19th century, P.T. Barnum and James Anthony Bailey revolutionized traditional circuses in America with their traveling circus company, "The Greatest Show on Earth" (Victoria & Albert Museum, 2022).

In present time, what is now referred to as "traditional circus," operated under a signature "big top" tent, and featured wild animal acts, jugglers, clowns, and tightrope acrobats, to name a few. Circus companies would travel by train through the night and orchestrate an elaborate circus parade to announce their arrival. The mobility of the circus was a spectacle in and of itself. Every day, circus companies transported over a thousand employees and hundreds of animals and supplies (Hansard, 2022). Circus historians argue that the spectacle of Circus "became a lens through which Americans saw the world," embedding circus jargon into popular language (i.e., bandwagons, dog and pony shows, etc.), influencing American imperialism with its imagery, and becoming the "most important form of entertainment in turn-of-the-century America" (Hansard, 2022).

The popularity of traditional circus began to dwindle in the mid-20th century. Animal rights activists protested the cruelty of animal treatment in the circus after several high-profile animal-related accidents and deaths. Although some contemporary circuses, such as *Odessa*, continue the use of equestrian acts, the use of circus animals is frowned

upon. Additionally, as circuses moved away from traveling companies (although traveling circuses still exist), these began to perform in established venues, thus rendering unnecessary some of the most signature representations of Circus. In its efforts to re-capture audience appeal, an "anti-circus circus" (Martin & Evans, 2010) movement surfaced through various independent circus companies (e.g., Cirque Bidon, Archaos, Cirque Plume) that deviated from conventional circus entertainment and featured an "urban form of circus, celebrating the industrial, harnessed to rock music" vision of Circus. This radical rupture from conventional conceptualizations of Circus drove a reinvention and transformation that continues to shape contemporary Circus.

Contemporary Circus, developed throughout the late 20th century and most prominently associated with elaborate theatrical productions such as *Cirque du Soleil*, is a metamorphosis of traditional Circus that blends narrative, characters, aesthetic, and original music. Remaining loyal to its roots in some ways and diverging in others, contemporary Circus features clowns, jugglers, aerial and ground acrobats, actors, and magicians, but largely limits animal acts. The success of contemporary Circus, however, has also negatively impacted the affordability and accessibility of these productions (see Valinsky, 2020). While traditional circuses were predominantly operated by circus families and small companies, contemporary Circus draws contracted artists—resulting in a saturated market of performers. Consequently, circus schools have flourished globally, making circus arts accessible for hobbyists and professional performers (Tait, 2005).

As a result of the growing accessibility of circus arts instruction, several sub-genres of Circus have surfaced. One example, social circus—founded in Latin America—is "broadly understood as a program operation outside the professional and performance

circus worlds that uses circus skills as a tool for assisting vulnerable populations" (Sorzano, 2018, p. 116). The social circus facilitates the instruction of circus skills to at-risk minority youth populations that foster transferable, life-long skills such as determination, perseverance, grit, and resilience (van Es et al., 2019).

Beyond providing a historical timeline of the circus, this overview highlights how Circus has remained sustainable through centuries of reinvention and transformation. Little remains of the original conceptualizations of Circus, however, the formative Discourses of Circus have cultivated a cultural identity that continue to promote membership and community. By attending to the early foundations of how the circus was produced, this literature review identifies key components of the discursive construction of Circus. For example, having moved away from many traditional circus acts, contemporary Circus relies on the athletic artistry of performers as entertainment capital. Historically, Circus has been discursively constructed as a spectacle and its sustainability contingent on its ability to spectacularize. Taken together, the following section explores the overarching Discourses that have traditionally governed the circus and their influence on how circus bodies are perceived.

Understanding the Relationship Between Circus Bodies and Circus Discourses

The human body is at the forefront of circus performance and reflective of Circus culture (Jacob, 2018). Professor and playwright Peta Tait (2005) explains circus performances as:

> Circus performance presents artistic and physical displays of skillful action by highly rehearsed bodies that also perform cultural ideas: of identity, spectacle, danger, transgression – in sum, of circus. Circus is performative, making and remaking itself as it happens. Its languages are imaginative, entertaining and

> inventive… but circus dominated by bodies in action can especially manipulate cultural beliefs about nature, physicality and freedom (Tait, 2005, p. 6).

While all circus performers are adept in their own right, the context of this study is focused on aerialists—or aerial acrobats—as their seamless dexterity and graceful acrobatics in the air have traditionally secured top-billing status. An aerialist is a type of circus artist who performs "gymnastic action on and off apparatus suspended in the air" and an aerial act is an interpretive, artistic sequence of 'tricks' or 'phrases' linked together and set to music (Tait, 2005, p. 2). Aerialists "deliver a unique aesthetic that blends athleticism and artistic expression" (p. 2). They diligently exercise upper-body and core muscularity, while also portraying a delicate exterior of agility as they weave through an aerial apparatus.

Moreover, aerial acrobats form an excellent demographic to study in a body work context. Aerial acrobats—as well as other athlete artists, such as dancers—develop a fine-tuned sense of proprioception (i.e., "sensory bodily awareness," Kosma & Erickson, 2020, p. 225). For aerialists, their keen sense of proprioception is a key element of their ability to move seamlessly through the air, constantly aware of their body's positionality in relation to the apparatus. Scholars have likened this perceptive ability to "a musician with an instrument," (Walby & Stuart, 2021, p. 6) noting how aerialists manipulate their apparatus as an extension of their bodies (Tait, 2005). Furthermore, the mind-body connection the aerialist exudes allows them to sense and adjust to real-time dangerous situations while enacting creative expression (Walby & Stuart, 2021).

Aerial acrobatics in early circus history (i.e., in the 19th century) consisted primarily of walking, balancing, dancing, or wheeling on tightrope that evolved over time

to include somersaulting to and from the rope (Tait, 2005). With the invention of the trapeze in 1860, aerial acts were revolutionized and new apparatuses were invented (e.g., corde lisse or rope) that had a similar consistency (i.e., ropes made of cotton). Since then, an abundance of aerial apparatuses have been developed and incorporated into circus performances, including aerial tissu or silks (i.e. "a double piece of hanging fabric," Circopedia, 2008; Vertical Wise, 2020a), lyra or hoop (i.e., "a heavy metallic hoop," Circopedia, 2008), straps (i.e., "a pair of fabric or leather straps," Circopedia, 2008), sling or hammock (i.e., "a long piece of fabric forming a swing," Atesi, 2020), and Chinese pole (i.e., "a metal vertical pole, usually covered in rubber and secured by cables," Sideshow Circus Magazine, 2009), among others (Lavers et al., 2019). As an institution, Circus has undergone significant transformations from its original iteration in response to ethical calls to remove animal-based acts and general loss of audience interest in variety shows (Tait, 2005). As a result, performances rooted in circus skills and acrobatics have become synonymous with Circus.

The ubiquity of aerial performance in Circus has conflated the social ideas and cultural identity of Circus with the imagery of the aerialist body. Specifically, "the performance of cultural identity [of Circus] is part of aerial artistry" (Tait, 2005, p. 7). Aerial performance is a blend of sensationalism and risk that satisfies audience expectations for spectacle. In essence, aerialists reproduce the cultural identity of Circus through their embodied identity enactment. The following section discusses the three dominating Discourses that have traditionally governed Circus and how these have influenced how circus bodies are perceived.

Circus Discourses: Spectacle, Risk, and Freedom

Dominant organizational ideologies and culture are illustrated in organizational Discourses. Lower-case discourses reveal upper-cases Discourses, exemplifying ways of talking and subsequently, ways of thinking (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). This section provides an overview of circus-based literature that reveals three institutionally dominating ideologies: (a) Spectacle, (b) Risk, and (c) Freedom.

Spectacle Discourse. In his book tracing the trajectory of the circus from its roots of origin to its current iterations, Circus historian Jacob (2018) describes the circus as "an inexhaustible source of joy and anger, powerfully implanted in life, it is an age-old art that neither knows nor observes limitations…a living spectacle" (p. 233). Inside the program for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus, Ernest Hemingway—fascinated by the circus from early childhood—wrote of the circus as being "the only spectacle I know that, while you watch it, gives the quality of a truly happy dream" (1953). Circus historians identify Circus as a "parent spectacle," underscoring its spectacularism in contrast to theater productions (Coxe, 1980). Whereas theatrical productions provide spectators with actors playing make-believe, all illusion is lost in the backstage of performance, as if "looking at the back of a picture" (p. 109).

In the circus, performers possess the skills they perform on stage. Coxe (1980; as cited in Stoddart, 2016) notes that "the actor says he will 'play his part', the circus artiste tells you he will 'work his act'" (p. 16). Moreover, the relationship between the performer and spectator in the circus is central to the ability to create Spectacle. Likening the circus performer to a sculpture, the audience can see every movement of the performer and from every angle leaving little room for deception (Coxe, 1980; Stoddart,

2016). As circus performers 'work' their acts, spectators' hold the performer accountable for their ability to perform embodied skills (rather than an actor's pretend skills). The burden of Spectacle, therefore, falls on the performer. The intrinsic, demonstrative nature of circus performance produced the label of Circus as a "spectacle of actuality" (Coxe, 1980; Stoddart, 2016, p. 16). However, contrary to this traditional conceptualization of the absence of deception in the circus, the current research may reveal how circus artists *perform* their occupational identity to bear the burden of Spectacle.

Risk Discourse. Circus scholars have explored the performance of risk through aerial artistry and risk in general as a feature of Circus (Legendre, 2016; Stoddart, 2016; Tait, 2016). Some scholars argue that traditional iterations of Circus are rooted in Circus Maximus, the largest chariot stadium in Rome (Jacob, 2018). Considered to be the most popular form of entertainment at the time, spectators watched in suspense as gladiators battled and erupted in cheers and applause when captives were fed to wild beasts. When designing his equestrian school, "the father of modern circus," Philip Astley kept the circular shape of chariot stadiums because of its practicality and novelty (History of Circus, 2022; Victoria & Albert Museum, 2022). This succinct description of the influence of the circular arena of Circus—the word 'circus' is rooted in the Latin word for 'circle'—lays the foundation for Risk as a dominating Discourse in Circus.

Moreover, public perception of Circus (re)produces the Discourse that "performers take risks" (Tait, 2016, p. 529). In fact, Tait (2016) argues that Circus "enhances the contradictory tension for audiences between holding the expectation of an accident and wishing to avoid witnessing one" (p. 529). Furthermore, research suggests that circus performers reproduce this contradictory tension through discourse related to

how they perceive safety measures. For example, Cirque du Soleil provides behind-the-scenes safety checks (i.e., stagehands, carpenters, and electricians tasked with looking out for safety disruptions), which performers have described as intrusive and annoying (Gross, 2015). Given their response to safety checks, highly identified performers may perceive safety measures as intrusive or annoying because these go against their performances of identity as risk takers. Risk, therefore, is integrated as a feature of circus culture (Legendre, 2016) and circus performers accept a level of occupational risk.

This occupational risk is exemplified by the prevalence of injuries among circus performers. An analysis of five years of data provided by Cirque du Soleil (Shrier et al., 2009) revealed 18,336 injury reports from 1,376 artists (i.e., acrobats who performed "acts requiring gymnastics, diving, martial arts, aerial movements," p. 1144). Research on this demographic suggests that circus acrobats may be more prone to sustaining injury than professional athletes (Stubbe et al., 2018). In 2012, the Wall Street Journal reported that Cirque du Soleil's show "Kà" reported a higher injury rate than other top injury-prone occupations, including police protection, fire protection, and construction work (Berzon, 2012).

Moreover, circus performers do not only risk injury, but they also accept the occupational risk of death. An exploration of Cirque du Soleil states about the circus that "the viability of its business is rooted in the willingness of a core group of performers to risk their lives on a daily basis" (Gross, 2015). Although death is a rarity in the circus, Cirque du Soleil has suffered three performer casualties in its nearly 40-year trajectory (Usborne, 2018). However, this is not a comprehensive number of aerial acrobats who have lost their lives while doing their jobs. In fact, it is quite difficult to quantify how

many performers have died in the history of aerial acrobatics. The author suggests this figure is impossible to acquire as performers would want to avoid this knowledge.

In addition, research on circus performers has identified these as precarious workers who are not adequately compensated for their labor (Stephens, 2015; Walby & Stuart, 2021). A qualitative exploration of circus acrobats' socialization processes revealed there was an unspoken rule in their circus school to not speak of injuries or experiencing pain with other peers or coaches (Legendre, 2016). Since occupational risk is embedded into the organizational culture, talking about fear of injury or pain is perceived by members as defying organizational norms and consequently threatening membership. Therefore, "it is better to hide your pain, minimize your injuries, not talk about your fears" (Legendre, 2016, p. 129). Moreover, if aerialists are precarious workers, it may be that they are not adequately compensated precisely because of how their occupation is discursively constructed and influenced by the dominant ideology of Risk as a 'way of thinking'. Building on previous literature, an in-depth qualitative study of aerialists could reveal how member discourse (re)produces the larger Discourse of Risk, answering the call to understand "what are the physical risks for circus performers versus the public perception of risk?" (Tait, 2016, p. 529).

Freedom Discourse. Circus performance also conveys larger social ideas of Freedom. The ubiquity of aerial performance in the circus has conflated the social ideas and cultural identity of Circus with the imagery of the aerialist body. Through their artistry, aerialists can challenge the boundaries of materiality and defy social norms and expectations of the human body as "circus communicates ideas of freedom through bodily experience" (Tait, 2006, p. 5). Tait (2006) argues that "spectators are bodily

watching extreme circus action in ways that are fundamentally aligned with how bodies, and therefore their risks, are watched in society. Bodily freedom is sensory visceral risky action in circus" (p. 5).

For example, aerialists are praised for their muscular bodies and their performances of gender ambiguity (Legendre, 2016; Ritter, 1989). Male aerialists are praised for their "manly daring" ability while preserving conventional qualities of graceful femininity and female aerialists are praised for their beauty and described "as adventurous and courageous, traits considered manly" (Tait, 2005, p. 9). Aerial performance has been likened to a bird-like exuberance for its seemingly effortless artistry of abstract movement and physicality in accomplishing unsupported turns, twists, and leaps in the air (Tait, 2005). Aerial performance exists at the intersection of freedom and risk and reproduces the larger cultural notions and social ideas of Circus (Tait, 2006). Circus bodies, therefore, are material representations of the cultural identity of Circus. Considering this Discourse of Freedom, a focus of this study is to explore how aerialists (re)produce larger cultural ideas of Circus to perform Freedom. How these larger cultural ideas of Freedom are expressed through identity enactment, as well as how Spectacle and Freedom Discourses are (re)produced by workers, the following section expands the discussion of Circus performance in relationship to the social construction of body work occupations.

Bodywork in Pain and Performance

In settings marked by traditional management styles, body work is defined as how the body is perceived as a resource of the organization (Wolkowitz, 2002). In some of these organizations, body work manifests in service to others. For example, in healthcare,

workers service patients' bodies towards healing and health maintenance. In other body work organizations, the body is discussed as an asset managed by the organization, often nurtured and strengthened to achieve organizational goals (i.e., professional athletics; see Zanin, 2018, 2019). Organizations often control members' bodies by establishing markers for expectations of performance and overall dedication to the organization (Lopez, 2010). In other words, organizational members are expected to meet production and performance standards that are constitutively (re)constructed through discourse.

When members are unable to enact positive occupational identities, they may become frustrated with the organization, become less engaged, less committed, and less identified as organizational members (Michel, 2011). In athletic contexts, failure to positively enact organizational identity can carry implications for reporting injuries or seeking medical help stemming from fear of being sidelined (Zanin, 2018). Additionally, organizational members can foster feelings of inadequacy and low self-efficacy when body work discourses ignore the material limitations of the body (Zanin, 2018, 2019). Therefore, the (re)production of dominant organizational Discourses plays an important role in how body work is discursively constructed in the organization.

Membership in the circus, for example, is influenced by the dominant Discourses of Spectacle, Risk, and Freedom. The "essence of circus" (Davis, 2018) is defined in part by pushing the material boundaries of the human body. Circus performers are expected to awe, entertain, and fascinate. The essence of an aerialist lies in creating art that combines "physical prowess and innovation, challenging boundaries of gender, disability, ethnicity, and race" (Calver, 2020, p. 308). In other words, aerial acrobats are expected to display a near super-human ability that transcends the materiality of the body. Hence, similar to its

athletic organizational counterparts (Zanin, 2018, 2019), body work Discourses in Circus *inherently* challenge and purposely upend the material limitations of the body (see Legendre, 2016).

However, even when organizational d/Discourses construct the body as 'super-human,' bodies remain limited by their biological properties (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Zanin, 2019). The incompatible constructions of bodily performance and their material realities can be understood from the lens of Cartesian dualism (Harris, 2017). Descartes (1956, 1960) draws a distinction between the mind (i.e., nonphysical substance) and physical matter (i.e., the body) as two separate substances. From this perspective, the mind is documented as a thinking substance with the ability to extend into the universe and the body is perceived finite substance bound by its material properties. Cartesian logic, therefore, suggests the dual existence of man, identifying the mind as the locus of self-awareness and consciousness (i.e., "I think, therefore I am"). What this distinction means for the current context of study is that Cartesian dualism permeates social construction and processes of occupational identification, producing a disconnect between what the mind can *perceive* and what the body can *do*. This conceptualization of the mind-body divide, however, is challenged in this dissertation based on Ashcraft et al.'s (2009) argument that symbol and material are mutually influenced through interaction. Therefore, although Cartesian dualism would separate the mind from the body, this dissertation is focused on the removal of this distinction as a way of exploring the material consequences of social construction, and vice versa.

For example, when identity enactment is contingent on bodily performance, body workers can feel less identified when met with their material boundaries. However, as

aerialists are already expected to perform extraordinary physical ability (i.e., "people think I'm Superman for hanging off one arm"), Circus Discourses may help bolster—rather than undermine—self-efficacy, adequacy, and drive identification. Although aerial acrobats experience the material limitations of their body when training circus skills (i.e., they experience pain and injury), they may learn to accept and challenge these as features of their occupational identity and perceive pushing past these challenges as a positive identity enactment. However, further explorations of member discourses that are reproduced into larger institutional Discourses is needed to substantiate these claims.

Pain Valorization and Performance

Moreover, a key difference between circus artists and sports athletes is the performative elements of each. In sport, pain is traditionally normalized and valorized by both organizational members and spectators. Athletes who decide to subscribe to a play-through-pain narrative are commonly exalted as heroes or martyrs, depending on the outcome of the game (Ruston et al., 2019). In rugby contexts, for example, gender norms often dictate how men are "socialized to mask, hide and disregard pain" as a coping strategy to manage pain (Sparkes & Smith, 2008, p. 689). However, these performances of pain occur off the rugby court to portray stoicism and create separation between other teammates. Another example of hypermasculinity and pain performance embedded into sport is found with ice hockey players. These players are traditionally expected to lean into violent plays in which they both sustain and effect pain. Failure to do so can result in ostracization from other team members and spectators, who feminize their resistance to hypermasculinity, thus threatening their occupational identity (Fowler, 2021). Pain valorization is also a key aspect of positive occupational identity enactment in

competitive swimming (McNarry et al., 2020), cricket (Allen-Collinson, 2017), and soccer (Morris & Lewis, 2010).

In these athletic contexts, the normalization and valorization of pain is defined in sports psychology as disassociation. In other words, "by ignoring feelings of their body, athletes are sometimes able to perform through the pain," (Duquin, 1994, p. 270). Sports psychologists argue that disregarding the body's response to pain can make athletes more susceptible to injury and "repress the development of emotional sensitivity" (Duquin, 1994, p. 270). Moreover, sport psychology draws a parallel between socialization processes that reproduce "self-abnegation" and "bodily sacrifice" discourses, referring to these as "the process of disembodiment" (Duquin, 1994, p. 270). Accordingly, athletes who effectively perform through pain bolster their occupational identification. How this social construction process is enacted and how members reproduce these discourses and reify their occupational identity from a communicative perspective is yet to be deconstructed.

Contrary to athletic contexts, in the circus—as well as other athletic-performative contexts— the audience is kept purposefully unaware of the presence of pain. The aesthetic performance of pain gives spectators the illusion that pain is absent. Thereby, artist-athletes do not only sustain pain in accordance with their body work occupational roles, but they also perform the absence of pain. Beyond the psychological framework for pain disassociation, circus performers are socialized to actively mask pain and express aesthetic quality and graceful artistry in accordance with positive occupational identity enactment. Thus, a purpose of this study is to explore how these body workers are socialized to sustain pain, conceal pain, and express performance aesthetic quality.

Pain Socialization and Aesthetic Quality Performance

Organizational socialization describes the trajectory of members as they acquire knowledge of the norms, rules, behaviors, and expectations of a new organizational culture or role (Jablin, 1987; Kramer & Miller, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Socialization into organizational membership has four primary stages: (a) anticipatory socialization, (b) organizational entry, (c) ongoing socialization, and (d) organizational exit and disengagement (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). The first stage of anticipatory socialization occurs before new members join the organization. This stage is broken down into two sub-stages: (a) vocational anticipatory socialization (i.e., selection of specific occupational or vocational roles) and (b) organizational anticipatory socialization (selection of a specific organization). Organizational entry occurs when a new member officially becomes part of the organization. Ongoing socialization is the process of assimilation into the organizational culture. During the ongoing socialization stage, individuals become established members of the organization and are familiar with the rules, skills, and expectations of their organizational role. The final stage of organizational exit and disengagement occurs when members transition from organizational insider to organizational outsider (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). Kramer (2011a) notes that socialization phases "do not represent a rigid, linear process, but rather a generalized description of the process" (p. 53). Organizational socialization, therefore, is a dynamic, fluid process with blurred boundaries between phases.

Furthermore, organizational communication scholars have researched non-traditional trajectories for members, namely in the context of life-enrichment groups (Kramer, 2009; Kamer, 2011a; Kramer, 2011b; Kramer & Danielson, 2016; Meisenbach

& Kramer, 2014). In his study of volunteer roles in a community choir, Kramer (2011a) distinguishes *vocational anticipatory socialization* from *role anticipatory socialization*. The latter "acknowledges preparation for general roles" (p. 68). Building on these findings, the process of occupational socialization in which workers are socialized into a specific occupational role (i.e., aerial acrobats) versus a specific organization will be analyzed through this study. Members undergo occupational identification in part by learning norms and expectations from other members who share similar occupational roles (Sage, 1973). Second, circus organizations cater to professional (e.g., Montreal National Circus School), recreational, or a combination of the two demographics (cf. San Diego Circus Center). Therefore, some members enroll in preparatory training programs for emerging professionals and others transition from hobbyist to professional (Kramer, 2011a).

These varying pathways pose important implications for organizational communication scholarship. Kramer's (2011b) model for the socialization of voluntary members expands organizational socialization processes beyond the context of employment. While there are features of volunteer socialization processes that mirror the trajectory of some hobbyists-turned-professionals (i.e., reasons why people volunteer), voluntary membership is neither compensated nor do volunteers tend to pay to learn new skills. Therefore, the findings of this study can be used to illuminate a gap in member socialization processes when members have undergone the embodied aspect of socialization (i.e., they have learned to adapt to pain) and then transition to a professional occupational identity. In this scenario, the motivations for identity enactment shift from receiving individual benefits of hobbyist to receiving compensation in a professional role.

Moreover, an additional socialization model that can illuminate the occupational socialization process of aerial acrobats is investiture and divestiture (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Whereas investiture socialization invites the qualifications and qualities of newcomers as valuable criteria for success, divestiture socialization processes "seek to deny and strip away certain personal characteristics of recruit" (p. 64). The context of the study can illuminate the ways in which newcomers' embodiment is met with tactics of divestiture or investiture as these relate to the embodiment of pain (i.e., expecting pain tolerance to be modified, pain boundaries to be shifted). Furthermore, these tactics carry implications for how newcomers' identities are affirmed or disconfirmed at individual and institutional levels. Ashforth and Saks (1996) found that investiture tactics (i.e., identity-affirming) were positively related to organizational commitment and identification, whereas divestiture tactics "constitute individualized socialization" (Ashforth et al., 2007, p. 450). In organizational contexts, these distinctions have helped to explore why professionals develop more closely linked organizational identifications versus occupational identifications. Therefore, as this study is situated within an occupational context rather than a specific organizational context, its implications can be used to explore how members enact positive occupational identity throughout their socialization trajectory.

Occupational Identification of Aerial Acrobats

Although this study is contextualized in navigating the occupational identification of aerial acrobats, a succinct review of organizational identification is valuable to understand the development of employee identification in organizing. Organizational communication scholars have continued to conceptualize our understanding of

organizational identification to include organizational loyalty (Scott, 1997), distinguish identification to organizational boundaries (Cheney & Christensen, 2001), label as a decisive act (Barker & Tompkins, 1994) and conceptualize identification as distinctive from identity in that identification is a *discursive act* that helps to *shape* identity (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Chaput et al. (2011) identify the process of organizational identification as one that "occurs during everyday interactions" and is central to the constitution of an organization (p. 253).

As mentioned previously, while some scholars conceptualize identification as a subjective, cognitive process (see Mael & Ashforth, 1995), communication scholars argue that identification is an interactive process of social construction (Burke, 1969; Dutton et al., 1994). The process by which organizational members perform identities toward a target of identification is through perceived consubstantiality with other members (Gossett, 2002). Burke (1969) conceptualized identification as a rhetorical process of overcoming division. When our interests, values, experiences, or perceptions, to name a few, overlap with others, individuals become consubstantial (Quigley, 1998). While individuals remain separate in substance, the state of consubstantiality with others is a process of identification (i.e., "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another," Burke, 1969, p. 21).

In the context of identification to an organizational target of identification, Dutton et al., (1994) argue that members seek to "maintain a stable self-concept over time" (p. 245) such that members become highly identified with an organization when their self-concept resembles enduring images of their organization. In other words, organizational identification is strengthened when the target of identification "proves to be a reliable

source of self-definition" (p. 259). This relationship illuminates members' behaviors, or identity enactments, in response to organizational actions. Moreover, Kuhn and Nelson (2002) describe identification as a simultaneous "bottom-up process," arguing that "members participate in the production of identity structures" (p. 30) rather than a simple "top-bottom" process in which identity structures are imposed on members. Therefore, organizational members are co-creators of identity structures. Given the conceptualization of identification as a social, simultaneous co-constructed process of identity enactment, the study of the aerialist occupational identity from a theoretical lens of d/Discourse is justified because it can explore the interdependent relationship between identity structures and member behaviors.

Furthermore, the aerialist occupational identity is a worthwhile context to explore the simultaneous social construction of identity structures. Aerialists' fulfillment of their occupational role is nested in performing a "spectacle of actuality" (Coxe, 1980) for audiences. While the audience is often unaware of the extent of diligent training that the artist undergoes in preparation for their performance, the circus artists' ability to perform such feats is the result of dedicated, intense, and painful training regimens that are fraught with occupational risk (Legendre, 2016). To understand how aerial acrobats perform their occupational identity, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis framework is employed in this study.

Goffman (1959) likens social interaction to a theater context, arguing that people perform a version of the self in front of an audience (i.e., the front stage region) and prepare how they present the self in the backstage region. This clear divide is useful in understanding how aerial acrobats enact their occupational identity. When performing for

spectators, aerialists engage in *impression management* (i.e., manipulation of how the audience perceives the artist). To fulfill their occupational role, performers present effortlessness and seamless movement in the air (Tait, 2005, 2006). Although their performance requires significant amounts of strength, the aesthetic of their performance subdues presentations of brute strength to convey effortlessness. The tenets of aerial performance conceal the characteristics (i.e., strong) needed to fulfill their occupational role. To understand how Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework can reveal the ways in which aerialists enact their occupational identity and (re)produce institutional d/Discourse, the following section surveys how masking and emotional labor should be explored through the lens of circus performance.

Masking and Performance

Emotional labor is defined as the expression of manufactured, inauthentic emotions to create acceptable public displays that fulfill organizational and individual goals (Hochschild, 1983; Miller, 2007) As a research construct, emotional labor attends to the situational expectations of a given occupation, various types of emotional labor, the individual and organizational factors that contribute to regulating emotional labor, and the long-term implications of emotional labor on the well-being of both the individual and the organization (Grandey, 2000; Vuori et al., 2018). Emotional labor has been researched across a variety of organizational contexts, highlighting the challenges, implications, and negative repercussions that emotional labor has on organizational members and particularly among service workers (e.g., flight attendants, customer service representatives, cashiers, food servers, etc., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Miller, 2007; Tracy, 2005).

Emotional labor research in the context of athletic or artistic performance is limited to a few studies in the areas of professional wrestling (Smith, 2008), coaching and college athletics (Lee & Chelladurai, 2016; Romo, 2017), cruise ship performing (Tracy, 2000), and modeling (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Relatedly, literature on masking as a form of deception (i.e., manipulating the body and face while lying, Lewis, 1993), has attended to some athletic contexts. Pertaining specifically to injury in athletics, scholars suggest athletes significantly downplay (and mask) injury and only report injuries that are 'serious' enough to limit performance (Gupta et al., 2016; Wiechman et al., 2000). The inverse of masking, or being intentionally deceptive to exaggerate a reaction, has been studied across a variety of sports-based contexts. For example, soccer players exaggerate reactions to being tackled through *diving* (i.e., when a player attempts to deceive a referee and draw a free kick or penalty by exaggerating a tackle from an opponent, Morris & Lewis, 2009). In wheelchair rugby, some athletes engage in *sandbagging* by exaggerating their disability to meet criteria for participation (Lindemann, 2008). In a circus context, aerial acrobats likely reproduce a blend of these deceptive behaviors (i.e., masking and exaggerating expressions) when embodying their performance character.

In this particular intersection of emotional labor, aerial acrobats appear to enact a blend of emotional regulation (i.e., expending effort to comply with the socioemotional demands of their profession—in this case, expectations of performance), surface acting (i.e., portraying emotions they do not feel, Lu et al., 2019), and masking of pain through manipulation of the body and facial expression. Therefore, member discourses that reproduce socialization to pain may also perpetuate emotional regulation, surface acting, and masking to achieve performance quality. Attending to pain socialization processes

and performance will likely produce insights about how d/Discourses are (re)produced as a mechanism of occupational socialization.

However, these discourses alone would perpetuate concerns related to body work in organizational structures that ignore the material limitations of the body (Zanin, 2018, 2019), even within an organization in which its entire identity is nested in creating spectacle. Therefore, this study can expand on past findings by analyzing how discourse can bolster motivation (i.e., to tolerate and mask pain and develop performance aesthetic), drive membership, and influence the transformation of the body. To understand how these discourses are reproduced to fortify, rather than erode, occupational identification (cf. Michel, 2011), the next section proposes the guiding research questions of this study.

Research Questions

Drawing from the overarching bodies of literature regarding d/Discourse, socialization, and occupational identification in body work, an exploration of the socialization process of aerial acrobats to pain as a form of occupational identity enactment is proposed. The literature review established the importance of conceptualizing organizational communication through a constitutive lens of d/Discourse. The review then introduced how Circus is a worthwhile context to explore the social construction and material realities of body work occupations. By outlining the dominant Discourses that have traditionally governed Circus—prefaced by a brief history of the circus trajectory—a claim proffered in this study is that to understand contemporary Circus discourse and its influence on workers' corporeality, it is necessary to navigate how these Discourses were foundationally (re)produced. Furthermore, a socialization

theoretical framework is useful for exploring how aerial acrobats navigate the process of (re)conceptualizing occupational pain as concurrent with the process of identification. Therefore, this study proposes the embodied experience of pain should be analyzed as an interactive socially constructed process through which participants create a shared reality rather than a subjective, cognitive experience. To understand this process, the following research question was proposed:

> **RQ1:** How are aerial acrobats socialized to navigate pain as a feature of their occupational identity?

Furthermore, drawing on the theoretical perspective of identification as a process of social interaction, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis framework is applied to this study to understand how workers (re)produce traditional Circus d/Discourses through occupational identity enactment. A dramaturgical analysis can uncover the ways aerialists negotiate occupational identity enactment with the material limitations of their body. To explore these identity enactments a second research question was proposed:

> **RQ2:** How do aerial acrobats reproduce institutional d/Discourses in juxtaposition to the material limitations of the body when enacting their occupational identity?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This qualitative research study utilized a phronetic, iterative approach (Tracy, 2018, 2020). This process combines elements of grounded theorizing in which the data is analyzed throughout the research process and concurrently with data collection. The result is an analysis that is grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014), guiding research questions, and informed by relevant bodies of literature (Tracy, 2020). To understand the complexities and nuances of occupational pain as a feature of occupational identity enactment, I decided that a phronetic iterative approach would be most suitable for this project. Given the research context and foci of the study–to learn the lived experiences of aerial acrobats as they navigate their occupational identity and immerse in Circus culture—a qualitative approach was chosen over quantitative research methodologies as a qualitative analysis is more suitable for portraying a holistic picture of the research scene (Tracy, 2020).

Moreover, qualitative research employs the researcher as an instrument of the research design, accounting for the researchers' self-reflexivity (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2020) versus methodologies that keep the researcher separate from the instrument of study. I am an aerial acrobat with performing and coaching experience. A qualitative research methodology makes space for my role as an institutional member of Circus and first-hand experience of the socialization process and subsequent enactment of the aerialist occupational identity. In doing so, the research design accounts for the author's "goals, interests, proclivities, and biases" throughout the entirety of the research process (Tracy, 2020, p. 5).

Procedures to Ensure Qualitative Quality

Appropriate strategies to ensure qualitative rich rigor and credibility, as outlined under Tracy's (2010) criteria for excellent qualitative research were used throughout this dissertation. First, to warrant rich rigor, I collected over 60 hours of interview transcripts from 27 aerial acrobats. Given that the data collection process was mostly limited to virtual interview data (due to Covid safety measures), it was not feasible to gather field work data. However, this limitation provided an opportunity to virtually engage a wider sample variety of participants than would have been available in a single location. Moreover, this study meets the criteria for feasibility (i.e., the project is practical and in accordance with resources available, Tracy, 2020) as I am a member of the circus community and as such, was better disposed to recruit participants over a non-member. In fact, many participants commended me for initiating this project and increasing the research available for this demographic, stating that more research needs to be conducted on circus performers, pain discourse, and institutional practices. Tracy (2020) recommends researchers consider sufficient yield as a measure of a high-quality qualitative research project.

Moreover, Tracy (2020) argued that researchers should consider and demonstrate suitability to their research aims (i.e., the project encompasses the theoretical issues of interest). The theoretical underpinnings of this study are nested in d/Discourse, occupational identity, socialization, and body work. By sampling this demographic, this interview study reached individuals with a shared occupational identity within an athletic-performative context. All participants had undergone similar socialization processes that were conducive to them enacting similar occupational roles. They all

shared a familiarity with and demonstrated resonance with the dominating ideologies of Circus and criteria for identity enactment of the aerial acrobat occupation. Regardless of their background or process of occupational identification, they demonstrated a shared understanding of the meaning of aerial acrobat and the occupational criteria of their role. In addition, they all claimed membership to Circus to some degree.

This study also meets the established criteria for credibility by achieving thick description and crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2020). First, my researcher's position as a member of the in-group allowed me to invoke tacit knowledge (i.e., contextual understanding and taking for granted assumptions) during interviews that established camaraderie between researcher and participant, allowing for a more natural flow of conversation and rapport building (Ellingson, 2017; Tracy, 2020). The findings of this study also provide thick description by giving "abundant concrete detail" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843) of interviewee responses through direct quotes from transcripts that convey nuance and rich meaning from their perspectives (Ellingson, 2009). Included in the findings are anecdotes that highlight the complexities of interviewee perspectives and thoughts that formulate meaning for the emergent themes of this study. Moreover, I collected multiple forms of data (i.e., interview and arts-based elicitation) and incorporated multiple theoretical perspectives that guided the analysis. By using a phronetic, iterative approach, the study was able to provide crystallization by increasing the scope and understanding of the research foci. As the study was initially solely centered on occupational pain socialization, the multiple forms of data collected, and various theoretical perspectives illuminated elements of occupational identity enactment beyond pain that are presented in the analysis.

Research Reflexivity

To meet the qualitative research criteria of sincerity (Tracy, 2010), this section outlines how I engaged *self-reflexivity* throughout the research process as I identify as a professional aerial acrobat. By demonstrating "an honest and authentic awareness of one's own identity and research approach" (Tracy, 2020, p. 273), stakeholders can know the motivations and impact of the researcher's positionality on the research process. Thus, the paragraphs that follow outline my experience in aerial acrobatics:

I started training aerial acrobatics in 2015 at a circus studio in southern California that catered to a recreational demographic. As a hobbyist, I was motivated by the community atmosphere, strength training opportunities, adrenaline, and sense of empowerment I received through aerial acrobatics. At the time, a single aerial class cost approximately $30 USD for one hour, with options for class packages and monthly memberships available. Aerial studios were not as ubiquitous in 2015 as they are in 2022, however, this fitness niche continues to be quite expensive. After training primarily silks and lyra for two years, I began to coach youth silks classes—and eventually adult classes—in 2017. After relocating to Phoenix, Arizona for graduate school, I began to coach at a local circus arts studio that caters to both recreational and professional demographics. I primarily coached sling, followed by lyra, silks, and trapeze.

Through coaching, I had access to free training space and discounted classes. It is not uncommon for hobbyists to transition into coaching and enjoy the perks that being a staff member affords you. These perks come at a corporeal cost. I quickly felt the pressure to have a dedicated training schedule and increase my skillset and knowledge base. Whereas the recreational studio I originally trained at was a boutique studio with a

relatively small training space, the Phoenix location offered a larger training space and a wider curriculum of classes. Therefore, I needed to cross-train in other apparatuses to be qualified to coach and substitute other aerialists' classes as needed. I spent a significant amount of time breaking down technical skills and sequences for my students to learn. I had to find the right balance between keeping up with my own training and time spent preparing my classes. While simultaneously enrolled in a rigorous doctoral program, my own training and artistic creation often took a backseat to my aerial teaching. At one point, I taught as many as nine classes per week over a span of four days. During spring break and summer, I taught youth summer camps (i.e., four days a week for four hours) in addition to my regular class load. The money and strength conditioning were nice, the physical strain and limited recovery time in between teaching commitments was not.

Although I had performed in student showcases and studio open houses throughout my aerial journey, it was in 2021 when I first got booked for paid performance gigs. I have performed ambient (i.e., atmospheric) gigs for corporate parties and community events through entertainment companies and have been booked for solo and doubles acts at local venues throughout Phoenix. To bolster my performance toolkit, I started to train on chains loops (i.e., a swing made of two sets of metal chains). I have experience creating and offering workshops, aerial choreography, curriculum development, backstage production, and rigging. My position as both aerial acrobat and researcher lent an autoethnographic lens of self-reflexivity to this study, allowing me to draw from my own experiences and viewpoints as I crafted the research design and collected and analyzed the data. Specifically, I can speak to the experience that

hobbyists-turned-professionals share, where what started as a hobbyist identity became an occupational identity.

As a member of the ingroup, my position facilitated access to the participant demographic and use *verstehen*, which focuses on the "study of groups on their own terms and from their own point of view" (Tracy, 2020, p. 52). Although I came from a hobbyist background, I built rapport with participants quickly as we shared similar learning experiences and I was familiar with the circus jargon, language, technical aspects, lifestyle, apparatus names and descriptors, circus production companies and schools, rigging knowledge, and members of the aerial acrobatics community. Although the trajectory to our occupational role varied, I connected with participants who started their careers through a professional-track program through our shared embodied experiences (e.g., socialization to the normalization of pain, balancing teaching and training, experiencing wear and tear on the body, managing injury, etc.). A key advantage of my positionality was my ability to empathize with participants' physiological and discursive experiences of enduring pain as well as shared experiences of managing pain and injury at work.

I have sustained several injuries throughout my acrobatic career. My first injury, a strained right hamstring, occurred during my time as a recreational aerialist. Since becoming a professional, I have sustained a tear to my left hamstring, nerve damage to both shoulders, a small labrum tear to my right shoulder, nerve damage to my left hip, nerve damage to my left wrist, dislocated and bruised ribs, one broken rib, a forearm hematoma, two digit hairline fractures, intercostal muscle strains, and countless superficial burns and abrasions. Most of these injuries—except for the torn hamstring and

broken rib—allowed me to continue my training and teaching schedule with little limitation. Therefore, I was also able to relate to participants' anecdotes of training, coaching, and performing through injury. While my shared experiences with participants afforded me advantages, my positionality came with some disadvantages as well. My researcher bias resulted in moments where it was difficult to separate participants' lived experiences from my own and could impact how I analyzed the data. Participant responses, however, often kept me in check. For example, one participant wanted to deviate from the interview guide to relay how her membership in Circus has resulted in significant body image and self-esteem issues. She started her sentence with, "I know your study is all about pain…" and then proceeded to tell me about the self-esteem challenges she endured during her professional career. Her expression was an important reminder to not allow my own research agenda to inhibit participants' expression.

A second disadvantage of my positionality emerged regarding the limited depth that participants would use to describe circus jargon and language specific to aerial acrobatics. Because they knew I was familiar with Circus, some of their explanations were more surface level than desired and did not go into deeper detail unless prompted. Thirdly, the embodied and social transformation of pain was a salient feature in my own experience and motivated the research design of this study. Participants with prior body work experience where pain was normalized (e.g., gymnastics) or individuals with higher pain thresholds would navigate a different trajectory where pain may not have been as salient a factor as it was in my own lived experience.

Data Collection and Procedures

After completing the necessary procedures for approval implemented by the ASU Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A), participants were recruited through representative and snowball sampling. Representative sampling allowed me to recruit participants that could "replicate characteristics of the larger group" (Tracy, 2020, p. 83). My involvement in various circus arts organizations since 2015 facilitated my ability to reach out to an extensive social network of professional aerialists. Professional aerialists included individuals who perform or coach in exchange for monetary payment. Potential participants were contacted through various channels, including direct face-to-face communication, telephone, messaging applications, and social media calls. Beyond this social network, I also used snowball sampling techniques by asking select participants to recommend other aerial acrobats who may be interested in participating. I also posted social media calls on two private Facebook groups: (a) *Circademics* and (b) *Safety in Aerial Arts*. Numerous members of each of these groups responded to the call and I responded to each accordingly. After reviewing the participation criteria with them, some individuals were not eligible to participate in the study.

Inclusion criteria for this study required that participants (a) be least 18 years old, (b) have current or previous participation in aerial acrobatics of at least two years, (c) self-identify as an aerialist, (d) have an association and participation with a circus organization for the purpose of learning circus skills (i.e., not self-taught), and (e) have coaching or performing experience with a circus organization. These criteria were established to ensure that participants had thoroughly experienced, engaged in, and could speak to the socialization process of becoming an aerial acrobat.

At the start of the study, participants were provided with a weblink to complete a Qualtrics survey. This survey included the consent form (see Appendix B) and asked participants to provide signed consent, contact information, and respond to demographic and criteria-fulfillment items. As part of the research design, participants completed primary and secondary interviews. Both interviews were conducted primarily via Zoom, with two participants opting to be interviewed in person. All interviews were both video and audio recorded with participants' consent. Most primary and secondary interviews were conducted within one week of each other.

Participants received compensation for participating in each interview portion of the study. Participants who were located within the United States or had access to a U.S. based Amazon account received one $25 Amazon gift card for each interview (up to $50 total). Participants who were located outside of the U.S. and did not have access to a U.S. based Amazon account were compensated the equivalent of $25 USD for each interview portion through an electronic wire transfer service (up to $50 total). In lieu of an electronic wire transfer, one non-U.S. based participant requested, "Send me an interesting book." I chose to send a copy of *The Circus: 1870s-1950s*. Lastly, in lieu of receiving the compensation directly, one participant requested that her compensation be donated to a charitable organization. I donated $50 USD to 350, a non-profit organization advocating for climate change and clean energy.

Participants

A total of 27 circus acrobats (N = 27) participated in this study. Participant ages ranged from 19 to 47 years (M = 30.11, SD = 6.84). Participants self-identified as female (n = 19), male (n = 6), and non-binary (n = 1). One participant preferred not to report

gender identity. Participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual (n = 15), bisexual (n = 2), queer (n = 2), gay (n = 3), lesbian (n = 1) and pansexual (n = 3). One participant preferred not to report sexual orientation. Most participants self-reported as White (n = 22). The remaining participants self-reported as White/Latino (n = 1), Hispanic/Latino (n = 1), Asian (n = 1), or opted not to report (n = 2). The educational background of participants broke down as follows: Bachelor's degree (n = 16), Associate degree (n = 1), Master's degree (n = 3), trade/technical/vocational training (n = 4), high school graduate/diploma/equivalent (n = 1), and some college credit/no degree (n = 2).

Participants' experience in circus acrobatics ranged from 3 to 23 years (M = 10.11, SD = 4.56). All participants (N = 27) received formal training through an established circus organization, school, or program. All participants (N = 27) reported they had previously both coached and performed aerial acrobatics. At the time of data collection, participants reported that they currently coached and performed (n = 20), only coached (n = 2), only performed (n = 1), or neither coached nor performed (n = 4). Participants who coached but did not perform at the time of data collection reported that performing opportunities were limited due to Covid-19 restrictions and shutdowns. Participants in this study provided a vast variety of specialized training in their apparatus(es) of choice. Participants specialized in straps (n = 6), tissu/silks (n = 12), lyra/hoop (n = 6), corde lisse/rope (n = 6), dance trapeze (n = 5), static trapeze (n = 2), hammock/sling (n = 4), aerial cradle (n = 1), Korean cradle (n = 1), flying pole (n = 1), Chinese pole (n = 1), aerial chair (n = 1), chains (n = 1), hair hanging (n = 1), and aerial juggling (n = 1). Many participants declared a specialty in multiple apparatuses (n = 17).

Primary and Secondary Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews are a valuable source of data collection as these allow participants to share their lived experience through accounts, opinions, reasonings, etc. (Tracy, 2020). A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendices C and D) was designed to prompt for underlying tacit knowledge central to their occupational identity of circus aerial acrobats and membership in their respective circus organizations. In addition, as part of the research design, the interview guide was structured in such a way that encouraged participants to employ their creativity using arts-based elicitation questions. All 27 participants completed the Qualtrics survey and both interview portions. Primary interviews ranged from 45 to 88 minutes (M = 60.70, SD = 12.6). The primary interview design elicited retrospective recollection of participants' experiences with pain, injury, and performance in aerial acrobatics. Example questions included: *"How do other members talk about experiencing pain in aerial acrobatics?", "What are some messages you have received from coaches related to managing pain?",* and *"What is the best advice that you have received about performing?"*

At the end of the primary interview, participants were verbally given instructions to complete the Photovoice component of the study. After each primary interview was concluded, I shared a private Google folder with each participant that included the Photovoice instructions for them to upload their media files. I did not access participants' media until these were discussed during the second interview. During the second interview, I used arts-based elicitation questions (i.e., using a visual aid to drive discussion), which can "can spark creativity, moving respondents from solely textual

information to considering the visual, material, and embodied feelings that can be difficult to articulate in words alone" (Tracy, 2020, p. 199).

Upon completing the Photovoice component of the interview, the remaining items of the protocol prompted participants to speak on various topics related to managing challenges and emotions around being an aerial acrobat and to elicit self-reflection. Examples of these items included: *"What do you consider to be your biggest challenges or weaknesses as an aerialist?", "When do you feel frustrated when training or performing?"* and*, "How can circus be a refuge from the trauma of life and how can circus give individuals additional trauma?"* All 27 participants completed the secondary interview and participated in Photovoice elicitation. Although prompted to include only two images, several participants shared more than two pictures as well as included videos. In total, 66 images and videos were collected from 27 participants. Secondary interviews ranged from 46 to 99 minutes (M = 67.12, SD = 17.12). Professional transcripts were reviewed for accuracy prior to analysis. Interview transcripts were stored on my password protected computer and the names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms. All participant transcript files were saved under the corresponding pseudonym such that transcripts were never linked to participants' names.

Photovoice Arts-based Elicitation

Given the artistic characteristic of the sample population, I deemed it necessary to include arts-based research as part of the data collection procedures. Tracy (2020) notes that "arts-based approaches can access emotion, tacit assumptions, and collective sensemaking" (p. 70). Thus, to give participants a suitable channel through which they could express their perspectives, I used Photovoice (i.e., participants are asked to capture

visuals and comment on these, Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999). I asked participants to upload two photos relevant to each of the following prompts: (a) *Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you* and (b) *Provide an image that represents the reality of being an aerialist.* I informed participants that they were welcome to provide photos of themselves, objects, or publicly available images of other individuals. In short, participants were encouraged to choose media that came to mind upon hearing each prompt.

Photovoice elicitation provided a valuable contribution to the data as these images elucidate the "front stage" (i.e., what the audience does see) and the "backstage" (i.e., what the audience does not see) dimensions of being an aerialist. During analysis, these photos provided rich substance to understand the meaning-making process identity enactment in each region in accordance with Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959). At the start of the secondary interview, I posed the following questions to participants for each image they provided: *"What is happening in this image?", "Why did you choose this specific image to respond to the prompt?",* and *"How do you feel when you see this image? What comes to mind?"* As data collection progressed, I included the additional question: *"What word comes to mind when you see this photo?*" These questions were posed to elicit responses through which participants could speak to occupational identity enactment and how these mirrored—or failed to mirror—institutional Discourse enactments.

Data Analysis

A phronetic iterative analysis "alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories" (Tracy, 2020, p.

209). To employ this type of analysis, I used abductive inquiry to examine the data in accordance with the posed research questions (Charmaz, 2014), reviewing the guiding literature, and continuing a back-and-forth iterative process between the research questions, emergent data, and guiding literature (Tracy, 2020). Guided by the paradigmatic underpinning of abductive reasoning, this analysis was completed through a cyclical, iterative process. The first step in analyzing the data consisted of collecting and organizing the raw materials (i.e., interview data, photos, and videos). Two participants provided videos alongside their photos. However, these were not used in the analysis. Once the interview data was returned from the transcription service, I listened to each interview in its entirety to review the data and edit any transcription errors. Furthermore, I took a naturalistic approach when reviewing the transcribed data, keeping grammatical and translation errors (Widodo, 2014). All interviews were conducted in English, however, three participants were not fluent English speakers such that inconsistencies in language use were kept in the transcription. I did remove verbal fillers when the removal of these allowed for a more fluid reading of the transcription but did not compromise the meaning of the data. This data immersion process occurred in a cyclical fashion both prior to and concurrent with the analysis process, allowing me to become intimately familiar with the data and "facilitate [a] close examination of participants' words" (Tracy, 2020, p. 203).

As stated, the analysis process took place cyclically and simultaneously with data immersion and data collection (i.e., I began the analysis concurrently with conducting interviews) using a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software to organize and code the data into a codebook. Initially, the research questions asked: (a) How are

aerialists socialized to navigate pain in Circus and what are the outcomes of these socialization processes? and (b) How are aerialists socialized to cultivate resilience in Circus and what function does resilience fulfill? During primary-cycle coding, I chose to explore beyond the proposed research questions and reviewed all emergent data. The initial process of primary-cycle coding, or first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2011), included line-by-line coding to highlight the words and phrases that best describe what the data presents (Tracy, 2020). As recommended by Tracy (2020), 20% of the interview transcripts were coded through line-by-line coding. After completing open line-by-line coding for ten interviews (i.e., five primary interviews and five secondary interviews for five participants), I engaged in a more focused coding process with the existing codes as I analyzed the remainder of the data. During this primary-cycle coding, the emergent data did not reveal resilience as a prevalent code compared to other codes and I removed RQ2 (i.e., How aerialists are socialized to cultivate resilience in Circus and what function does resilience fulfill?).

After this initial open primary-cycle coding process, I reduced the data set to focus on instances where participants mentioned pain-related and injury-related experiences. First, through a process of fracturing (i.e., splitting the data into small slices; Tracy, 2020), I made very fine distinctions between emergent codes using a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). A constant comparative method compares "the data applicable to each code" and these code definitions are then modified to fit new data (Tracy, 2020, p. 220). For example, the code "non-serious injuries" included descriptions of surface injuries, temporary loss of sensation, or numbness, whereas the code "superficial skin lesions" included descriptions of the most common skin or surface-level

lesions. These codes were then combined into one emergent code, “superficial or short-term injuries.”

Continuing a constant comparative method for emergent codes, I identified preliminary themes regarding pain and injury within the context of aerial acrobatics. All mentions of pain and injury were included and fractured during this phase. For example, participants’ mentions of pain experienced by their students was coded as separately from pain they experienced themselves. Similarly, participants’ mention of how their coaches responded to pain-related expressions was coded as separately from their own coaching approach when responding to students’ expressions of pain. When data did not fit into an established code, a new code was created. This process continued until the pain and injury related data was entirely fractured.

Once the data was fractured, I began to group emergent codes into different categories, revealing distinctions between “good pain” and “bad pain,” apparatus-specific pains, as well as attitudes toward pain between in-group and out-group members. I used *in vivo* terms to label some specific codes (i.e., “Circus hurts”). *In vivo* coding uses direct phrasing from participants rather than language that is derived from the researcher (Strauss, 1987; Tracy, 2020). Given the documented individual, subjective nature of experiencing pain (Cosio, 2020; Hadjistavropoulos et al., 2004; Linton & Shaw, 2011), I deemed appropriate to have emergent codes reflect participants’ own language as well as reveal in-group lexicon.

Guided by socialization (Berkelaar & Harrison, 1999; Jablin, 1987; Kramer & Miller, 1999), occupational identification (Ashcraft, 2007; Meisenbach, 2008), and d/Discourse (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) literature, emergent codes were categorized

into instances that related to anticipatory socialization, ongoing socialization, identification, and members' everyday talk. Through this secondary-cycle coding iterative process, the emerging themes were reviewed for overlap and theoretical fit to provide interpretations and explanations of the data. These themes were then combined into more fine-tuned themes that revealed different phases of socialization when navigating pain. Moreover, as pain was a prevalent construct throughout the analysis, the themes revealed how aerial acrobats used pain as a tool, resource, and channel throughout their occupational socialization process and as criteria to enact their occupational identity. In short, the analysis revealed the use of pain as a way of work in this context. Therefore, the term *pain work* was introduced as a unique subcategory of body work in which workers are required to sustain, endure, and manage pain to fulfill their occupational role. At the development of *pain work* as a focus of the study, RQ1 was modified from, *How are aerialists socialized to navigate pain in Circus and what are the outcomes of socialization processes?* to *How are aerialists socialized to navigate pain as a feature of their occupational identity?* The purpose of this modification was two-fold: (a) to include occupational identity as a construct as pain was revealed as a feature of this occupation and (b) to exclude "outcomes of the socialization process" as I considered this unnecessary and redundant. To answer RQ1, the emergent themes revealed four key phases of pain work socialization when navigating pain: (a) experience, (b) tolerate, (c) accept, and (d) proselytize. These phases were then integrated into a cyclical process model that is explicated in the following chapter.

At this phase, the data revealed pain and injury-related themes that did not align with the guiding research question or literature. The data revealed a distinction between

an ongoing socialization process of navigating pain (i.e., providing an answer to RQ1) and managing occupational pain and injury as an established professional aerialist. For example, the code "binary in performing" included statements that suggest workers are fulfilling their occupational role by taking care of their bodies when they are injured and simultaneously violating their occupational role by not performing. The emergence of the "binary in performing" code and similar others prompted me to add a second research question: *How do aerial acrobats negotiate an occupational identity in alignment with traditional Circus Discourses?* I then expanded the guiding literature to include pain valorization, masking, and occupational identification in body work contexts (Allen-Collinson, 2017; McNarry et al., 2020; Morris & Lewis, 2009; Zanin, 2018). I also reviewed d/Discourse literature (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) in alignment with overarching Discourses of traditional Circus institutions (Tait, 2005, 2006).

Guided by the aforementioned bodies of literature and RQ2, I re-initiated open primary-cycle coding for the entirety of the data set. Emergent codes that did not align within the scope of RQ2 were stored for future research projects. I then focused on identifying patterns between codes that appeared frequently in the data and grouped these together through the process of axial/hierarchical coding. Axial coding "is the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding" (Tracy, 2020, p. 226; see Charmaz, 2014). Hierarchical coding is an axial coding practice that groups emergent codes that can be nested into larger umbrella categories (Tracy, 2020). Through a hierarchical coding process, I created categories that provided more thorough interpretations of micro-level discourses (see Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) that reflected the dominant traditional Circus Discourses of Spectacle, Risk, and Freedom. Continuing

an abductive, iterative process, the author revisited the raw data and drew *in vivo* language from participants that (re)produced institutional Circus Discourses. For example, when participants expressed "The show must go on" as an axiom, they did so in connection with discussing instances in which the participant was in danger during a performance. Thus, the use of the phrase, "The show must go on" was an emergent code that included statements that suggest aerialists (re)produce the institutional Discourse of Risk by performing through instances that put them in physical danger.

This phase of coding resulted in emergent codes that reflected the (re)production of multiple institutional d/Discourses. To better understand and organize the data, I drafted a loose analysis outline segmented by the three Dominant discourses (i.e., Spectacle, Risk, Freedom). The loose analysis outline emphasized the overlap between the institutional Discourses and emergent codes. Thus, I turned to writing as a form of inquiry. Tracy (2020) states that "qualitative researchers find meaning by writing the meaning into being" (p. 322). In other words, qualitative researchers come to *know* and learn through the writing process. One way of practicing writing as a method of inquiry is to write the same incident from various perspectives. In this case, I drafted a findings chapter based on the loose analysis outline and kept emergent codes in multiple categories. Through this process, the data revealed that although institutional Discourse enactments overlapped, the codes themselves indicated separate themes. For example, the codes "Performing is a gift for the audience, not the performer" (i.e., statements that convey performers cater to the audience) and "Circus is about the show, not who is in the show" (i.e., statements that convey individual performers are not as important as the production) both (re)produce a d/Discourse of Spectacle. However, they do so in different

contexts. Whereas the first code reflects occurrences that include the audience, the latter omits the audience. I found this distinction was prevalent throughout the emergent codes.

Therefore, I decided to apply Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959) to this portion of the analysis to better explicate the data. As a result, the second research question was modified from, *How do aerial acrobats negotiate an occupational identity in alignment with traditional Circus Discourses?* to, *How do aerial acrobats reproduce institutional d/Discourses and negotiate these in juxtaposition to the material limitations of the body when enacting their occupational identity?* Tracy (2020) notes that altering research questions is a hallmark of rigorous, data-driven qualitative research. While "early questions provide orientation and a launch pad for action" (p. 19), more nuanced research foci can develop once the researcher enters the field to allow for richer interpretations and attend to issues made salient by participants. Therefore, the modified RQ2 was better suited to encompass the emergent themes of identity enactments in accordance with Goffman's (1959) front stage and back stage regions. These themes are discussed in detail in the findings section and represented in Table 1. Throughout this process of analysis, I simultaneously analyzed Photovoice materials and the corresponding interview data (i.e., participant voiceover when discussing the images).

Photovoice Analysis

Guided by Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield's (2018) arts-informed approach to Photovoice data analysis, I created an addendum to my codebook to include the images provided by each participant and reviewed each image alongside the transcribed voiceover from participants as they discussed their images. Next, I employed a *preliminary analysis procedure* to "organize the interpretation of the data, to provide an

overview of how each photograph was discussed by the participant" (p. 5) by creating a table for each image within the codebook. This preliminary analysis developed a *structural description*, which is "the process of seeking all possible meanings, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced" (p. 5). I achieved structural description by organizing the Photovoice interview data into the following categories: (a) What is the photograph of? (i.e., the researcher's interpretation), (b) How does the participant describe the photograph?, (c) What does the participant say about why this photograph was chosen?, (d) How does the participant formulate meaning (identified via descriptions of how they feel about the photograph and use of emotionally-laden language), and (e) What word(s) does the participant use to describe this photograph?

After completing the preliminary analysis procedure for all 66 images, I used the same iterative approach as previously noted to integrate the Photovoice data within the data used in response to RQ2. This process occurred by identifying paired participant images that were congruent with the emergent themes of identity enactments to visually represent a front stage/backstage dichotomy. These images, alongside the categorized data from the preliminary analysis procedure were included in the findings section of backstage identity enactments. Lastly, images that did not function as pairs to visually represent a front stage/backstage dichotomy were included throughout both findings chapters as visual examples to elucidate on jargon or terminology for which verbal descriptions would be inadequate and fail to capture the full meaning of the term. I reviewed the Photovoice interview data corresponding to these images in relationship to

the findings for RQ1 and curated them according to where they visually represented the data.

CHAPTER 4

PAIN WORK SOCIALIZATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Through their shared collective occupational identity of aerial acrobats, this analysis draws on the unique lived experience of each performer to render a crystallized exploration of how aerial acrobats are socialized to navigate pain in the process of occupational identification. Guided by RQ1, this analysis (a) delineates the socialization process through which the meaning of pain is transformed and (b) builds on past theorizing about body work by introducing the subcategory of *pain work*.

Occupational Socialization to Pain Work: (Re)Negotiating the Social and Physiological Experience of Pain

The first research question (RQ1) was posed to explore how aerial acrobats are socialized to navigate pain in the process of occupational identification. When asked about the role that pain plays in aerial acrobatics, all participants confirmed that pain was normalized as a feature of their occupational role. The interview protocol included several questions specifically relating to pain, however, some participants brought up pain without prompting as one of the first sensations they experienced when introduced to aerial acrobatics. For example, during her first class on static trapeze (i.e., a horizontal bar hung by two ropes that stays in place, VerticalWise, 2020), straps and silks artist Stella (age 34, 12 years' experience), recalled, "It hurt so much to even go on the ropes and hold on to the bar." During her first silks class, silks artist JaJa (age 27, 9 years' experience) shared, "It hurt really bad on my feet. The lock on the feet were pretty intense on the arch of your foot." When lyra and sling artist Tia (age 40, 10 years'

experience) first sat on an aerial lyra, her reaction was, “It was horrible. It was so painful. And I hated it. I was like, I’m never doing that again.”

Participants were asked to recall their early experiences with pain and how they managed and conceptualized pain throughout their aerial journey. An in-depth analysis revealed a non-linear socialization process through which individuals learn how to accept pain as ubiquitous in aerial acrobatics. As individuals learn to adapt to pain, they eventually lean into the physiological sensation of pain as a measure of growth and success. The findings of this study indicate that individuals negotiate both the social and physiological experience of pain in juxtaposition with their increasing pain tolerance, burgeoning strength, and skills development. Given the prominence of pain in enacting the aerialist occupational identity, this evidence suggests that *pain work* is a unique subcategory of body work in which workers are required to sustain, endure, and manage pain to fulfill their occupational role. *How* pain workers meet the criteria to embody their occupational identity is demonstrated through a four-phase cyclical process that details the iterative transformation of pain: (a) experience, (b) tolerate, (c) embrace, and (d) proselytize.

Cyclical Process of Meaning Making of Pain

In line with socialization literature that recognizes dynamic, non-linear adjustment processes (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Woodrow & Guest, 2019), the author found that the adjustment process to pain is cyclical as it accounts for both the social and experiential construction of pain in participants’ bodies. Pain as a general feature was introduced early in participants’ experiences with aerial acrobatics. However, individuals cycle through the adjustment process of adapting to pain as their bodies learn different *types* of pain

from contact with new apparatuses or as they learn new skills. This process contributes to socialization literature as it highlights the dynamic, non-linear process of *embodied* socialization. Thus, the findings from this study indicate a layer of socialization that factors in the corporeality of workers as they transition from one phase to another.

Experience Phase

While many people are drawn to aerial acrobatics by the allure of flying in the air, newcomers quickly realize that suspending themselves in the air may not be feasible at the start of their training. First, newcomers must navigate the sensation of the metal or fabric pressing into their flesh as they sustain some of their body weight on the apparatus. This apparatus-body connection is visually represented in Figure 1, provided by rope (i.e., corde lisse) artist Juliet in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you.

Beginners usually do things low to the ground as a preventative safety measure in case they fall, but this accommodation does provide relief from those early pain sensations. The key to being able to hold a persons' body up in the air is to bypass the pain of body-apparatus contact and actively press one's body into the apparatus. For example, silks artist Charlie (age 34, 8 years' experience) shared her early experiences on the lyra as follows,

> What felt painful in doing lyra was just the metal hoop and how it felt on my pelvis, or even how it felt in my hands…doing an inverted straddle[1] or a back balance[2] on the lyra was probably the first time I felt some sense of pain.

[1] In the air, "turning upside down, inverting the body so that the hips are above the head" (Scherb, 2018, p. 104) with open legs.

[2] Placing the apparatus "on the sacrum above the gluteal tissue" in an arched position (Scherb, 2018, p. 92).

Charlie's experience provides an example of how newcomers are not only greeted by pain, but often—and more so at the start—suspended in pain. In their recollection of those early pain-ridden experiences, participants described becoming cognizant of their threshold and tolerance for pain. In their anticipatory socialization, individuals are not often aware of the pain involved in aerial acrobatics. Participants reported that they were surprised by pain as there was little or no mention of it prior to climbing on their first apparatus. The author notes that during her first aerial class on silks, the coach taught her to tie a foot knot (i.e., a basic wrap on the foot that can be done with any malleable apparatus) and proceed to put all her weight on her wrapped foot. As soon as the entirety of her weight rested on her foot, she felt excruciating painful constriction on the surface of her foot and immediately stepped down. In response, her coach told her to practice wrapping her feet at home with a towel or a blanket and putting pressure on them to desensitize to the pain—undoubtedly the same approach he took when first introduced to aerial.

Figure 1

Front Stage Image: Skin-Apparatus Contact

Note. Rope apparatus made of cotton pressing up against the participant's skin as she holds herself up in the air.

Changing the Language from Pain to Discomfort. Under this premise of desensitizing to the pain, individuals either withdraw from the apparatus and try again after a few minutes (having been alerted to the presence of pain) or remain in the position and wait for the pain to dissipate. It is commonly understood among aerialists that conditioning to pain is crucial to one's ability to suspend themselves in the air. For example, silks artist Bailey (age 27, 10 years' experience) recalled his first experiences with pain:

> I have very distinct imagery of my foot in a foot knot for just so long…they were having us hold things in those positions for so long and the conditioning aspect was way more intense at the beginning of my training than how I've continued on my own version of conditioning and I don't hold myself in positions until I feel such crazy discomfort but I do remember that at the very beginning… So they didn't shy away at all from having you feel the discomfort. The other thing that I remember more towards the beginning of my training was sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and my hands would be clenched into fists where my forearms were just so swollen, that it was like putting pressure on those ligaments and I would pry my hands open.

Bailey's excerpt is a good representation of the process that participants underwent when experiencing new pain sensations. Knowing that students must adapt to the pain in order to continue their progress, coaches would encourage students to remain suspended in pain and wait for the pain to reduce over time. Furthermore, Bailey—now an experienced aerialist—uses the term *discomfort* to reference the pain he experienced at the time. Going into an intensive acrobatic atmosphere, most newcomers—unless they have had previous experience with athletic endurance—have a limited vocabulary for pain-like sensations and they register new sensations under the umbrella of pain. Moreover, when the sensation of being suspended in the air is new, the body is also operating under a heightened sense of protection from danger or fear. In other words, the body is on high

alert and is navigating how to actively manage multiple new sensations. To move newcomers away from the altered psychosomatic experience of pain and begin to transform the meaning of pain from something that should be avoided to something that can be endured, workers co-construct a framework that reframes pain into *discomfort*.

In effect, the logical breakdown of this reframing occurs as follows: (a) beginners are experiencing a new sensation, (b) beginners try to make sense of the new sensation, (c) as the novelty of this experience subsides, the psychosomatic reaction to the new sensation will also subside, and (d) newcomers and veteran workers reconceptualize the initial reaction to the sensation from producing pain to experiencing discomfort—aided by their coaches' language choices of using terms such as *discomfort*. Participants used stretching as an example of how this reconceptualization occurs. Straps artist Sebastian (age 29, 6 years' experience) notes:

> The first time you stretch, it's gonna be the first time you feel what it's like to stretch a muscle and that oftentimes comes with what I would call discomfort, not even pain, really, it's just discomfort. And, the first time you do it, maybe you'll be, "Oh, no." …And then you give it some time, and then the pain goes away, or feels good even or whatever and then just by that process of learning your body, you accept what it feels like to stretch, and you allow your body to learn, and then develop and progress that way.

Every participant in this study used the terms "discomfort," "pressure," or "uncomfortable" to reframe early experiences of pain. In some cases, participants corrected the author's use of the term pain or self-corrected their use of the term pain by replacing it with one of the aforementioned terms. The communicative act of reframing pain into discomfort invites newcomers to accept a painful experience as temporary and thereby more readily accepted. Silks artists Emily (age 29, 9 years' experience) echoes this sentiment,

> I know a lot of people really don't like using the word pain. And I think because it is kind of a scary word that brings to mind images of like, broken bleeding bodies, right? So I do think in this context, I'm going to reword it to *discomfort*, because they do go hand in hand…While discomfort is integral, I think that is also important because it's teaching you how to work through discomfort on more levels than just physical pain. So I think discomfort is a really important and helpful part.

Emily's excerpt indicates there is a negative connotation to "pain" and reframing pain into discomfort is helpful for navigating undesirable sensations. Whereas pain is meant to be avoided, discomfort is a less alienating term. Thus, it is important and helpful to reframe the terminology so that the body can withstand the pain. This reframing supports Ashcraft et al.'s (2009) position on the body as a communicative product and the corporeal effects of discourse about the body. Moreover, lyra and sling artist Tia shares the dislike for the use of the word pain. Her excerpt reveals the process of transforming her conceptualization of pain by monitoring her language choices,

> This drives me crazy. I think the word pain, we need to be careful, right? Because it's just your brain reacting to a new sensation, and it's trying to protect you…It's just uncomfortable because it's new, and my body doesn't like it…sitting on a wooden bench for two hours is painful. But that's not the kind of pain that I would shy away from, because I know that it's not harming me…I don't put myself through the beauty is pain mentality because it's discomfort, right? And you have to work through that neurologically.

Tia's excerpt suggests that thinking in terms of pain makes the body more alert to perceiving danger than by using the term "uncomfortable." When giving the bench example, however, she reverts to the use of the word pain, describing it as the type of pain that does not cause harm. This brief example demonstrates how by replacing pain with discomfort, Tia is reframing dangerous pain to pain that does not cause harm. Tia's excerpt supports the notion that aerialists will over time reframe how they conceptualize pain by changing their language choices around the word pain. In doing so, they can

internalize that they are not in danger and can endure the discomfort of the activity. In essence, aerial acrobats—and beginners in particular—may heavily rely on this reframing to reconcile the cognitive dissonance that comes from experiencing pain and the desire to engage in aerial acrobatics. This attempt to reconcile dissonance is further influenced by the micro-level discourses that coaches and more senior aerialists actively reproduce. Statements such as, "Breathing through that short term discomfort can lead to success," "They [new students] need to learn that the discomfort, at least for aerial, it lessens over time because you get used to it and you build calluses," or, "Don't stop doing the thing that is uncomfortable," invite a transformation of the meaning of pain and by default, one's pain tolerance and willingness to endure pain. Even in retrospect, interviewees reframed pain as discomfort as they recalled their early experiences. For example, Barbara (age 35, 12 years' experience, silks) shares,

> Within the first couple of weeks, there was a lot of discomfort. I wouldn't call it pain. It wasn't like, "Take me to the hospital!" But I'm a pretty vocal person and there was a lot of swearing the first couple of weeks. I remember learning hip key[3], and I was, "This is dumb. Who would do this?" And I'm just complaining my way through it. But I think even now—I haven't really been in the air the past year to be honest and I got up on the bar the other day, just did a front balance[4], my hips were, "Hey!" and I was, "Oh, God!" Yeah, so it was humbling to be reminded of those sensitive areas that a lot of new people also have to go through and experience.

Barbara illustrates how aerialists refer to early experiences of pain as discomfort, but only in retrospect. She labels pain as a sensation that is severe enough to be taken to the hospital and calls her experience getting back on an apparatus after a year away as humbling. She is differentiating between degrees of pain or between pain and injury.

[3] To "hang with one side toward the apparatus" (Scherb, 2018, p. 115). The position requires active hip flexion to support the body by the hips.

[4] Placing the apparatus on the pelvis and balancing in an arched position (Scherb, 2018).

This time, she is familiar with how the pain (or discomfort) subsides over time, knows that it is not hospital-worthy pain and knows that she just needs to desensitize to the pain, or in the words of participants, "discomfort."

Self-Selecting Into Categories of Pain. Moreover, after experiencing the first few instances of pain, or "discomfort," students who were willing to accept the presence of pain in their attempts to engage in aerial acrobatics indicated a preference for the type of pain they chose to experience. They did so by selecting a category, or family, of apparatus. In this way, newcomers continued to enact some control over the pain they were exposing themselves to while simultaneously learning to accept pain as a feature of aerial acrobatics. Silks artist Bailey describes the difference between the pain that comes from fabric (or soft) versus metal (or hard) apparatuses as follows,

> There's really the two kinds [of pain] that are associated with soft apparatus and hard apparatus. The soft apparatus have more of a constricting pressure, and more of a burning or skin surface level pain to them, where steel apparatus have more of a bruising, a more deep, flat pressure rather than constricting. It's like you're just grinding against the apparatus…and rather than burning, it's more a bruising pain. In those two families, people self-select the family of apparatus based on which of those two pains that they sort of masochistically prefer over the other.

This sentiment of indicating a preference for one apparatus family over another based on the pain sensation was echoed by straps artist Ellie (age 19, 3 years' experience), who noted that she was biased against "anything with a bar" because, "a hard bar digging into my body is not really my jam." Silks artist Leah (age 23, 13 years' experience) also distinguishes between the preference of one sort of pain over the other,

> The tendency that I've seen is, there's two different types of people, there's bruises and hard things like getting hit hard. And then there's people that like tightness and burns, so that kind of separates the bars from the silks…so a lot of times the first thing that you experience is the stuff that you're going to take to more and that you've trained your body to accept.

Leah's excerpt demonstrates that as pain becomes socially constructed as a feature and normalized among aerialists, they must physiologically familiarize themselves to a certain type of pain and garner an expectation of the pain they are walking into—or rather, climbing onto—as well as their ability to remove themselves from the pain if needed. Aerialists accomplish both uncertainty reduction regarding the type of pain they can expect and enact control over the type of pain they will experience.

These findings support previous literature linking uncertainty reduction to organizational socialization of new members (see Lester, 1986). Organizational members use various information-seeking strategies, such as direct and indirect inquiry or observation to manage uncertainty (Kramer, 2011a, 2011b). The findings of this study suggest that aerialists gain information by experiencing embodied pain and then making assessments about the type of pain they choose to endure. For example, when describing her preference for hard apparatuses over soft ones, for example, lyra artist Elisa (age 29, 23 years' experience) shared, "With the hard apparatus like a lyra, I know what and why and how this is going to hurt and I know how to get out of it." Here Elisa relays that familiarity with an apparatus reduces the uncertainty about the type of pain she can expect. In addition, flying pole (i.e., Chinese pole) artist Markus (age 22, 14 years' experience) explains his decision process for why he gravitates away from hard apparatuses, "It's a personal decision. I just, I don't like them." In this instance, Markus is enacting control over the type of apparatus, and pain, he is willing to endure. Whereas Elisa's experience highlights the uncertainty reduction benefit of choosing one's pain, Markus describes how he is taking control over the type of pain he experiences.

As aerialists move beyond early experiences with pain, recognizing their pain threshold and tolerance, and making decisions about the type of pain they choose to experience, they being to transform how they conceptualize pain. The following section outlines how moving beyond experiencing pain to accepting and tolerating pain is marked by a modified approach to complaining about pain and supported by statements that convey how participants normalize pain in Circus.

Tolerate Phase

As beginners move beyond the initial experience of pain and continue to train aerial acrobatics, they modify their approach toward complaining about pain as a sign of accepting the presence of pain. Participants explained that at this stage of socialization it is futile to express that something hurts because they are now aware of the ubiquitous presence of pain in Circus. When asked how their coaches responded to complaints about pain, or how they themselves as coaches responded to their students' complaints about pain, participants reported that complaints about aerial being painful were received as superfluous and often dismissed. For example, silks artist Natalie (age 30, 4 years' experience) shares, "I would vocalize that and be like, 'Wow, that one hurts.' And, you know, the teachers are just, "Yeah, circus hurts." Natalie goes on to explain,

> If it's a "Wow this position hurts," I tend to get the tough love…where they're just, "Yeah, do it again." They'll just dismiss it because they're, "Yeah, I went through the same thing. So do it again."...If it's apparatus related or it's just the position, because it hurts and you just need to get used to it, then they kind of tend to have that "Yeah, suck it up, let's go." But I'm okay with it, because I do that.

Natalie's excerpt demonstrates the approach that coaches take when training students to tolerate pain by disconfirming complaints about pain and affirming a position that students need to learn to "get used to it." Natalie's experience provides support for how

pain endurance is constructed into the process of occupational identification as an aerial acrobat. Her coach's response of, "Yeah, I went through the same thing," is indicative of pain endurance as a positive identity enactment.

Participants shared similar stories of coaches being dismissive of pain-related complaints. Some of these responses included, "Just do it, get over it and just do it." When complaining about blisters on her hands from the trapeze bar, one participant was told, "Well yeah, it is not a sofa." The coach's response to complaints about blisters from training on a trapeze bar exemplifies normative reinforcement of embodied pain as a feature of positive occupational identity enactment. By contrasting a trapeze bar to a sofa, the coach is using sarcasm to convey that pain should be expected when pressing the body against a hard apparatus. After disclosing to her coach that a certain move was painful, Emily's coach responded with:

> The phrase was—if you were especially on the metal apparatus where you just had that bruise-y, almost like a stingy, angry feeling— "your body's yelling at you and you need to tell it to—that little voice needs to go sit in the corner and eat a sandwich. It's not its turn to talk." I thought that was actually really cute. And just being like, "It's not your turn to speak yet. We can talk later. It's not your turn, wait for it." It actually really helped.

Emily's excerpt indicates how coaches will downplay pain that is expected in aerial acrobatics and guide students toward ignoring that pain. Here, Emily's coach is socializing her to cultivate mastery over pain and do a mental shift that will aid her in pushing past the pain. As noted by Emily, this socialization tactic proved to be effective. Emily's experience, as well as other participants who conveyed coaches responded to complaints about pain with a lack of sympathy, suggest that aerialists (re)produce d/Discourses of pain stoicism as an occupational norm.

Given the ways in which pain is first reframed as discomfort, coaches and senior aerialists reproduce d/Discourses that indicate an underlying understanding and acceptance of pain as a feature of aerial acrobatics. In response to the question, "What is the relationship between pain and aerial?" some participants noted, "There is no difference [between Circus and pain]. It's part of the job," "Some things will always hurt," "If you want to do aerial, work hard, it will hurt," and "Circus hurts is the general ideology that we were given." When visiting a youth circus school, Barbara recalled witnessing the following interaction,

> There would be kids in the silks or on the trapeze and be, "Oh, this is uncomfortable or this hurts." And she [the owner] had a call in response that she would do anytime anyone would complain. She would say, "Circus what?!" And the kids would go, "Circus hurts!" And that's how it was taught to high school kids but looking back on it, I'm like, "Oh, why would you? Why would you teach that way?" But it was this badge of honor thing, you have to suffer for your art.

Barbara's excerpt indicates how pain is valorized among in-group members as positive identity enactment. Her statement of, "you have to suffer for your art" suggests that "suffering" or pain, is necessary to create art and central to the process of identification. Suffering for your art is constructed as a shared sense of reality of *how things are supposed to be* in Circus. Therefore, to not suffer for your art is a form of resistance. Furthermore, this "Circus hurts" discourse is prevalent in the circus industry and readily recognizable. When asked about how his coach responded to him complaining about pain, silks artist Bailey shared:

> It was "Circus hurts." I remember any time that I would complain about something, she would just be, "Knock it off, push it off. You're fine, you're gonna do it, you're gonna be fine," and would just be very blunt and to the point like, "It's not gonna hurt you. It's not gonna kill you. It might hurt a little bit, but it's gonna get better and your body's gonna get used to it." So anytime I started to

> complain, I knew that there wouldn't be a sympathetic response. So I would just stop complaining about the pain that I was in and I would get used to it.

Here, Bailey's coach is informing him that the pain Bailey feels is not going to hurt or kill him. Bailey's coach is evaluating Bailey's pain. In response, Bailey engages positive identity enactment when he stops "complaining about the pain" and "get[s] used to it." His experience supports the notion of the experience of embodied pain as an interactive, co-constructed process. Similarly, lyra artist Elisa, who started training aerial acrobatics at the age of six, relayed that she had "very old school coaches" who responded to complaints about pain with, "That's just how it is" and "This is what it is and that it hurts and move on with your life, don't whine to me kind of thing." Elisa goes on to describe how this socialization process continues to influence her approach to her own coaching,

> There's a lot of times where I will demonstrate a trick or explain a trick or go into a class and say, "Look, I know this hurts. I'm telling you, this hurts. Please don't tell me it hurts. I don't need to hear that it hurts. I know that it hurts." There was just a–I don't want to say suck it up and do it mentality–but a suck it up and do it mentality.

Here, Elisa (re)produces pain stoicism as positive identity enactment. She illustrates an awareness of the pain and conveys that there is no need to express that pain is present. As demonstrated in the following section, aerial acrobats learn to normalize and adapt to pain through a process of experiencing pain, followed by the desensitization of pain.

Adapting to Pain. The journey from first experiencing pain to subscribing to pain as a feature of aerial acrobatics is indicative of how discourse simultaneously changes personal and collective embodied experiences and social realities. This journey occurs as aerialists desensitize from those original painful sensations to the point where that experience is all but a distant memory. In other words, they can recall the experience of

pain but no longer feel pain in their bodies (at least for certain apparatuses and moves they have become accustomed to). As straps artist Ellie describes,

> It just comes down to our bodies adapt so much. So a hoop artist who does hoop all the time is going to be immune to that pain, they're going to think straps are super painful. And to this day, when I teach straps and my highest level complain about pain, I'm like, "What are you talking about?" I genuinely don't really feel pain on straps much anymore. So I think it's whatever you do most, your body's going to condition to that.

Ellie's excerpt illustrates the cyclical nature of how aerial acrobats adapt to pain. When aerialists train with a new apparatus, they need to learn to tolerate that apparatus-specific pain and restart the conditioning cycle. As the pain dissipates and is no longer at the forefront of their experience, they can experience the benefits of pushing past pain. Newcomers can now corroborate statements communicated by their coaches and senior students that pain is both normal and expected at first, will subdue over time, and pushing past the pain is a necessary process of conditioning to increase pain tolerance and decrease the natural response to withdraw from pain. Moreover, as the experience of active embodied pain fades over time, the distance between those early painful experiences and current embodied sensations where pain is absent may lead aerialists to forget "starter" pain.

This phase is key to the socialization process as students have shifted from an initial attitude that pain must be avoided—and complained about—to one where pain is adaptable, temporary, or has a limit. Therefore, the meaning of pain is transformed from a bodily response of experiencing hurt to a necessary obstacle that can be overcome. Rope artist Megan (age 21, 11 years' experience), who also trained on chains loops (i.e., a

swing made of two sets of metal chains), affirms the ways in which pain becomes adaptable to the point of normal,

> You get used to it. It's tender at first but after a couple of weeks of training, it just becomes normal. And you go into it and you're, "okay, okay, we're gonna do today, and that's fine." And you get through it and then, it just makes you stronger. And it makes all the other apparatuses easy, like you never feel pain.

Megan's comment on how training chains loops "makes all the apparatuses easy" stems from the idea that chains loops are one of the most painful apparatuses to train. Her comment should be taken in stride only to indicate the level of pain she was able to adapt to during her training with chains. However, this idea of "never feeling pain" after adapting to high levels of pain is a good example of how aerialists increase their pain tolerance as they advance in their training. Moreover, Megan's comment supports a modified social construction of pain that bolsters identification (i.e., "As an established aerialist, I no longer feel pain). This sentiment is further echoed by silks artist Bailey, who shared, "The thing about pain in circus is that it always goes down." Aerialists, therefore, exchange the message that although the pain sensation is prevalent at the start of training aerial acrobatics, it will subside over time (i.e., "your body is going to condition to that [pain"). These findings support previous literature on how aerialists develop *body callousing* (i.e., conditioning to pain) as necessary criteria to fulfill their occupational role (Walby & Stuart, 2021). Furthermore, as an interactional, socially constructed process, aerialists develop *mental callousing* to tolerate pain through socialization messaging and affirmations from others of positive identity enactment. Having reproduced the d/Discourse of pain being temporary, aerialists also need to differentiate between pain that will subside and pain that will not subside over time.

Pain Typology. When prompted to respond to a scenario where new students expressed pain when on an apparatus, interviewees noted that they would ask the student to describe the type of pain they were feeling. The *in vivo* code of "productive pain" emerged from participants' responses. Productive pain is pain that fulfills a purpose (i.e., "acclimation" pain, pain that hurts "in the moment" but would lessen over time, or "surface pain" that only hurts the skin but does not cause internal damage). Lyra artist Julia (age 41, 5 years' experience) defined productive pain as:

> Productive pain means you're applying pressure to your body…And some kids are panicky about that feeling of pain until they realize it isn't injuring them. So we have to talk through that verbiage…to talk about that experience of either stretching or choosing to put all of your weight on your hips on a bar as you fold over it, is that maybe some of us have more sensitive hip flexors than others so we're gonna have to get used to it. If you do it a lot of times, your body is going to lessen the response of panic…It's telling your brain, "It's okay."

Julia's excerpt indicates another way in which aerialists make strategic language choices that co-construct the embodied experience of pain. As aerialists learn to recognize productive pain and understand its purpose, they move away from perceiving pain as threatening.

Whereas productive pain is normalized and expected, participants also indicated the existence of non-productive pain. The author uses the term *destructive pain* for non-productive pain. Destructive pain is pain that impairs mobility, reveals an underlying health condition, or can lead to injury. To distinguish between productive pain and destructive pain, participants described the latter as long-term pain that would not go away after they withdrew from the pain source. Moreover, destructive pain generally felt "deeper, more intense," more in line with "sharp stabs, burning, radiating pain," was "the kind of pain where something is not right," or "pain that causes harm." Compared to its

counterpart, destructive pain prompted immediate attention or cessation from the root of the pain (i.e., withdrawal from the apparatus).

As aerialists learn to tolerate pain, it is important that they understand the difference between pain that *should* be tolerated and pain that *should not* be tolerated to avoid injury. Learning this distinction is a key aspect of the socialization processes reproduced member discourse. For example, lyra artist Elisa teaches her students to differentiate between "good hurt and bad hurt," adding that learning to distinguish between the two comes with experience. Similarly, straps artist Ellie expressed, "I don't expect someone on day one to know the difference between discomfort and pain. But the more you experience, the more you put your body through, the more you push yourself physically, you're going to start to find those lines." Here, Ellie's comment indicates that exposure to pain is a criterion for identification and positive identity enactment is learning to differentiate between pain types through the experience of pain.

Setting Pain Boundaries. To "find those lines," participants relied on the psychosomatic experience of pain and learned to differentiate between productive pain and set boundaries accordingly. By setting these boundaries, aerialists learn to navigate pain they are willing to tolerate from pain they are not *able* to tolerate. For example, static trapeze artist Frodo (age 24, 19 years' experience) broke her leg during a live performance when a tree branch broke off and shared,

> There are many different layers of pain, like now when I broke my leg, I couldn't walk on it. And it was obvious for me that I wouldn't be able to continue the performance. But then when it comes to open hands, your skin burns, bruises, these kinds of things. It's actually about this process of teaching your body that even though it might be a bit painful now, you're not gonna die. So it's more about learning to be able to put boundaries for yourself, like where is—what is actually too much and where is okay.

Frodo's excerpt indicates how her body's materiality will resist her social construction of pain (i.e., bodily resistance to organizational identities, Ashcraft al., 2009). Frodo was resigned to stop performing because the materiality of her leg posed a barrier to her ability to perform the aerialist identity (see Zanin, 2018). However, if her mobility were not impaired, Frodo would be able to continue to positively enact her identity (i.e., had she just fallen and bruised her leg, she could have categorized the incident under pain she was willing to endure). To provide contrast, Frodo is also experienced in the discipline of hair hanging (i.e., where a person is suspended by their hair) and shared her approach to engage in this skill:

> I have to say that it's the scariest discipline I've ever done in my life. Because it's also part of this telling your instincts not to get the feeling that I might tear off my scalp, but the knowledge that I would likely not. It's safe.

Materially, Frodo's broken leg immediately grounded her but her hair and scalp's ability to successfully suspend her body weight through a process of engaging the proper muscles give her the certainty that this skill is safe and that she can withstand the pain.

Interviewees echoed Frodo's sentiment and offered statements such as, "I can handle the superficial pains really easily on the skin. And like really doesn't bother me, it's just part of it," "First they have to learn that there's discomfort, and then there's pain that puts you in physical harm," or that it is knowing the difference between, "my body *will not* go there versus it *doesn't want to* go there." In the latter statement, the body not wanting to go there is indicative of pain that you should push through. Rope artist Megan provides another example of setting pain boundaries when training neck hangs on chains (i.e., sustaining your entire body weight by the nape of your neck). She shared:

> We're fine. We don't need to learn this skill. We can do others. Anytime I've done anything that has a massive amount of pain involved or a neurological thing, I just let myself know, it's okay. We're not gonna do that one. And it doesn't make us any better or worse, and we're just going to learn something new or work on a different move because this one isn't worth it if it's gonna damage me in some way.

In Megan's case, she draws a pain boundary when something has "a massive amount of pain" or when the risk of potential neurological damage is involved. Megan's excerpt indicates a distinction between *pain* and *damage*. Whereas she is willing to accept pain, skills that risk damage are not "worth it." On a similar note, silks artist Lauren (age 29, 5 years' experience), decided that "straps just hurts" and the pain was "just not worth it." Straps artist Marcel (age 26, 10 years' experience) trained in aerial cradle (i.e., "a rectangular metal framework…in which the carrier kneels to assist the flyer in performing various aerial acrobatics," Tohu, 2022) and noted, "After one year, my back was destroyed. This was so painful for my back, I was completely immobilized" and therein transferred to a different apparatus discipline. Having experienced the damage from aerial cradle, Marcel set a boundary to transfer to a different apparatus.

As newcomers re-evaluate their pain thresholds alongside their increased tolerance, they can observe results from having pushed through pain. In between these two points—where students recognize their pain tolerance and observe results of pushing through pain—exists a co-constructed process of the experience of embodied pain. Whereas newcomers initially rely on their subjective, first-person verified experience of pain, they learn to filter and reframe their embodied experience through an objective, third-person verification process. For example, when coaches inform students that the pain they experience is "productive pain," this discursive interaction constitutes a

meaning-making process that transforms how pain is perceived by the pain-recipient. Aerialists can observe the material consequences of "productive pain" and "destructive pain." On the one hand, "productive pain" leaves observable lesions that often go away in a short timespan (e.g., bruises, burns), "destructive pain" leaves aerialists injured and impedes their mobility. Taken together, the subjective, individual experience of embodied pain is influenced by the co-construction of a social reality of *how* pain should be experienced. The following section continues to analyze how aerialists become socialized to *pain work* as they learn to attribute value to and embrace pain.

Embrace Phase

With modified attitudes toward pain, this section reveals the ways in which aerialists attribute value to pain, draw on pain as a resource for measuring their skill level, and continue to nurture a complex relationship with pain. To embrace pain as a feature of aerial acrobatics, students need to experience pain as having value. One of the ways that aerialists exemplify this value attribution of pain is by associating pain with growth. Dance trapeze (i.e., "a static trapeze which is hung from one point making the ropes form a V," Vertical Wise, 2020b) artist Marc (age 25, 7 years' experience), whose circus school shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic, missed the feeling of, "getting home aching" because aching was an indicator of all the hard work he put into his training. Similarly, lyra artist Jo (age 23, 9 years' experience) shared, "I know because I'm burnt everywhere that I had a really good research session and found new things." Furthermore, lyra artist Elisa shares how she associates pride and accomplishment with pain and urges others to also embrace it:

> You've got to embrace it. You got to embrace it, you've got to accept that that's how it feels. When I train, there's a level of enjoyment with the pain and with this idea of pushing your body to its limits. And then seeing if you can go further. I think part of it definitely stems from that need to feel accomplishment. And to have that connected to the pain, I think is a very strong connection…*I feel accomplished because I'm in pain*. The same way that if you do a really hard workout, and afterwards, you're just a sweaty mess. You have that sense of 'I did this' associated with that feeling.

Elisa's reproduces her association between pride and pain through her coaching. She frequently asks her students, "Do you want this more than the pain [you will feel]?" By relaying her pain mantra to her students, Elisa reproduces through discourse that pain is an obstacle to goal achievement. Moreover, positive identity enactment is perceiving the experience of pain as a source of pride. On a similar note, silks artist Leah shared, "You're taught to enjoy the pain to improve" and that "in retrospect, you become so grateful for the pain because there's growth in pushing past those breaking points." Straps artist Sebastian provides support for this perspective; "Circus people like to joke about being masochistic. Because your body is put through so much and the more you push yourself, the more impressive usually things end up being." Here, Sebastian frames the act of enduring pain enough to be considered a masochist as an identity-affirming perspective. Moreover, Sebastian's comment demonstrates how identification is constructed as needing to push past an indefinite amount of pain to perform the aerialist identity (i.e., "The more pain I push through, the more impressive of an aerialist that I am").

As students progress in their aerial training, the decision to embrace pain becomes the mark of a "good" aerialist. In other words, interviewee responses indicate aerialists

gain social capital by their ability to endure pain. For example, rope artist Juliet (age 23, 9 years' experience) shares,

> It's almost a power thing, or a social standing thing like, "I'm cool enough to deal with this pain" It's not bad pain. It's not self-inflicted harm. It's almost just *if you're really good at dealing with pain, it means you're a good circus artist*. So that gives you social hierarchy amongst circus artists, or if people know you did something that's extremely painful on stage but you make it look so easy, which is a huge aspect of it, then it's like, "Wow"...so it's almost also a measure of success, which is strange. Even though you know, sometimes if you're complaining about pain, then it's the other way around because then it's a weakness.

Jo's excerpt indicates how aerialists normalize pain as a basic rite of passage into Circus while also having a shared understanding of how difficult enduring pain can be. As stated in the excerpt, although complaints about pain are dismissed, the ability to endure intense pain is exalted *but only when students have fulfilled the criteria of embracing pain*. Thus, embracing pain is indicative of positive identity enactment as workers are demonstrating valorization of pain as a measure of their "in-group" membership.

As mentioned previously, straps artist Sebastian shared that "aerialists like to joke that they are masochists." This is an interesting juxtaposition with the many statements that interviewees gave that indicated resistance to the use of the term pain. While beginners learn to reframe initial pain as discomfort (and in the process disregard and downplay pain), they also embrace pain as a feature of their aerialist identity. Lyra artist Jo was told during a conversation with another aerialist, "I think that that circus appeals to masochists, a little bit, you have to be willing to be bruised and scratched up and sore and achy and low key injured." Thus, when students subscribe to a "Circus hurts" ideology, hurting can be tantamount to and embodying a Circus member identity. For

example, aerial cradle artist PauPau (age 35, 17 years' experience) highlights the positive association between embracing pain and being a member of Circus,

> I think you like pain if you do circus. It's not like you love pain, but it means that you accept pain to get something that you want to do. And so for sure pain and circus clearly have a big link, because you cannot just have the tricks, you need to train them. It's painful just to repeat the same thing every day, it's so boring but this is also painful in your head. This is not only the body. It's sometimes very slow. You want to have a trick that you don't get it and some tricks you're going to have a lot of preparation for one trick, and it's just one trick and then you need to do another one. And one took you years. So yeah, the pain in the circus it has a big, big link, you cannot have one without the other one.

PauPau's excerpt highlights the endurance needed to fulfill the occupational role of aerialist. Here, we see how enduring physical pain can help the aerialist learn to endure the mental pain of repeated failures inherent to training aerial acrobatics. Often declaring themselves as "masochists" or "badasses," the ability to embrace intense pain and the social capital gained from doing so can reproduce a d/Discourse that the aerialist can endure anything.

These findings indicate how aerialists navigate a complex relationship with pain in which they transform its meaning from something that is negative to something that is positive. This transformation is a collective process that emerges from aerialists' individual experiences with pain being socially reconstructed through their interactions with other aerialists. The new student who first experiences pain and withdraws from the apparatus receives feedback on their subjective embodied experience (i.e., "That is discomfort, not pain"). The senior student who is praised by their coach for enduring pain and achieving a skill has their subjective embodied experience qualified by an external party as a source of pride. Lastly, workers demonstrate that they enjoy pain *because* they

are aerialists. The following section describes how aerialists become proselytizers of normalizing pain as a feature of Circus.

Proselytize Phase

Having navigated the process of transforming the meaning of pain, this section reveals the ways in which aerialists proselytize the dominant ideology of "Circus hurts" by wearing pain as a badge of identity (i.e., showing off abrasions) and through various uses of language that promote, humorize, downplay, and defend pain as a feature of Circus.

The previous section recounted the ways in which aerialists derive pride from pain. Relatedly, the external, visual lesions that aerialists sustain through training aerial acrobatics are symbolically constructed into wearing pain as a symbol of membership that invites others to normalize and exalt pain as well. This process is a collaborative one as aerialists may "show off their battle scars" to "earn their badassery" or praise the visual lesions of others and thereby reproduce the d/Discourse of "Circus hurts." Participants relayed statements such as, "aerialists will show off their bruises," referred to these as "battle wounds" or "battle scars," and claimed to have a love for burns. Silks artist JaJa, who tried to avoid promoting the idea that "Circus hurts" among her youth students, confessed to creating a Snapchat account for coaches to share pictures of their abrasions. Ironically, JaJa's nine-year-old student approached her the day following her interview for this study with "the biggest smile" and said, "Coach! Look at my hands!" JaJa provided the image of her students' hands in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that represents the reality of being an aerialist (see Figure 2). JaJa's

member-specific Snapchat account further establishes valorization of pain, but only as a sign of in-group membership. For outsiders (i.e., spectators), pain is concealed.

Figure 2

Backstage Image: "Coach! Look at my hands!"

Note. Calloused hands of a nine-year old child.

Similar anecdotes of participants wearing abrasions as badges of honor were plentiful. For example, when training with a group of friends, lyra artist Jo shared, "We would get so proud of our bruises and our silk burns…and you'd get these little guys [abrasions] just all the skin would come off and there was a little bit of a machismo around like look how beat up I am." Statements from interviewees indicate that this visual exchange often resulted in bonding with other performers and thereby bolstered their collective identity in their valuation of pain. During a trial week to join a new circus school, rope artist Juliet relays the following encounter, "I got a really big rip and I went to get it bandaged up and someone from a different specialization was like, "Oh,

welcome!'", indicating that she was accepted as an member of the ingroup. Juliet underscores the symbolic meaning of abrasions as a measure of identification. She notes,

> It's almost a mark of, you're an aerialist, maybe you get that, and of course sometimes they weren't fun, but it was kind of fun to be in a group and like, "Oh, man, that's a nasty burn."

Juliet said "maybe you get that" to the author because she was aware of the author's shared collective identity as an aerialist. She is drawing upon shared knowledge, and a shared social reality between her and the author such that if "you're an aerialist," then you are aware of the symbolism associated with bruises. In a similar fashion, silks artist Lauren "fondly" remembers a playful competition with her friends in which they all shared pictures of their bruises from a skill they all trained the previous day. Lauren was "crowned the winner of the worst bruises" and her friends joked that her prize was a frozen bag of peas. Flying pole artist Markus—eight years old at the time—shared a similar experience when training with other youth students. He noted, "I was very proud of the first time I bled on my tissu [alternative name for silks]. I was like, 'I have marked my territory!'"

These instances of consubstantiality through visual abrasions were juxtaposed with instances in which aerialists experienced frustration from a lack of abrasions. Lyra artist Elisa, for example, shared:

> There's a kind of pride in the damage that they do to their bodies. If you're gonna do something hard, you want to have a bruise or leave a mark. I know personally I don't bruise easily and it's frustrating when I have under the skin kind of pain that you can't see. It was so hard, like "You don't believe me?" Where other kids that'll come in and be like, "Look at my arm! My whole arm's purple!"

Elisa's excerpt indicates how her inability to show her abrasions inhibited her performance of identity. This is another example of how materiality resists social

construction. In this case, however, the resistance comes from the absence of visible bruises. When pain is imbued into an occupational role, workers may perceive an identity threat when unable to visually demonstrate how much pain they are sustaining. The material representation of pain and subsequent valorization of pain as indicative of in-group membership delineates how *pain work* norms are (re)produced both discursively (i.e., "You love pain if you are an aerialist") and materially (i.e., demonstrating visible corporeal effects in the way of bruises, abrasions, etc.).

Use of Common Tropes and Humor. Another way that participants demonstrated positive identity enactment was through the use of common tropes and humor to promote, downplay, or defend pain as a feature of Circus. For example, participants referred to bruises, burns, and other abrasions as "kisses" from the apparatus. An example of an "apparatus kiss" is depicted in Figure 3, provided by trapeze artist Frodo in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that represents the reality of being an aerialist. By using the metaphor of "kisses," participants modify the meaning of an abrasion as something that is damaging or unwanted to something that is desirable and indicative of affection. The act of using this metaphor bolsters the shared social reality that pain is good.

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Figure 3

Backstage Image: Apparatus Kiss

Note. Participant shows off a "kiss" from her trapeze.

Moreover, when asked about common tropes they would hear around their circus school or from coaches and other members, participants (re)produced these as axioms. Some of these common phrases included, "If you shower after training and it doesn't hurt, then you haven't worked hard enough [because you won't feel your burns]," "If it doesn't hurt, you're not doing it right," "No pain, no gain," "Circus hurts, suck it up buttercup," and referring to a lyra as the "hoop of hurt." One respondent shared that at her studio, members would refer to Tylenol as "Circus candy" because of how often members needed to consume painkillers. Moreover, participants would also confess to donning t-shirts with phrases such as, "Everything hurts and I'm dying," "But did you die?", "Circus hurts," "Badassery," "Circus hurts and so do I." The phrase, "Circus hurts" was often shared as a hashtag (i.e., #circushurts) when participants posted pictures of themselves to their social media accounts with bruises, burns, etc. or videos of

themselves falling or having a painful mishap while doing aerial acrobatics. Silks artist Barbara defined the ideology of "Circus hurts," as "I'm tired and I'm working hard and I'm in pain but *I'm doing it for circus*." Taken together, participants (re)produced a d/Discourse of "Circus hurts" through the use of texts and artifacts that promote a shared social reality crafted through a process of identification.

Lastly, participants would also elicit humor from abrasions both among themselves and with outsiders. Lyra artist Jo claimed that "there is a degree of very necessary humor about pain." They mentioned:

> Training in (location omitted), there's a lot of overlap between the circus community and the kink community…but a funny joke that we would tell in class is, "Are they sex bruises or circus bruises?" So there's also this association of that pain and discomfort with pleasure.

Jo's excerpt indicates how Circus pain is downplayed through aerialists' use of humor. Furthermore, when asked about how her parents would respond to her visual abrasions, straps artist Ellie shared, "Honestly we just end up having a lot of jokes in my house and my parents being like, "Is somebody going to call child services on us? They're going to say we're abusing you." Similarly, other participants expressed "getting a kick out of" being pulled aside by school officials or medical personnel during doctor's visits to ask if they were being abused at home. On a personal note, the partner of one of the author's close friends was convinced that they were not taking circus classes but participating in some sort of fight club. Drawing from the previous examples, participants' responses to outsider perspectives of pain demonstrate in-group identification through joking about other stigmatized groups (e.g., sex workers, victims of domestic abuse) and using these as inside jokes that reinforce distinctions from the out-group who lack knowledge of *pain*

work. Aerialists perform their identity with other members of the in-group when they participate in normalizing and humorizing pain as their occupational identities are recognized and validated.

At this fourth phase of the model, aerialists have undergone a trajectory of transforming how pain is conceptualized and normalized. Moreover, they (re)produce a d/Discourse of pain proselytization that then influences newcomers' embodied experiences of pain. Through their simultaneously discursive and embodied experiences, participants inform on the meaning-making process through which pain is transformed to allow occupational embodiment. Pain, therefore, is the gatekeeper to embodying the aerialist identity. The first contact between body and apparatus is marked by pain, to varying degrees. For some, the pain is surprising, uninviting, or difficult to surpass. For others, the pain is minimal, inconsequential, easy to tolerate. For all, the pain is present—a constant reminder that pain and aerial acrobatics are closely linked.

Interestingly, the ubiquitous adage repeated by aerial performers from circus organizations around the world is not "Aerial hurts," but rather, "*Circus* hurts." The inherent pain that emerges from the body-apparatus connection carries meaning beyond the physiological experience of pain. In Circus, pain is not bound by its material existence but rather, is foundational to the embodiment of the aerialist occupational identity itself. In other words, aerialists (re)produce through the use of "Circus hurts" that to be part of Circus in the role of aerialist, it is necessary to go through pain. When embodied pain is the entry ticket into Circus, the meaning of pain is transformed beyond its physiological experience into a socially constructed stimulus imbued with purpose and value.

In answer to RQ1, this chapter introduced the concept of *pain work* as a unique subcategory of body work in which workers are required to sustain, endure, and manage embodied pain to enact their occupational role. How this process occurs is illustrated through a cyclical process model that demonstrates the co-constructed meaning-making of pain for pain workers (see Figure 4). However, while the meaning of pain can be transformed through discourse and the masking of pain accentuated as conditional to occupational embodiment, the performer is still confined by their material properties. Thus, the following chapter answers RQ2 by revealing how aerialists enact their occupational identity in juxtaposition with the materiality of their bodies while reproducing dominating Circus Discourses.

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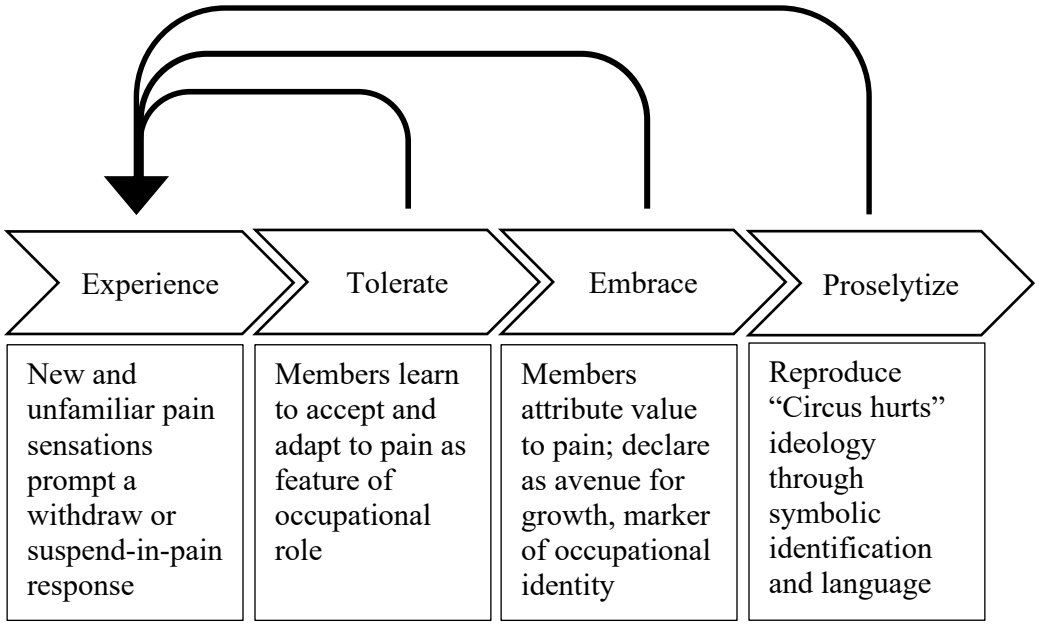
Figure 4

Process Model of Meaning-Making of Pain



Note. This figure demonstrates the iterative process in which the meaning of pain is transformed as a process of socialization into aerial acrobatics. Arrows indicate the non-linear process that members cycle through when presented with new, unfamiliar, or revisited after time pain contexts (e.g., new apparatus or skill, returning after time away).

CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY ENACTMENT AND DISCOURSE

"If people can't deal with pain, circus is probably not for them." — Juliet, rope artist

The previous chapter established how pain, and the ability to withstand it, is a gatekeeper to a career in aerial acrobatics. The occupational identity of an aerialist is intrinsically linked to an affiliation with Circus, and workers reproduce dominating Circus Discourses when performing their occupational identity. The following sections answer RQ2 by analyzing how contemporary aerialists engage in identity enactment and reproduce institutional Discourses of Circus in juxtaposition to the material limitations of their bodies.

Establishing the Dramaturgy of Circus: Identity Enactment of Pain Work

Using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, the following discussion explores the dramaturgy of Circus. Through this analysis, three dominant Discourses that characterize Circus drama (Tait, 2005, 2006) were identified in accordance with how aerialists perform their occupational identity: (a) Spectacle, (b) Risk, and (c) Freedom. These three discourses exist interdependently as the Spectacle of Circus is co-created by the perceived Risk and Freedom portrayed by performers to audiences (Tait, 2006). Through the use of a front stage/backstage identity enactment framework to demonstrate how aerialists reproduce these institutional Discourses, the analysis revealed six identity-enactment strategies that workers engage as they negotiate the materiality of their bodies with the expectations of their occupational role.

To supplement this analysis, the following sections include participants' Photovoice images in accordance with the following prompts: (a) images that represent

how you would like the audience to see you (i.e., front stage images) and (b) images that represent the reality of being an aerialist (i.e., backstage images). When presented side by side, these images vivify this front stage/backstage divide and further contextualize the occupational experiences of these pain workers as they navigate the institutional body work discourses of Circus.

Front Stage Identity Enactments: Performing Freedom, (Perceived) Risk, and Spectacle

The second research question asked how aerialists reproduce institutional-level Circus Discourses and negotiate these with their materiality as they embodied their occupational identity. This portion of the analysis is situated in the front stage region (i.e., where the performance takes place, Goffman, 1959). When aerialists perform in front of the audience, they uphold the dominant Discourses of Circus using three identity-enactment strategies: (a) masking pain to reproduce Freedom, (b) performing-despite-risk to reproduce Risk, and (c) artistic sacrifice to reproduce Spectacle.

Masking Pain

As part of the criteria of their occupational role, aerialists reproduce the Discourse of Freedom by conveying a "bird-like exuberance" and "seamless movement in the air" (Tait, 2005, p. 14). Traditionally, the aerialist's body represents a defiance of social convention by promoting bodily freedom (Tait, 2006). Institutionally, Circus is marked by promoting ideas of Freedom through promises of escapism (Jacob, 2018; Tait, 2006) and inclusion (i.e., a place where people who have been ostracized by society can be themselves and find community). Therefore, interwoven into the fabric of circus

performance is that its members are exercising Freedom from society, judgment, gender norms, etc. (Tait, 2006).

As "Circus communicates ideas of freedom through bodily experience" (Tait, 2006, p. 5), aerialists embody a visual performance of Freedom through fluid acrobatic movements that appear to be effortless. To accomplish the illusion of effortlessness, these pain workers actively suppress expressions of pain and other raw human reactions (e.g., fatigue). Straps artist Marcel (age 26, 10 years' experience) said, "You are an actor playing the role of an actor…your pain does not show up. *It's not part of the dramaturgy of circus*." Marcel's statement describes how although pain itself is a feature of the occupational role of the aerialist, e*xpressing* pain is not. By way of contrast, these findings reject the conceptualization of circus acrobats as performers of 'actuality' who are devoid of performances of deception (see Coxe, 1980). Moreover, these findings provide support for the incongruencies between social constructions of body work and worker's corporeality (Michel, 2011). Furthermore, this concealment of pain, according to dance trapeze artist Lucy (age 35, 10 years' experience), is "part of the magic that makes circus people." Having gone through the process of transforming their embodied experience of pain, aerialists have established, via a process of occupational identification, a foundation of subduing physiological reactions to accomplish occupational goals.

Masking pain is a foundational identity enactment to perform the aerialist identity. Fabrics artist Diana (age 36, 13 years' experience) shared, "There's a lot of masking to look and appear strong or appear a certain way to get through it [the performance], move through it, accomplish anything." These findings support literature on aerial performance

and pain. In their interview study of 31 aerialists, the authors (Walby & Stuart, 2021) note that "the shocks absorbed by the aerialists' bodies flying high above crowds would rupture most humans" (p. 7) and "circus aerialists often work through pain that would overwhelm the average human" (p. 15). The masking does not end when the performance stops, but rather, when the performer can no longer be seen by the audience. After executing an arduous performance, the performer needs to exude an air of confidence that shows, "that did nothing to me," as shared by silks artist Natalie (age 30, 4 years' experience). She continues to describe how the criteria to make things look effortless pose a paradoxical challenge for the performer:

> I would say the biggest misconception—it's just because we have to make it look this way—is that they [the audience] think it's easier than it actually is. And even when I'm getting hired to do a gig sometimes I have to remind them [the hiring manager] that I am still human and being in the air for an entire hour is not possible. I need breaks and I can't just be up there for the entire time…they just don't really take into consideration how taxing it is on the body.

This excerpt highlights how aerialists, through the process of positive identity enactment, create the illusion of effortlessness to such a degree that non-members undermine the effort necessary to execute a performance and thus have unrealistic expectations of the performer.

The effortlessness that the performer conveys transcends beyond the basic expectations of aerial artistry and into instances when the aerialist is actively in pain or is performing with an injury. In some cases, the adrenaline of performing is enough to suppress pain sensations. Silks artist Lauren (age 29, 5 years' experience), for example, noted how, "Especially when you're performing, my injuries are not there. Whatever was hurting I don't remember it was hurting because I'm so focused on the routine and

sticking to my music and providing that entertainment that I am hired to do." On a similar note, silks artist JaJa (age 27, 9 years' experience) shared,

> [We need] to be able to work through some of those times when we're in so much pain as aerialists and we've crashed and we burn and we bruised and we blistered and then to have a final product to show and just let all of that not even exist anymore. And it might just be that three or five minute show and you might only do it once. But you have to get out there and pretend like none of it hurts anymore.

When performing her occupational identity in the front stage, JaJa's excerpt demonstrates that she knows to pretend that none of the pain she has sustained or is experiencing during the performance "exists." In response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you, JaJa provided an image of her performing during a street festival and commented on the enthusiasm and joy she portrays for the audience (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Front Stage Image: Street Festival Silks

Note. JaJa giving an enthusiastic silks performance for the gathering crowd.

Masking Emergent Pain. Aerialists demonstrate an uncanny ability to adapt to the experience of pain, particularly when pain emerges during a performance. In all cases, the aerialist will attempt to mask their pain as much as circumstances allow. When doing ambience work (i.e., atmospheric work), the aerialist is hired to perform in the background of corporate events, private parties, restaurants, etc. To provide a visual representation of a typical ambience gig, the author provided an image of herself performing on a lollipop apparatus (i.e., a ground-supported spinning combined lyra/pole apparatus) at a holiday event (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Ambience Gig on Lollipop

Note. A typical ambient gig where the artist performs as part of the event backdrop.

A typical ambience performance will require the artist to perform five-to-15-minute sets with breaks in between over the course of the event. An important distinction between ambient work and show performances are that shows often require more pre-

training, usually over the span of weeks or months giving some allowance for rest and healing. Ambient work, on the other hand, usually consists of basic tricks but requires the artist to perform over longer spans of time, using repetitive motions and causing friction against the same areas. In other words, ambient work is exhausting and often creates surface wounds that continue to get aggravated throughout the event. Silks artist Natalie shared the following ambient gig experience:

> You have to hide it [pain] at all times, no matter what's happening… I was on a gig for a holiday and I was on lyra. We were outdoors…And it was a multi-day gig. So we were there for the whole weekend, for a number of hours [each day]. Because of the humidity and the fresher tape [on the lyra], it actually caused blisters on the center of the palm of my hands…I still had like a day or two after when this happened. Of course, the blisters tore open almost right away so having to continue to perform with ripped up hands and having to just put tape over it to lessen the pain, but *it was probably the most painful gig experience of my life*. But even then, you would not know it because I just went out there and I put a smile on my face and made it look like I was having the time of my life because *that's what you have to do*.

Natalie's excerpt describes how expressing pain would be violating a norm of her occupational role and a negative identity enactment. While she did not elaborate on the conditions of her contract during the interview, Natalie's anecdote does not indicate that she entertained the idea of *not* performing. Instead, she performed her aerialist identity by wrapping some tape around her hands, putting a smile on, and demonstrating enthusiasm because "that's what you have to do."

When compared to other anecdotes shared by participants, Natalie's experience masking emergent pain appears muted. While superficial wounds are painful, they tend to heal quickly. Some participants shared experiences of sustaining more severe injuries during a performance and continued to mask their pain. Silks artist Barbara (age 35, 12 years' experience) shared an event she witnessed:

> My friend (name omitted) was doing a corporate event and they had to hang out in the top of their silks wrapped for a double star[5] for half an hour because the client wanted them to start out and hand out these Rolexes—something ridiculous. She came out of her wrap because it had started to cut circulation so she was readjusting. And she ended up falling from like 24 feet and broke her heels. And this happened in front of the clients and everything. *She had to walk off like nothing happened*.
>
> Interviewer: How did she do that?
>
> Barbara: Adrenaline! I don't know straight up like gumption, just get through it and get off the stage. But she was crawling on her knees [once off stage] and in a wheelchair for three or four months.

Barbara's friend continued her performance of identity by masking pain even though she had broken both heels. Her comment of "just get through it and get off the stage" indicates the unwillingness of her friend to not uphold her occupational identity until she exited the front stage region. A similar account is shared by lyra artist Elisa (age 29, 23 years' experience), who was contracted to perform as a human cannonball for a famous circus company. In a human cannonball act, the performer lies stomach down inside the barrel of the cannon and is then shot out with compressed air or a spring for approximately sixty to seventy-five feet. Once in the air, the performer rotates themselves to land on their back into a net or inflated bag. Elisa, who practiced and performed this act five or six hundred times, overdid her rotation and landed on her feet instead of her back, destroying her right ankle. After a successful landing, she would usually do a lap around the arena. Unable to do that, she recalls:

> I got out of the bag styling[6] and the spotlight goes one way and I go the opposite

[5] A drop where the aerialist starts in a sideways position with the fabric (or other malleable apparatus) on their back, wraps it around their bottom leg and stomach and rotates downward with legs open while holding a 'V' shape with the arms (Aerial Physique, 2021).

[6] After performing an impressive feat, the performer raises their arms in a 'V' shape to indicate victory and draw applause from the audience.

> way. So I just hobbled out that way and then kind of collapsed, so that was fun. But it's just funny because nobody realized that [I was hurt] because I got up but you know you style and then you hop off the other way.

In Elisa's case, she maintained her front stage occupational identity enactment as best she could. Although she knew she was unable to complete the final run, she did not risk having the audience know that something had gone wrong with the performance and masked her pain by styling as expected. Like the experience that Barbara relayed, neither performer indicated that they were injured until they were backstage. Elisa's description of being hurt as "funny because nobody realized" she was hurt is indicative of a positive identity enactment.

Effortlessness. In enacting their occupational identity, aerialists are held to a certain standard of aesthetic quality in their performance. Regardless of how tired or discouraged they may be, they need to produce the same quality of Spectacle. After all, aerialists have an obligation to perform their front-stage identity in spite of their corporeal limits. Flying pole artist Markus (age 22, 14 years' experience), who performed ten shows a week during a contract, shared how difficult it was to perform at the same level of intensity for every show. He shared that the audience kept him "awake" and shared, "You want to make them happy. Because remembering that it's their first time watching the show—you've done it nine times already that week, they've never seen it before, and *you need to make it just as good for them* as your first time performing this." To make a performance "just as good" as the first time, aerialists need to continue to portray their movements as effortless.

Performing effortlessness is increasingly harder to accomplish as the body tires. Effortlessness, however, is part of the criteria of the aerialists' occupational role and the

performance of effortlessness is a positive identity enactment. In support of existing literature (Tait, 2005), participant responses demonstrate aerialists (re)produce through discourse that effortlessness is an occupational norm in discourse. For example, lyra artist Elisa noted, "It's your job as a performer to make what you're doing look effortless." Echoing this point, silks artist Natalie's coach often reminded her that "no one pays to see you struggle," and explained:

> They're paying to see someone who has mastered their craft…if you were buying a piece of art from an artist, you're not gonna buy a stick figure from someone, you're gonna buy a fully detailed, beautiful portrait that looks like a photograph… *So you can't be performing stick figure tricks.* The best way to say that I will not be performing a trick that I haven't put 100 or more hours of practice into…*it should look effortless*.

Natalie compares performing a trick that conveys "struggle" rather than effortlessness with buying a simple "stick figure" piece of artwork that anyone can draw and is low-quality. Natalie's comment demonstrates how aerialists reproduce through discourse that an occupational norm is to fulfill audience expectations and "performing stick figure tricks" that are not perfected (or not performed effortlessly) would violate this norm. She added the following as part of this discussion:

> You just have to make everything look effortless and like it doesn't affect you at all…You got to look like you could do this like a million times in a row if you wanted. When in reality, you really can't—like a three and a half to four minutes act is incredibly exhausting…But you can't show that you're exhausted until you are off that stage. You have to look confident and make it look effortless. The whole time.

Natalie indicated that she fulfills her occupational role and performs her front stage identity by portraying effortlessness despite her bodily limitations. Even when performances are "incredibly exhausting," the aerialist must uphold their front stage occupational identity and look confident and effortless until they leave the stage. To

represent the effortlessness that aerialists must convey in the air, Natalie provided an image of herself performing at a well-known aerial competition in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Front Stage Image: Displaying Effortless

Note. Participant making an arduous performance look effortless during an aerial competition for which she won first place.

This section explained how aerialists engage positive identity enactment in the front stage region by performing effortlessness as an occupational norm. Their responses how reproduce through discourse the expectations of their occupational role. In doing so, aerialists (re)produce the dominant d/Discourse of Freedom that is representative of circus performance. These findings suggest that performing effortlessness ignores the

material limitations of body workers as they are held to quality standards of performance that do not account for the materiality of the body. Straps artist Ellie (age 19, 3 years' experience) shared, "the appearance of being effortless…takes 110% of your effort." However, there is no room to demonstrate effort in the front stage region, rather, expressing effort is left to backstage spaces as depicted in Figure 8, provided by straps artist Marcel in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that represents the reality of being an aerialist.

Figure 8

Backstage Image: Post-Performance Collapse

Note. Aerialist collapsed on the ground after having lunch after a performance.

In summary, aerialists use the identity enactment of *masking pain* to fulfill their occupational role in the front stage region. In doing so, they reproduce the dominating Discourse of Freedom as they perform superhuman feats without giving any indication of

pain or injury in the process. The following section explores how aerialists reproduce the Discourse of Risk through the identity enactment of *performing-despite-risk.*

Performing-despite-Risk: The Show Must Go On

When an aerialist hangs from an apparatus during a performance, they rely on their strength, knowledge, trust in a skill, and the safety of their equipment to keep them safe. Silks artist Leah shared (age 23, 13 years' experience), "If you wrap it [a drop] correctly, you won't die, but it's just scary because it's a lot of falling or falling backward or very high…you just have to go forward and *just hope it works out*. People die because you're wrapped in and you trust the wrap…[or] rely on your skill to catch them." Existing literature has related aerial performance to *edgework* (i.e., "risk-taking behavior"; Walby & Stuart, 2021, p. 16) as the aerialist walks a fine line between life and death whenever they go up in the air. Performing "visceral risky action" (Tait, 2006, p. 5) is key to the allure of aerial performance. Traditionally, Risk is a feature of Circus and feeds into the thrill that the audience feels when watching a performance. As previously mentioned, seeing someone performing a dangerous act can produce a vicarious embodied reaction for the audience (Tait, 2006, 2016). Aerial cradle artist PauPau (age 35, 17 years' experience) elaborates on the prevalent discourse of Risk that feeds Circus spectacle:

> The story of circus started with the arena in the Roman times, from gladiators. So death is already here. It's present. The only goals are to kill each other…So let's skip a bit in history and arrive in the 19th century…to this traditional circus that we still know today. It's one arena in the middle. So they kept this model of architecture, which is a circle and people around. So when you have an audience around the circle, which is watching what's happening in the circle, the artist or the person who is in the middle is already prisoner from the audience…You understand? The story about circus and how *we still hope that the guy on the trapeze will fall, even if we don't want that.*

As PauPau is familiar with the history of the circus and how its history influences contemporary Circus, her excerpt demonstrates an understanding of the occupational expectation of aerialists to perform *perceived* Risk. The performance of perceived risk, however, is created through engaging *actual* risk. To fulfill their occupational role, aerialists must accept a certain level of risk (Walby & Stuart, 2021). In the front-stage region, where the aerialist is performing in front of a live audience, this analysis finds that aerialists subscribe to the common trope of "the show must go on" through the identity enactment of *performing-despite-risk*. Performing-despite-risk is defined as continuing to perform the aerialist occupational identity when unexpected events happen that put the aerialist in unprecedented danger and accepting occupational risk. Whereas the identity enactment of *masking pain* is based on the aerialist performing through "discomfort" or non-life-threatening pain (i.e., performing with open blisters), *performing-despite-risk* involves the aerialist continuing a performance with the uncertainty that they could sustain a life-threatening injury or even death.

Interviewees' use of the phrase, "the show must go on" surfaced when discussing instances when unexpected rigging, apparatus, or human-error issues occurred. They conveyed that they would not consider stopping a performance if something went wrong because "the show must go on." Silks artist Natalie shared that stopping during a performance would take her audience "out of the experience." Lyra artist Tia (age 40, 10 years' experience) echoed a similar sentiment, "If something goes wrong in the performance, I don't want to break the fourth wall. I don't want people to know that something has gone wrong" and that "performances should be immersive." Breaking the "fourth wall" (i.e., the invisible divide between the audience and the performer, Bell,

2008) would kill the illusion for the audience and violate an occupational norm. Silks artist Lauren shared, "I've never stopped in the middle of a performance," even when something is going awry. She relayed the following experience:

> I was rigged up like 80 feet…we were rigged on a piece that moved and it had a wheel on the beam that wasn't locked in. So you're moving and your rigging is moving with you and we performed through it…I remember her [performance partner] literally kicking off the wall because her piece had moved too close to the wall. And she couldn't finish the rest of it without gracefully trying to kick off and it wasn't a matter of, "Oh, I need to stop and get down," it was "Kick off and keep going." And it's kind of insane when you think about it, because that is incredibly dangerous.

Lauren could feel that something was wrong with the rigging but did not consider to "stop and get down." In the moment, both her and her partner absorbed the risk they were in and chose to "kick off and keep going." Lauren's excerpt indicates that she was aware of the risk involved in the situation, noting that it was "incredibly dangerous" to continue the act in retrospect.

During these high-risk scenarios, participants demonstrate the extent to which they perform their front stage occupational identity. The previous comment of the performer being "a prisoner of the audience" indicates that performers cannot leave or walk away from risky situations as doing so would violate an occupational norm. When all eyes are on the performer and something goes wrong, they are materially constrained by the front stage and occupationally constrained by their front stage identity. Like a prisoner trapped in a cell, the performer is trapped in the front stage and performs their identity accordingly. For example, trapeze and sling artist Margaux (age 36, 11 years' experience) recalled an experience where her fabric apparatus did not open as extensively as she needed it to open to safely drop into the fabric. Knowing that she did not have

enough fabric available, but "needing to hit the music" for the drop, she shared, "It was enough where I was—this will probably be fine and I'm going to take the risk…*here's hoping I don't die.*" Margaux suggests that she was cognizant of the risk she was taking (i.e., "here's hoping I don't die") and simultaneously aware of needing to hit her music cue (i.e., enact her occupational identity). Her actions reveal she continued to perform her occupational identity even when she was in danger. In saying "this will probably be fine," Margaux portrays a sense of *pseudo agency* (perceived self-efficacy, see Zanin, 2018) over her circumstance.

Similarly, lyra artist Jo (age 34, 8 years' experience) shared an experience when their hand slipped during a performance, "Okay, well I just almost died" and after the original scare wore off and they knew they were okay, they thought, "Where the fuck am I in my music? I have to get–like *the show must go on*. I have to get back into the choreo, how do I get back to where I need to be time wise?" Even though Jo had undergone a considerable scare—as they were 25 feet up in the air—they continued to perform their front stage identity despite the shock that their body had just absorbed. Jo's example supports the notion that aerialists perform-despite-risk and learn to adapt to challenging circumstances during a performance to meet occupational norms.

In an extreme scenario, static trapeze artist Frodo (age 24, 19 years' experience) broke her leg during a performance. Upon landing, she said "Shit, how is the audience gonna react to this?" and "What are we gonna do with the rest of the show?" The show did in fact continue as Frodo rode off in the back of a bike, cheerfully waving goodbye to her audience. She added that because of the way the producers, staff, and performers responded to the incident (i.e., by continuing the show), many audience members thought

that the entire experience was part of the performance. In keeping with "the show must go on" motto, the ushers said to the audience that Frodo "was totally fine and I was just going to the hospital to check my leg a bit. Of course, that was a lie, they didn't know how I was." Later in our interview, Frodo disclosed that her greatest fear as an aerialist was traumatizing the audience and said, "But I already did that!" Here, Frodo's comment of "traumatizing the audience" reveals her concern for failing to engage a positive identity enactment by having sustained an accident. In doing so, her assumption of responsibility for having traumatized her audience (re)produces larger body work d/Discourses that ignore the material realities of workers (Michel, 2011) as she positions her accident as a violation of occupational norms.

Accepting Occupational Risk. Effectively, aerialists want to convey to the audience that there is an element of risk in what they are doing, but never want to have that risk go into fruition—such as was the case in Frodo's experience. Reproducing perceived risk is tied to the occupational identity of aerialists. Participants expressed how audiences see aerialists as "daredevils," "risk taker[s]," and "somebody who's willing to do stuff that other people might think is really terrifying." Rope artist Juliet (age 23, 9 years' experience) described the relationship between risk and pain as features of embodying the aerial acrobat identity,

> It is a lot about risk. There's so much risk of pain in circus. I think that's part of the interesting aspect. It's also part of the daring, impressive part. In traditional circus, danger is a huge aspect of it. Of course, danger equates with pain so I think it also comes with some of the interests and the fascination with circus is this relationship with pain.

Juliet's comment illustrates how risk, accompanied with pain and danger, as an occupational feature, is present for the performer. Dance trapeze artist Lucy, shared "At

some point, you have to accept the risk. You have to embrace this as part of what you're doing." Straps artist Stella (age 34, 12 years' experience) echoed a similar statement, "Aerial is dangerous. It is risky. On the spectrum of things that put you at risk, it's up there." Lastly, dance trapeze artist Leo repeated a similar notion, "You're basically like a gymnast in the air, right? You're figuring out your dynamic movement, and how you're going to flip, turn, twist, rotate, and *not die in the process*."

Participants underscored the occupational risk of aerial acrobatics during instances when they contrasted aerial acrobatics to other types of performance. Participants commented on "how aerial takes you into a state of risk that is extreme" and that the aerial performer is in "disproportionately more and more danger [than the ground performer]." Distinguishing between juggling and aerial acrobatics, lyra artist Elisa noted, "A juggling mistake is, you drop. An aerial mistake is you die essentially, if we're going to be really dramatic about it."

Moreover, the actual degree of risk that is assumed is made salient when extreme accidents occur (i.e., those that lead to significant injury or even death). In 2018, Yann Arnaud, a 15-year veteran with Cirque du Soleil, died tragically when his hand slipped during a live performance of a straps act. Former President and CEO of Cirque du Soleil, Daniel Lamarre, was quoted as saying, "We were very surprised, considering his experience, that something like that would have happened" (Reuters, 2018). Whereas Lamarre's comments insinuates Arnaud's experience should have prevented him from letting go of the apparatus, the reality is that providing adequate safety measures that account for the performers' humanness and room for error would have prevented this death. Unfortunately, safety measures that are visible to the audience would counteract

the perceived risk performers portray. For example, if mats, a wall cushion, or safety lines were present on stage this may encourage the audience to think, "Well, I could probably do that too if I knew that if I fell, I'd just sink into a nice cushion." The absence of safety measures, however, bolsters the *actual* risk performers accept to perform their occupational identity and makes performance more exciting for the audience to watch.

In summary, aerialists use the identity enactment of *performing-despite-risk* to fulfill their occupational role in the front stage region. In doing so, they reproduce the dominating Discourse of Risk as they subscribe to a "the show must go on" motto and continue to perform through unprecedented danger and accept a baseline level of occupational risk. The following section explores how aerialists reproduce the Discourse of Spectacle through the identity enactment of *artistic sacrifice.*

Artistic Sacrifice

The job of the performer is to entertain the audience. Their successes and failures are determined by the audience's reaction. Circus revolves around the idea of creating Spectacle and the performers' role is to be spectacular. The most famous circus company in American history, the partnership created between Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, was billed "The Greatest Show on Earth." Traveling circuses are deemed "an exercise in hyperbole and spectacle" (Hansard, 2022). Circus gives spectators "this ability, in a way, to dissolve oneself, to have an out-of-body experience" as circus acts "push the boundaries of human strength, of the limited nature of our humanness in ways that allow us to transcend it" (Davis, 2018). In short, Circus *is* Spectacle. To reproduce Spectacle, this analysis finds that aerialists perform their identity in the front stage region through placing significant pressure on themselves to please the audience. In doing so,

they use the identity enactment of *artistic sacrifice* as they elevate audience needs above their own.

The pressure that performers place upon themselves to please the audience reproduces the larger discourse of Spectacle and trickles down into every aspect of their performance, from the tricks they choose to put into an act to the criteria used to differentiate between good and bad performances. Silks artist Bailey (age 27, 8 years' experience) shares the "beautiful advice" he received from a coach. He was told remember that "...performing was a gift. It wasn't for you. It was something that you were giving to the people who are watching you. By noting that the "gift" of performance was for the audience and not the performer, Bailey affirms the underlying principle of sacrifice and pressure to please the audience as a positive identity enactment. An example of the pressure that performers put on themselves comes from straps artist Sebastian (age 29, 6 years' experience):

> This is probably a little abusive to myself but I once did the math of, if I perform for six minutes on stage for 3,000 people, how many minutes is that added up? So one person's experience is five minutes, so 3,000 times six? So basically if I half assed that performance, I wasted 18,000 minutes of people's lives. That's a lot of pressure. But it's something to be aware of, I think it matters.

Sebastian describes the pressure and perfectionism he engages as a norm of his occupational role. Pleasing the audience is a tricky business as artists walk a fine line between selecting crowd-pleasing acts or acts that highlight their skill level, thus reflecting the identity enactment of artistic sacrifice. For example, a common adage among circus folk is "splits for claps," which describes how audiences are satisfied with relatively simple (to the performer) tricks such as doing the splits. An example of a "splits for claps" moment is depicted in Figure 9, provided by trapeze artist Lucy in

response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you. Audiences often have a relatively low baseline for what the body can do and many spectators are likely not able to do the splits themselves—*but the notion of doing the splits is relatable as spectators have a heuristic for doing the splits*. Seeing someone do the splits in the air, therefore, is itself an impressive feat (for lay audiences).

Figure 9

Front Stage Image: "Splits for claps"

Note. Participant Lucy doing the splits on aerial chair for her audience.

Interviewees admitted to crafting an entire choreography around what non-circus folk or "muggles," (i.e., non-magical persons, Rowling, 1997) as commonly referred to by circus performers, would find impressive. The use of the moniker of "muggles" positions the aerialist as "magical" or superhuman. They describe the magical element at the core of aerial performance through the following comments: "This [act] is magical because [the audience] kind of freak out—just a simple swing is making them react," "[aerial acrobatics] adds another element for the audience because it's *not a very human*

thing," "magical element," "not a very human thing, we're not supposed to be in the air– we can't fly," and "people want to see this crazy thing that could be really dangerous– there's some truth to that *illusion* of what the audience wants to see and believe." Aerialists are attributed with an identity of superhuman and magical that they, in response, perform as an occupational norm.

There is a threshold for how aerialists perform "magical" and "superhuman" as an occupational norm. Aerialists need to be magical at a level audiences can relate to, otherwise, the acts will go over their audience's heads (no pun intended). The low baseline of impressiveness of tricks for audiences provides a challenge to performers. While they train diligently for job security, they often end up performing skills that do not demonstrate the extent of their talents. Performing more challenging tricks for lay persons can be useless because "normal people do not understand at all." When asked how she felt performing for different audience members (i.e., non-circus folk and circus folk), lyra artist Elisa shared:

> The idea of having peers or other aerialists watching has a lot more of "You actually know what I'm doing" versus a lay person who looks and sees a split and thinks that's the most impressive part of the act…"No, no, honey, that's the easy part. That's for you. The other stuff is for the people who actually can see how difficult it is."

Elisa's comment connotes the sacrifice that artists make when developing their choreography. She alludes to feeling irritation toward lay people who applaud skills that may appear difficult but are simple to perform. She indicates that she understands more difficult skills would be lost on non-circus members. Aerial cradle artist PauPau describes a similar frustration:

> They don't realize if we do a back or a front salto [somersault], and so it's a

> bit frustrating because one is more complicated than the other one…if the audience doesn't understand what you do—there are some tricks that people can visually understand what's happening, there are some tricks that they're just a bit lost. If you do a double salto[7], they will understand because it's easy to understand. But if you do a salto[8] with a lot of twists inside, they are not able to understand the level of difficulty, which means that you better do this in your training but not in the show. *There is no payoff*. You will put on yourself a lot of pressure and people will have the same sensation on what they react the most.

PauPau describes how audiences need to visually understand what is happening for them to appreciate the act. A double salto has properties that are simple enough for the audience to appreciate, whereas saltos with "a lot of twists inside" are more technically challenging but also difficult for the audience to make sense of visually. For PauPau, "there is no payoff" as the audience will not respond in accordance with the difficulty of the act (i.e., by giving sufficient accolades). PauPau uses the identity enactment of artistic sacrifice to train her more challenging skills in the backstage region but does not perform them in the front stage region. PauPau proceeded to share conversations with her performance partner about choosing which tricks to perform:

> For example, swinging by the feet. They're just like, "Wow!" but *we didn't even do a trick*…with years of performing, you understand, "Okay, these tricks, they're working good on the audience; these other tricks, they're complicated for us, and they're not working good. This other one is easy, and it's working like crazy. So then you start to make choices from that.

PauPau describes how, in talking to her partner, they decided to keep the tricks that the audience responded with the most accolades to or were "working good" and choosing these over more complicated tricks that the audience was not appreciating enough. To display an example of the type of performance that audiences will appreciate, PauPau

[7] A trick that requires the aerialist to release the hands from the bar or performing partner's hands and "tuck tight into a double back somersault and open out for the catch" (Pilgrim, 2022a).

[8] A trick that requires the aerialist to hold the body in a straight position and release, "making a full twist in the air before the catch" (Pilgrim, 2022b).

provided an image of herself performing aerial cradle with her performance partner in response to the study prompt of: Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you (see Figure 10). In her photo, PauPau can be seen about to catch her partner's hands after performing a salto, which she considers to be a basic trick. PauPau's example supports the notion that to fulfill their occupational role, aerialists reproduce in their everyday talk how they need to elevate audience's needs over their own during front stage performances.

Figure 10

Backstage Image: Performing Aerial Cradle at Dinner

Note. PauPau about to catch her partner's hands after performing a salto.

Backstage Identity Enactments: Corporeal Risk, the Cost of Spectacle, and Loss of Freedom

The previous sections discussed how aerialists use various identity enactment strategies to perform their occupational role in the front stage region to reproduce

dominant institutional Discourses of Circus. The next portion of the analysis is situated in the backstage region (i.e., where the performer prepares the performance; Goffman, 1959). When aerialists prepare front stage performances in the backstage region, they uphold the dominant Discourses of Circus using three identity-enactment strategies: (a) bodywork double-bind through corporeal Risk, (b) complicit anonymity as a cost of Spectacle, and (c) self-deprecation as a loss of Freedom. In addition, this section includes an analysis of paired Photovoice images provided by participants. The images are displayed side-by-side, demonstrating the front stage (e.g., images that represent how you would like the audience to see you) and backstage (e.g., images that represent the reality of being an aerialist) identity enactments of body workers in this context.

Bodywork Double Bind

This section reveals that aerialists negotiate the material limitations of their bodies with their occupational expectations through the identity enactment of a body work double bind. At one pole, professional aerialists must maintain performance-ready shape. At the opposite pole, aerialists need to properly care for their bodies in order to fulfill the expectations of their occupational role. When aerialists are injured or tired, resting for recovery or healing impedes their ability to perform the aerialist identity. However, *not* resisting for recovery or healing also impedes their ability to perform their aerialist identity. This dynamic creates a double bind, contrary to a contradiction or tension. Whereas tensions are "feeling states" when "making choices, responding to, and moving forward in organizational situations" and contradictions are mutually exclusive, bipolar opposites (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 68-69), a double bind is "structured as a paradox (so that to obey is to disobey and vice versa)," requires an intense relationship (i.e., in this

context, occupational identification), and an inability to discursively or physically escape the message (Tracy, 2004, p. 122). Participant responses revealed that they perceive being stuck in a double bind where they need to do their jobs despite injury or fatigue, yet recovery and healing would facilitate their ability to do their jobs.

For example, as a feature of their occupational role, aerialists need to keep a consistent training schedule, which prevents them from taking long periods of rest or allow their body to properly heal. Rope artist Megan (age 21, 11 years' experience) shared, "Working in this field, your hands are going to be exhausted, and your mind's gonna be exhausted, because you're constantly using your body to make a living and push yourself forward." Behind the scenes, aerialists undergo arduous training that is often painstaking. Their schedules are often determined by the gigs or contracts they secure. Thus, aerialists perform their backstage occupational identity through a body work double bind by training through exhaustion, pain, and injury to fulfill their occupational role.

As aerialists engage a body work double bind as an identity enactment, performers (re)produce a d/Discourse of Risk by engaging actual corporeal risk in the backstage region. Trapeze artist Frodo mentioned, "It's hard to have a life outside of circus…you have to keep up your skills at the same time as you're creating…you have to train two or three hours of technique every day…you have to work really hard creatively and also physically to maintain what you have." Silks artist Bailey chose a picture of himself performing bicep roll-ups (i.e., an upward somersault where the apparatus wraps around the biceps; see Figure 11) for his front stage image. When asked why this image was chosen, he answered, "I feel that's kind of an iconic move of mine…In terms of how

the audience sees me, it's something that I worked on for a really long time to create this particular shape." Bicep roll-ups are infamously challenging, as the aerialist's entire body weight is sustained by the arms.

Bailey's backstage image shows him teaching roll-ups (see Figure 11). In this picture, he is shown using the red marks and bruises on his arms as a guide to indicate where the fabric should be for roll-ups. He shared, "When I'm doing the roll ups in the routine it's this flawless finished product, this polished skill, but even as I'm teaching and training them, *my body is still enduring all this stress*." Bailey's explanations for choosing these images are to illustrate the wear and tear that his body endures when training and teaching roll-ups for the purpose of performing a "polished" and "flawless finished product." What the audience does not see is how Bailey's backstage performance of identity, and the stress that is body endures, allows him to perform his front stage identity.

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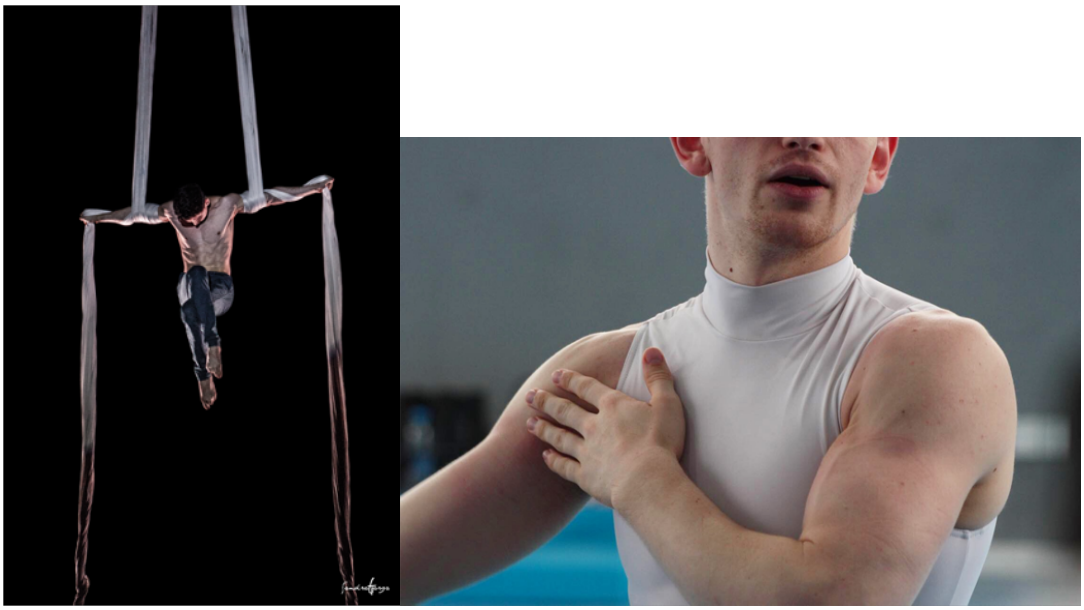
Figure 11

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Bicep Roll-Ups.



Note. On the left, Bailey's front-stage image performing roll-ups during an act. On the right, his backstage image using his own marks and bruises to teach roll-ups to others.

In a similar vein, rope artist Megan chose a picture of her performing on chains loops as her front stage image (see Figure 12). She chose this image because it portrays her as "a really, really confident young lady." Her backstage photo (see Figure 12) shows her calloused hands. In response to why she chose this photo, she said:

> When you think about it, no matter what apparatus you are using, your hands are probably the number one contributor to your ability…We train more hours than we know sometimes…These were my hands after days and hours training on a trapeze. Your hands may be bleeding and the sweat will sting, but you still grip that bar and go as hard as you can until you leave for the night.

Whereas in her front stage image, Megan exudes confidence and enthusiasm, her backstage image shows the material reality of her glove-covered hands. She demonstrates

how arduous aerial acrobatics training can be and how none of that material damage is observable to the audience.

Figure 12

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Covered and Calloused Hands.

Note. On the left, Megan during a performance on chains loops wearing protective gloves and boots. On the right, Megan's calloused hands from hours training on trapeze.

Megan went on to compare her time in circus school to "military training," where she "was just so terrified the whole time, because I was being yelled at and I was being told to do things and push super, super hard." Megan auditioned for and was selected as one of 15 students to participate in a 6-week intensive summer training program. She trained for eight hours a day, six days a week. During this time, she realized how diligently she would need to train if she pursued a career in circus arts. She shared, "I'm going to be in a gym eight hours a day, every single day, even if I am in a really large

show production and I'm traveling, any downtime you get, you're gonna be training for that show." Unable to commit to the identity enactment of a body work double bind to fulfill her occupational role, Megan ultimately decided to walk away from Circus.

Participants (re)produced via discourse that engaging a body work double bind is a positive identity enactment. Some responses included, "You don't want to not train," "I wouldn't feel like myself if I stopped training," and "To be able to be a professional circus artist, you have to put so much [work] all the time." Flying pole artist Markus shared, "If you're tired, it's quite hard to keep yourself going," but he would not consider skipping his training. He continued, "...it's not actually a question. I'm going to get up, I'm going to train." The identity enactment of a body work double bind results in the aerialist expressing frustration toward their own body's material limits. When needing to perform their occupational role, the body's material properties can be perceived as an obstacle for performances of identity. For example, straps artist Ellie chose for her front stage image a picture of her doing the splits on straps loops because she looked "very confident but calm…serene. It looks graceful but strong at the same time" (see Figure 13). Her backstage image (see Figure 13) shows Ellie looking defeated during a training session. She shared,

> I'm having a total breakdown. I was training roll-ups and I wasn't succeeding in the drill…I think a lot of people don't think about how much of training is *this*, wanting to quit and just wanting to walk out and just give up, the frustration of not getting something because, you don't go on stage and show your failures, you go on stage and show what you're best at and show that you're impressive.

Ellie's "total breakdown" comes as a result of her body not being able to perform as needed during her training session. Her inability to achieve a specific drill limits how well she can perform her front stage occupational identity. By expressing frustration with

their body's material limitations, aerialists (re)produce a d/Discourse of blaming their own materiality as an impediment to fulfilling their occupational role.

Figure 13

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Training Mood

Note. On the left, Ellie appears "graceful" and "serene" on straps loops. On the right, her "training mood today" after an unsuccessful session that left her feeling defeated.

Risking and Resisting Materiality. Aerialists engage an identity enactment of a body work double bind by (re)producing two opposing discourses: (a) training through injury and fatigue and (b) chastising training through injury and fatigue. For example, straps artist Stella, shared, "I've been doing this for 12 years and just sat here for an hour and told you about how it's unproductive to train through pain. But there's still this, 'Oh, we got to push through.' There's gotta be something in the water for aerialists or something, we do it, we do it." Whereas participants generally agreed that "pushing through" pain was harmful, they also (re)produced through discourse that training

through pain was a positive identity enactment. In doing so, they reproduce the dominant Discourse of Risk that is imbued into their occupational role. As established previously, aerialists identify as "risk takers" and take corporeal risks in the backstage region to perform their front stage region identity.

This analysis suggests that aerialists, as pain workers, enact their occupational identity through withstanding pain. In other words, the aerialist's identity is bolstered by their willingness to push past pain, as demonstrated by the *meaning-making of pain process model* phases of *embrace* (i.e., attributing value to pain) and *proselytize* (i.e., endorsing pain). Thus, aerialists conceive that managing pain is just "part of the job." Trapeze artist Frodo, for example, broke her toe at the start of a performing contract and noted, "I didn't realize before two weeks after, because we had a lot of performances in that time. I thought, well, I'm gonna just check it out later. And that's, of course, not healthy in any way." Frodo expresses the unhealthiness of her approach to managing her injury, but only in retrospect. Lyra artist Emily (age 29, 9 years' experience), sprained her ankle during practice when her foot became cinched between the trapeze bar and the rope, immediately cracking the cartilage on the outside of her foot. She shared that "...the pain culture in that studio made it feel embarrassing to even have that ankle wrapped up or to avoid certain movements." Emily's hesitation to wrap her ankle or avoid certain movements suggests that doing so would be a violation of an occupational norm as it would indicate to others that she was not pushing through her pain.

Another example comes from straps artist Sebastian, who did inform his producers that he was unable to perform after sustaining an injury. He admitted that disclosing injury could be difficult because it made him "question your whole identity as

to what you can do." Sebastian expressed that although he is mindful of the benefits of disclosing injury and asking for a rest day (i.e., "Give me the night off, I need the rest so tomorrow, I'll be even stronger…You don't want to see a shit performance anyways"), doing so made him question his identity. In short, this analysis reveals that *unwillingness* to endure pain—or perform through injury—is a violation of an occupational norm. Sebastian's experience is indicative of the body work double bind as an occupational identity enactment.

Another example comes from lyra artist Emily. When training neck hangs, she said that was used to hearing comments such as, "Well, these are the number of reps. So if you're starting to feel twinges in your neck, you do the number of reps, you'll probably be fine. Just ice it, like *get over it*." Echoing previous examples, Emily shared, "ignoring the shooting pain in my neck was not helpful" as well as "the throbbing headache that would come right after that." In retrospect she admits to having taken an unproductive approach to her training by continuing to train neck hangs and only stopped when her chiropractor told her, "Listen, I can only fix this so many times before you damage yourself. You're reversing the curve of your neck. Your neck is not okay with this. You've got to stop." Whereas aerialists (re)produced through discourse to "get over" the pain, Emily was forced to accept the materiality of her body once her chiropractor alerted her to the danger of the level of risk she was absorbing.

Lastly, trapeze artist Frodo chose for her front stage image a picture of herself performing a trapeze act as part of an art exhibit (see Figure 14). She chose this image because it depicted "the closeness with the audience," noting being an aerialist "has more to do with the space and the setting and the mood and the connection with the audience

than it has to do with what I'm actually technically doing." In contrast, her backstage image (see Figure 14) shows her lying on a hospital bed after breaking her leg during a performance. Explaining why she chose this image, Frodo shared,

> …*my body is my tool*…when I'm a circus artist, a thing like that would change my life like this (snaps fingers), at least for some time. And then at the same time, the fact that I am actually an aerialist also gives me some freedom to move while my leg is not functioning 100% right, like the possibility to actually hang from my arms and to really feel like I am able to move even though *parts of me* are not yet recovered.

In describing her body as a tool, Frodo alludes to how she resists the materiality of her body even when she is severely incapacitated. Determined to perform her occupational identity (i.e., "I am actually an aerialist"), Frodo finds ways to engage the body work double bind identity enactment by training the "parts" of her that are not injured. When asked about the length of her recovery, Frodo answered, "they're [doctors] guessing six to nine months. I'm aiming for four." (i.e., pseudo agency, see Zanin, 2018). Frodo's interview took place a week after her surgery. When asked when she planned to go back to training her upper body, she turned her camera around to show a trapeze hanging from the ceiling of her living room and said, "I am already…It took me three days…I mean, it wasn't really like my body's rotting, at least I can still use my arms." Frodo demonstrates that after sustaining a significant injury, she continues to perform her backstage occupational identity through this body work double bind by resisting her body's materiality through claims that she can speed up her projected recovery time and continuing to train her upper body.

Figure 14

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Flying and Falling

Note. On the left, Frodo performing on her trapeze for an art exhibition. On the right, Frodo in her hospital bed after breaking her leg during a performance.

In summary, this portion of the analysis revealed how aerialists use the identity enactment of a body work double bind in the backstage region. Relying on their bodies as a tool, aerialists (re)produce the dominant Discourse of Risk through discourse that prompts them to train diligently and through pain and injury as ways to perform their occupational identity. The following section details the last backstage identity enactment of this analysis, *complicit anonymity*.

Complicit Anonymity

Like other body workers, aerialists worry about their ability to secure work as many performers are freelance contractors and are not usually employed by a single organization. Their occupational identity, therefore, can either be affirmed or threatened based on their ability to secure contracts. Landing a contract can be seen as a hard-won privilege rather than an occupational feature. Cirque du Soleil, the most famous production company of contemporary Circus employs 1,300 performers from over 50

different countries (Cirque du Soleil, 2022a). Aspiring performers audition to be put into a database of over 20,000 entries that is accessed by the casting department (Belkin, 2007), meaning that only 6.5% of those artists are employed by Cirque. Because contracts are "few and far between" and the field is so saturated, aerialists engage in *complicit anonymity* with producers by (a) participating in a type of deindividualization where they are not recognized by name (i.e., *anonymity*) (b) being cognizant of their replaceability, and (c) accepting inadequate pay and working conditions to secure contracts (i.e., being *complicit*) as an identity enactment.

While Cirque du Soleil may be the most difficult company in the world to secure a contract with, it serves as a good example for understanding the ways in which aerialists engage a complicit anonymity as an identity enactment. An article published in *Vanity Fair* states, "Banishing fame was Cirque's most fateful innovation" (Gross, 2015) as circus shows create characters with no individual in mind, but rather, for bodies that fit the costumes and stage gear. Unlike traditional circuses that gave top billing to performers (Jacob, 2018), Cirque performers' names are unknown to the audience, who "work behind a veil of anonymity" (Gross, 2015), identified only by their occupational role (i.e., the aerialist, the juggler, the clown, etc.). Flying pole artist Markus suggested that in a theater setting, a certain performer could be the draw for the audience, but "that's not really the idea of circus." The idea of Circus is to produce Spectacle. Bringing too much attention to a single performer would jeopardize the draw of the show if the performer were absent. In fact, while casting departments are always on the lookout for new acts, performers cannot be *so* unique that they are not replaceable (Belkin, 2007). This analysis finds that by engaging a complicit anonymity, performers (re)produce the

dominant Discourse of Spectacle by protecting the integrity of the show at the cost of their individuality.

As aerialists are aware that "the idea of circus" is not about exalting individual performers, they are also aware that their anonymity enhances their replaceability. For example, trapeze and sling artist Margaux shared,

> …they're looking for a performer who can perform five or more acts so they don't have to hire and pay more performers. They're only going to select so many to be in one show…you'll always have somebody that can do your job just as good as you were worth. *So if you get hurt, you'll be out and out of your contract within a day, and you'll have somebody performing in your place that night.*

Margaux indicates that since performers fulfill multiple roles, producers cast performers with uniform body types with have similar abilities. When a performer is injured, producers can access the database and find a suitable replacement. Margaux's excerpt highlights the degree of deindividualization of the performer as well as the commodification of body worker's bodies. In short, participant responses indicate that in Circus, performers are bodies, not people.

Margaux's photos accentuate the "bodies not people" point. For her front stage photo, she chose a picture of herself doing the splits during a performance on sling (see Figure 15). She is pictured wearing minimal clothing and her bright red hair drapes over her back in a high ponytail. It is important to note her aesthetic is beautiful, yet impractical. Her minimal attire makes her more vulnerable to fabric burns and her draping hair can get caught on the apparatus. She shared:

> It was interesting to perform with the hair. The photos look great, but some part of me is just exasperated because I have put so much effort into these previous acts like the presentation, the characterization, the costuming, the concept…and yet I feel that it's not really what people want and that's frustrating…In order to be hired as performer you need to have *this* aesthetic.

Margaux's comment suggests that her ability to be employed is not based on the artistry she crafts, but what her body looks like. She also shared that she would never be hired by Cirque du Soleil because "there are 200 tiny Russian 20-year-old gymnasts that can do what I do, and more." For her backstage photo (see Figure 15), she presented an image she submitted to Cirque as part of the audition process. She poses to the side with her hair up in a tight bun so the viewer can see her detailed physique without obstruction. She said about the photo:

> We are bodies trying to be aesthetic and pleasing constantly…When you submit to Cirque du Soleil, you have to take body shots, front, back, side…*It does feel dehumanizing in some ways*, and to send them in like, "Okay, here's my body."

In mentioning the phrase, "We are bodies," Margaux engages the identity enactment of complicit anonymity to fulfill an anticipated occupational role. Margaux's experience illustrates the body commodification Discourse that is (re)produced in body work organizations as her only valued identity is her bodily performance. She describes the process as "dehumanizing" as she is aware she will solely be evaluated on her anatomy and aesthetic. Margaux explained that Cirque does not disclose what they are looking for in these photos but assumes they are used to assess the acts or skills that her body could be used for in a production.

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Figure 15

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Aesthetic and Audition

Note. Margaux performs on sling (pictured left). Margaux poses for audition photos (pictured right).

When organizations treat occupational roles as fulfilled by deindividualized bodies, they (re)produce d/Discourses that ignore the material needs of body workers. These d/Discourses manifest in underpayment of body workers, poor working conditions, and lack of access to basic health coverage. As freelance contractors, aerialists often find themselves having to stipulate in their contracts that they have access to *some* facilities during gigs to prepare to perform (e.g., a green room) as producers often fail to provide these services. Aerial juggler Marc (age 25, 7 years' experience), for example, tore an abdominal muscle during an outdoor performance in the winter because he did not have a green room and his trapeze—also kept outside—was "soggy and wet" when he started his

act. Since he had signed a contract saying, “if I fell it was my fault,” he would not get paid if he failed to complete his contractual obligations.

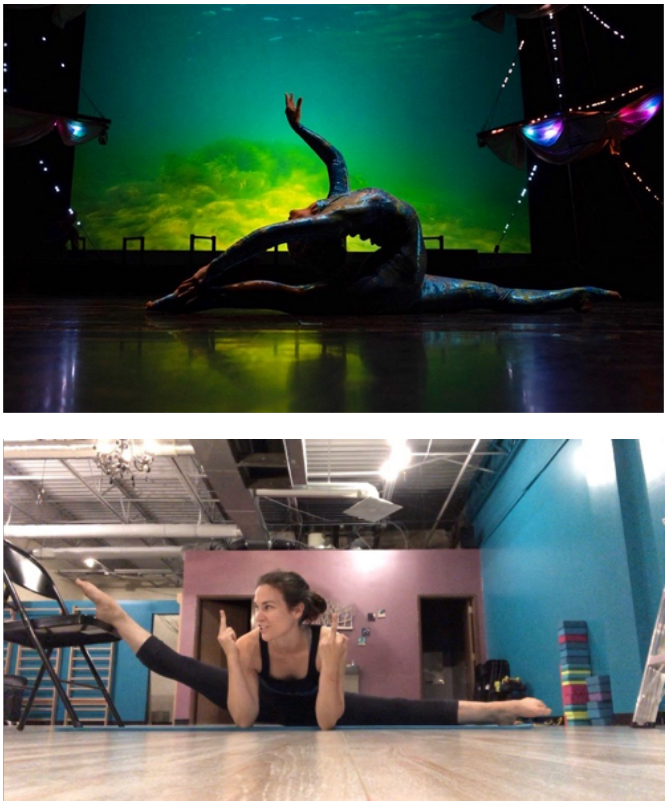
Moreover, as their front stage image, lyra artist and contortionist Jo shared a picture in a deep backbend while doing the splits on the stage of a production (see Figure 16). When asked why they chose this photo, they answered that this was one of the images they use for self-promotion as it shows that they are “very bendy,” “very strong,” and have access to high quality costumes. In contrast, their backstage photo (Figure 16) shows them doing the splits using a foldable chair for support and flipping off the camera. They chose this image because it is representative of the material conditions of their backstage preparation area (i.e., highlighting the need to be resourceful and use what is available in their environment). Whereas the location of this photo is in “actually a nice training space,” they shared that oftentimes they are told to warm up in the women’s bathroom. Jo adds that what the audience does not see is:

> I am really tired and sore and I have to go in and train because I have to continue to get this choreography ready for this show. It’s not going to pay me enough money to even pay the studio fees for the time that I’ve been rehearsing but I’m *hoping* I get the photos so that I can use it for promos so I can get more gigs with that act.

Jo explains that many gigs fail to offer a salary that would even cover the cost of the preparation for the gig but at least provide the opportunity to walk away with marketing materials that can be used to land future jobs. Note that they use the phrase “hoping I get photos” to use for promotion, indicating that the anticipated outcome of the performance (i.e., useable photos) is not secured. Not given access to the basic needs to fulfill occupational role for which they were hired to do, Jo’s excerpt highlights the anonymity (i.e., performing an identity of a body, not a person) they enact as part of their identity.

Figure 16

Front Stage and Backstage Images: Marketing Materials



Note. Jo performing a contortion act (top image). Jo flips off the camera while training over splits and talking about not getting adequate pay for a gig (bottom image).

Self-Deprecation

As previously mentioned, the performer's ability to secure a contract is celebrated as a victory, which may lead to them equating their worth to their success. Moreover, they are constantly evaluating their own bodies and skills in comparison to their peers, (re)producing through discourse that their worth lies in their bodily performance. As aerialists (re)produce d/Discourses of Freedom (i.e., how they look in the air in the front-stage region), they engage with a *loss* of Freedom through self-deprecation as an identity

enactment in the backstage region. They do so by being overly critical of themselves through discourse, fostering self-doubt and loss of confidence.

Participants admitted to feeling "intimidated," "over my head," "not good enough," like they "don't want to look like shit in front of these people," constantly criticizing themselves in comparison to other artists they see on social media, and feeling discouraged when peers were cast for performance contracts. Straps artist Ellie shared, "It's hard not to nitpick at your flaws." Silks artist Lauren detailed how she "set higher expectations for yourself based on where other people are with their practice or their strength." When unable to succeed at a skill being taught during a class, trapeze artist Lucy shared:

> I can be quite self-deprecating…I'm going to instantly go down the rabbit hole of "here's what I'm not training well enough." And "here's where I should be working harder." And "here's what I need to supplement into my routine to get stronger." I would assume that everybody else in our class is stronger than me.

Lucy describes how she "instantly" defaults into engaging with self-deprecation when she fails at a skill. Surrounded by peers with varying abilities and experience, she witnesses others achieve and consequentially labels her performance as failing. Constantly exposed to the bodily performance of peers, aerialists (re)produce an infinite unattainability of perfection that they enact through self-criticism.

Participants' self-deprecation identity enactment also emerged in how they talked about their own bodies. For example, lyra artist Elisa's front-stage image shows her posing on a lyra during a photo shoot (see Figure 17). She shared that her grandmother passed away the day before the shoot and she chose this picture because it "expresses so well this idea of, it doesn't matter what else is going on, you still have to get a pretty

image." Elisa (re)produces the dominant Discourse of Freedom as she performs her front-stage identity under emotional duress. She also, however, uses self-deprecation—in her backstage conversation with the author—by sharing:

> There are very few pictures that I just like. I also dislike a lot of things about it…I've struggled for a long time with body image stuff. So for me, this photo of my thigh looks really large, that front thigh and you can see the rolls on my back. Just because I'm like, squished into that pose. And my [foot] point is not as nice as I would like it to be.

Elisa chose this image from her favorite photos of herself (i.e., "pictures that I just like") yet scrutinized the image for flaws in her response. She criticizes "rolls" on her back that would not be apparent on a smaller aerialist in a similar pose. Moreover, she criticizes her foot point. Whereas some people have a naturally flexible foot point, others develop it through strength and flexibility training. Elisa's comments highlight how in comparison to other workers' corporeality, she deprecates her own. When discussing her backstage image (see Figure 17), which shows bright red splotches, raised skin, and bruises on her feet, she describes her feet as "being particularly dramatic" in that training session. Again, Elisa criticizes her body's material reality as she labels as "dramatic" her skin's natural reaction.

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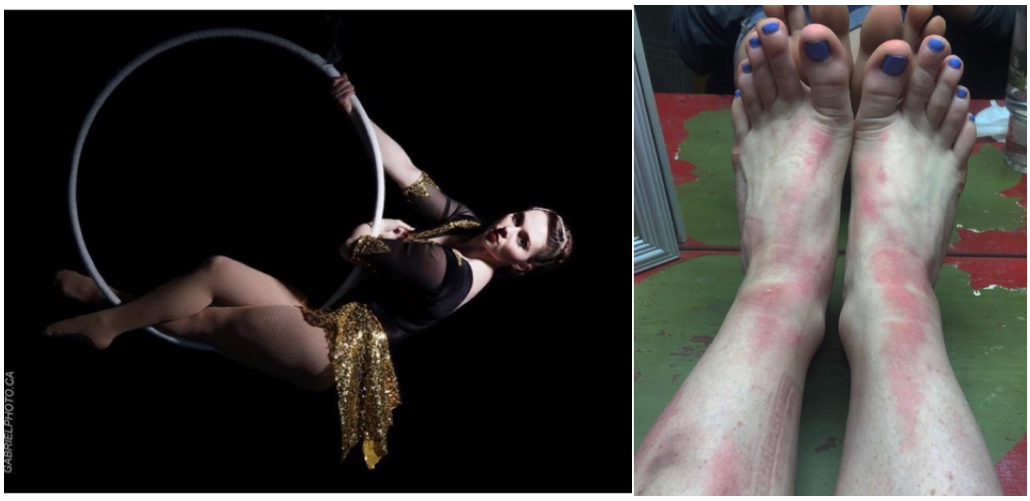
Figure 17

Front Stage and Backstage Images Pairing: Dramatic



Note. Elisa poses on lyra during a photo shoot (pictured left). Elisa's reddened and bruised feet and shins after training on lyra (pictured right).

Participant responses reveal that the identity enactment of self-deprecation is reproduced via discourse. For example, as a teenager, rope artist Juliet was told by a coach, "you're too heavy" and "I'm seeing some more of not the best type of fat on you" when she asked why she could not achieve a certain skill. Juliet was told that there was something wrong with her body rather than given a technical breakdown of the skill.

Another example comes from trapeze artist Margaux. She recounted a friend's experience auditioning a lyra act for Cirque du Soleil. She was told that "because of her size and build," she was the right size for straps. However, straps apparatuses do not require the performer to be any particular size or shape as they are entirely malleable. By way of contrast, a performer would choose a hoop based on its circumference to account for the performer's height and length of their torso. Therefore, Margaux's friend likely

did not have the body size or shape for the lyra costume or the lyra itself but would be suitable for straps. Margaux added "...unless you are literally some sort of divine aerial entity, they're not going to hire you for their act that is already choreographed with a specific closet full of costumes for whoever was in that first iteration of that act." This example supports how these body workers are expected to conform their bodies to costumes and gear to meet the criteria for their occupational role. As such, when they measure their success and occupational worth based on the contracts they secure, aerialists engage self-deprecation of the way their body looks and performs when they are rejected for a role. As body workers (re)produce the d/Discourse that their body is a tool, they also (re)produce through discourse that the tool is faulty when it fails to fulfill occupational expectations.

In conclusion, these findings uncovered how aerialists (re)produce d/Discourses of Spectacle, Risk, and Freedom across various identity enactment strategies. By applying Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis framework, the identity enactments that emerged contextualize how occupational identity is performed in the front stage and backstage regions of Circus performance. A full list of these identity enactments and their corresponding institutional Discourses can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Identity Enactment Strategies

Identity Enactment	Definition	Institutional Discourse Enactment
Front Stage Identity Enactment Strategies		
Masking Pain	Concealing pain and suppressing raw human reactions (e.g., fatigue)	Freedom
Performing Despite Risk	Continuing to perform when unexpected events happen that put the aerialist in unprecedented danger	Risk
Artistic Sacrifice	Elevating the audience's needs and concerns above their own	Spectacle
Backstage Identity Enactment Strategies		
Bodywork Double-Bind	Training through exhaustion, pain, and injury to fulfill occupational role without allowing for necessary rest and recovery time.	Risk
Complicit Anonymity	Accepting inadequate pay and working conditions that fail to meet performers' needs to secure contracts as they are aware of their replaceability.	Spectacle
Self-Deprecation	Being overly critical about their abilities, performance, and body image when evaluating themselves in comparison to other workers, fostering self-doubt and loss of confidence.	Freedom

Note. This table presents how aerialists (re)produce dominant institutional Discourses through identity enactment strategies.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The socialization process of aerial acrobats to pain and how they (re)produce traditional Circus d/Discourses through occupational identity enactment were explored through this study. Two research questions posed in this study were answered through a semi-structured interview study of 27 professional acrobats and the arts-based elicitation method of Photovoice. A phronetic iterative analysis (Tracy, 2018, 2020) revealed a subcategory of body work—*pain work.* The analysis also revealed six identity enactment strategies that (re)produce institutional d/Discourses. The findings of this study can be transferred to provide theoretical and methodological implications for organizational communication literature in the areas of socialization, identification, and body work, as well as embodiment in qualitative research. The following sections discuss these implications, limitations of the study, and future directions of research.

Cyclical Process of Meaning Making of Pain

In response to RQ1, the findings of this study suggest that aerial acrobats undergo a process of occupational socialization that shifts how they conceptualize and engage with pain. Given the centrality of pain to participants' occupational identity, the author introduces the theoretical concept of *pain work* as a category of body work imbued with particular socialization processes, consequences, and potential benefits for workers. Pain workers are those employees who are required to sustain, endure, and manage embodied pain to enact their occupational role. Pain workers come to understand their experience of pain through discourse. Norms within pain work are (re)produced and sustained through d/Discourse and as a result, members' pain work becomes valued and monetized. For

example, veteran aerialists inform newcomers that what they are identifying as "pain" is actually "discomfort." In doing so, that external attribution of an internal subjective experience (re)produces d/Discourses that serve to commodify embodied pain.

As such, this finding builds on body work literature (Wolkowitz, 2002). In the case of pain work, workers learn to conceptualize pain as a medium through which they can meet the standards of their occupational role. Pain functions as both gatekeeper and medium to occupational role fulfillment. Furthermore, pain is integral to the process of identification as members learn to conceptualize the embodiment of pain as positive identity enactment and mirror their behavior accordingly (Dutton et al., 1994). Pain, therefore, is a gatekeeper of occupational identification as workers must undergo pain to be able to perform their occupational identity (e.g., "If people can't deal with pain, circus isn't probably for them"). Aerialists claim consubstantiality by (re)producing d/Discourses that normalize pain as integral to their aerialist identity (Burke, 1950, 1969; Gossett, 2002). For example, they claim oneness with the target of identification of the aerialist identity when showing off external, visible bruises or lesions as these demonstrate an "acting-together" through observable material properties.

Aspiring aerial acrobats must experience initial surface pain when first holding, putting their weight on, or climbing onto a new apparatus before they can try any tricks (e.g., "If it doesn't hurt you, you're doing it wrong"). As they undergo occupational assimilation (Berkelaar & Harrison, 1999; Jablin, 1987; Kramer & Miller, 1999), participants explained that they learned to interpret pain as a medium, or avenue, for growth. As a result, pain becomes a measurement for expertise and a tool to discern their skillset. Whereas pain may have been previously experienced as a negative consequence

of engaging in aerial acrobatics, desensitization to—or the absence of—pain is translated into accomplishment. Thus, aerialists lean into pain as a challenge that is indicative of them fulfilling occupational norms, and thereby as positive identity enactment, particularly to a degree that leaves them with visual evidence of their hard work (e.g., as noted by one participant, "if you're gonna do something hard, you want to have a bruise or leave a mark").

As they are introduced to aerial acrobatics and through ongoing socialization, workers (re)produce pain work d/Discourses that transform how they experience pain. Within pain work, pain is an occupational expectation. As a result, pain workers learn to manage, embrace, and mask pain as positive identity enactments. Pain workers develop heuristics through their everyday talk that equip them to navigate pain socially and experientially. Using a body work context of aerial acrobatics, participant interviews revealed a cyclical process of how the meaning making of pain occurs. This process model is enacted via four phases: (a) experience, (b) tolerate, (c) embrace, and (d) proselytize. This socialization process forms part of the ongoing socialization stage of assimilation into an organizational culture (Jablin, 1987; Kramer & Miller, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), or, in this case, an institutional culture.

As this is a process (re)produced through discourse, it is during this process that members learn the norms and expectations of their organizational culture (Dutton et al., 1994). However, this study is not situated within a specific organizational context, but rather, an institutional one. As aerialists identify as circus performers, this process transcends an organizational role to an occupational one. As such, aerialists co-construct a social reality in which positive identity enactment is inherently linked to an affirmed

identity of ingroup membership. Moreover, the findings of this study indicated that participants across various occupational role pathways (i.e., circus training, education, organizational experiences) provided similar accounts of the socialization process of pain work.

During the *experience* phase, students first encounter a material apparatus and become cognizant of their threshold and tolerance for pain. The meaning-making process of pain starts with veteran aerialists reframing newcomers' pain to *discomfort*. Through this reframing, students can manipulate the psychosomatic sensation of pain to reconceptualize their attitudes toward pain. Given the plethora of available apparatuses in circus contexts and the embodied context of experiencing pain, it takes time for aerialists to explore all available resources available to them in their occupational role (i.e., metal apparatuses versus fabric apparatuses). Thus, they may gravitate toward a certain family of apparatuses over another. According to Jablin's (1987, 2001) socialization model, the anticipatory socialization process concludes once members form part of an organization. Building on Kramer's (2011b) model of voluntary organizational membership socialization, the findings of this study reveal the cyclical nature of socialization as members continue to experience anticipatory role socialization as they engage with other apparatuses. As a body work occupation, the embodied component of the occupational role of aerialists produced a cycle in which they will continue to experience anticipatory socialization as they consider introducing their bodies to new and unfamiliar sensations.

Moreover, the findings of this study are used to illuminate the dynamic experience of socializing to pain work. According to these findings, pain is not subjective but rather co-constructed and unique experiences of pain change as a result of

occupational identification. Kramer (2011a) found that volunteers will change their organizational membership if their current organization fails to meet their needs. Similarly, aerialists' ability to choose their pain (i.e., by choosing one family of apparatuses over another) indicates a within-occupational role shift. Given that many aerialists follow the pathway of hobbyist to professional, they can enact more control over what type of pain they choose to put their bodies through, indicating a fluid occupational role dynamic. Moreover, more advanced aerialists may decide to try out other apparatuses to give their bodies a break from certain types of pain. Thus, aerialists can choose what type of pain they experience and modulate how they are subjecting themselves to pain accordingly.

During the *tolerate* phase, aerialists demonstrate they have accepted pain as a feature of their occupational role by modifying their language toward pain (e.g., no longer complaining about the presence of pain). As students move toward the acceptance of pain and the understanding that pain dissipates over time, they begin to socially construct pain as a gatekeeper to enacting their identity as an aerialist. It is also during this phase that students learn to differentiate between *productive pain* and *destructive pain*. *Productive pain* is pain that indicates to students that they are building tolerance to pain for the purpose of desensitization. *Destructive pain* is pain that impedes mobility, indicates an underlying health issue, or can lead to injury. Aerialists are socialized to lean into *productive pain* but to cease participation if they feel *destructive pain*. At this stage, students continue to set boundaries on the types of pain they are willing to tolerate. Therefore, pain work socialization processes are more successful when individuals can choose the pain they are willing to endure than when general pain is imposed on them.

Zanin (2018) found that when managing injury, athletes practice pseudo agency when perceiving they are "exerting control over structure(s), while simultaneously reinforcing co-occurring hegemonic structures" (p. 284). Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that participants' ability to choose their pain enabled them to exert control over their pain work, as their pain was simultaneously commodified for the organizations' or clients' benefit. These findings align with Tracy and Tretheway's (2005) notion of auto-dressage, in which members practice self-subordination as a form of performing preferred occupational identities. As pain work commodifies the embodied experience of pain, workers will demonstrate a favorable occupational identity by leaning into the type of pain they choose, thus fulfilling the occupational norms.

Third, aerialists demonstrate modified worldviews toward pain by attributing value to pain and using pain as an evaluative tool to gauge their skill level. At this *embrace* stage, aerialists have undergone a collective experience of transforming pain from something they should withdraw from to something that is valuable, and necessary, to enact their occupational identity. Aerialists develop positive attitudes toward *productive pain* and use pain as a measurement of growth. McNarry et al. (2020) found that competitive swimmers identify "good pain" as indicators of athletic improvement. Moreover, previous literature has demonstrated the valorization of pain in sport, usually when linked to demonstrations of masculinity (Pringle & Markula, 2005). However, in this athletic-artistic context, pain is not performed in front of spectators. Rather, aerialists must not only undergo pain, but they must also learn to mask it. Aerialists (re)produce through discourse that pain is indicative of growth but only when it is not exhibited during performance. Therefore, pain work is complex and context specific. Among

aerialists, pain work is concealed in front of audiences, revealed among peers, and praised when concealed.

In the final stage, *proselytize*, aerialists have transformed the meaning of pain and promote the dominant ideology of "Circus hurts" by wearing pain as a badge of honor and as evidenced by their language about pain. At this stage, aerialists parade their superficial abrasions and collectively normalize and exalt pain. In fact, the lack of superficial abrasions is deemed as frustrating because of the symbolic value these abrasions carry in (re)producing pain work d/Discourses. In the *proselytize* stage, pain workers have integrated pride in pain into their occupational identity through discourse. However, given the embodied experience of pain, aerialists continuously re-cycle this process when introduced to new pains. Whereas the socially constructed understanding of pain has been internalized, the body must relearn the process when embodying unfamiliar pain or when having taken time and distance away from familiar pain. For example, aerialists who return to training after a hiatus must re-adapt to pain. However, they do so with an underlying knowledge that the pain will go away with time and practice.

Figure 4 demonstrates the cyclical meaning-making process model of pain. Although applicable primarily to newcomers who are navigating painful sensations when they first climb on an apparatus, the model is not linear. In fact, veteran aerialists cycle through the model perpetually as they learn new apparatuses or new skills on apparatuses to which they are already accustomed. Essentially, aerialists undergo a perpetual cycle of adapting to new pains throughout the entirety of their careers as aerial acrobats. Therefore, aerialists do not need to circulate through the process model entirely. They can choose to set boundaries to new pains they experience and never move beyond the

experience stage. For example, an aerialist learning a neck hang skill (i.e., *experience* phase) may experience too much pain and fear and decide not to try the skill again. Moreover, an aerialist may push through the pain of doing an ankle hang (i.e., supporting the entire body weight by the ankles while handing upside down) on trapeze (i.e., *tolerate* phase, but decide that they do not care to explore trapeze as a new discipline). How aerialists navigate this process model is context-specific to both apparatus, skill, and occupational role fulfillment expectations.

The meaning-making process model of pain and the subcategory of pain work carry important implications for organizational socialization, body work, and identification in communication scholarship. First, drawing from *vocational anticipatory socialization* (Jablin, 2001), this process model elucidates how workers select occupational or vocational roles based on their psychosomatic experience with pain. In order to be able to engage in a pain work occupation, workers demonstrate control when selecting pain that they are able and willing to endure.

Second, the findings from this study illuminate the understudied stage of *ongoing socialization* by displaying the cyclical nature of socialization in a pain work context. Even as aerialists may no longer consider themselves newcomers to the organization, they will cycle back to earlier socialization stages as the context of their occupational role expands to learning new skills and training with new apparatuses. In fact, given the wealth of possibilities inherent to circus organizations, aerialists never become completely actualized in their occupational roles.

Third, this process model pinpoints the ways in which discourse can shape the symbolic and the physiological conceptualization of pain in workers' bodies. These

findings answer Aschraft et al.'s (2009) call to consider how discourse and materiality interact within organizational contexts. They challenge a nominalist perspective that reality is solely and wholly socially constructed. In other words, reality is not whatever organizational members say it is, instead, symbolic constructions are bound by confrontations with material limitations. In the context of the current study, aerialists learn to sustain, endure, and mask pain, yet they are still bound by the material boundaries of their bodies. When an aerialist pushes too far through pain and is injured, depending on the extent of the injury, their mobility can be impaired and thereby their ability to perform their identity is constrained. The research from this study contributes a "more sophisticated treatment of the material-symbolic relation" (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 25). While organizational d/Discourses may (re)produce ideologies that reframe the experience of pain, these discourses do not preclude members from the material consequences of sustaining pain. This study was then crafted to answer the call from Ashcraft et al. (2009) to place a symbolic lens on the materiality of the body and perceive the body as "a communicative product" (p. 34). Pain work provides a suitable lens through which the body can be experienced as a site of social and embodied (re)production of d/Discourse, underscoring pain as an interactional experience that can be collectively reframed.

Furthermore, this study also carries practical implications for identification and how identity is enacted in an occupational role. Drawing from Kuhn and Nelson's (2002) perspective that identity structures simultaneously influence and are shaped by members, how pain work is conceptualized can be molded if members do not perceive high levels of identification with their occupation or the larger institution. For example, although not

included in the analysis, participant responses to the question, *"What changes would you like to see in circus as an industry?",* included various challenges that performers face as members of Circus and threaten their Circus membership identity. Therefore, if aerialists and other circus performers formed a coalition to enact change in the industry, speaking out about prominent issues they face collectively, their behaviors could over time modify identity structures. Furthermore, this study carries practical implications in organizational communication beyond Circus. The pain work socialization model can be applied as an analytical tool to understand the embodied socialization processes in other organizations that feature occupational (e.g., athletes, sex workers, beauty workers) with the potential to uncover varying phases of the model or deviations.

Moreover, the process model answers the call to further integrate embodiment in organizing (Harris, 2017; Styhre, 2004). Citing the Foucauldian perspective that "states impose control not just upon individual bodies, but upon entire populations," Harris (2017, p. 5) argues that Cartesian dualism has distorted how organizations relate to bodies as a site of work. She urges scholars to attend to the relation between the physical and the symbolic as it carries implications for how organizations manage workers' bodies. Responding to this call, the contributions of this study elucidate the implications of d/Discourse on members' corporeal reality by outlining aerialists' worldview shift for how they construct and experience pain.

Lastly, as the findings of this study expand how pain is perceived and experienced via d/Discourse, there are practical implications for organizational contexts in which pain is not optional. For example, for patients managing chronic pain, these findings can contribute to how medical providers can help patients transform their conceptualization

of pain and how pain is managed. A meta-analysis of patient empowerment in cancer pain management found self-efficacy to be positively correlated with and necessary for empowerment (te Boveldt et al., 2014). In turn, the authors proposed pain management can be improved when patients feel confident in their ability to control their pain. In addition, research has found that self-efficacy is negatively correlated with disability and depression among retirement community residents with chronic pain (Turner et al., 2005). By applying the four-phase cyclical meaning-making process model of pain to healthcare contexts, patient empowerment over pain management can be bolstered through discourse. Granted, the current process model is situated in a performative-athletic context. However, the model can be modified to focus on promoting self-efficacy discourses for pain management. As demonstrated by this study, the experience of pain is influenced via communication. Furthermore, *how* pain is experienced is also influenced by an individual's ability to choose or have agency over their pain. Therefore, this study carries implications for transforming the embodied experience of chronic pain to be more tolerable when patients are given the choice over the type of pain they sustain.

Identity Enactment Through (Re)Producing Institutional Discourses

In response to RQ2, the dominating Discourses of Spectacle, Risk, and Freedom (Tait, 2005, 2006) provided a useful lens for understanding traditional, institutional Circus ideologies that continue to influence contemporary circus organizations. As institutional-level Discourses impact workers' corporeal reality, the findings of this study illuminate how aerialists enact their occupational identity and negotiate the expectations of their occupational role in juxtaposition to the material limitations of their bodies. By applying Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework with processes of occupational

identification, six identity enactment strategies that aerialists perform to different audiences were revealed. In the front stage arena, aerial acrobats enact their occupational identity via *masking pain*, *performing-despite-risk,* and *artistic sacrifice.* In the backstage arena, aerialists negotiate their occupational identity by enacting a *body work double bind, complicit anonymity,* and *self-deprecation.*

In the front stage area, aerialists reproduce the dominating Discourse of Freedom by masking pain and performing effortlessness. The occupational role of the aerialist is symbolized by their "bird-like exuberance" (Tait, 2005) and seemingly superhuman abilities. As such, aerialists enact their occupational identity by masking any pain and suppressing raw human reactions (e.g., fatigue). These findings confirm that aerial acrobats (re)produce d/Discourses of emotional regulation (Hochschild, 1983; Miller, 2007), surface acting (Lu et al., 2019), and masking (Gupta et al., 2016; Wiechman et al., 2000). Whereas previous research has found surface acting to lead to worker dissatisfaction (Grandey et al., 2015), the research from this study can be used to build on the ways in which emotional labor can affirm occupational identity (Humphrey et al., 2015). The findings of this study suggest that workers engage in emotional labor to enact their occupational identity because doing so (re)produces institutional-level d/Discourses. As aerialists are highly identified with Circus as an institution—as demonstrated by their (re)production of Freedom—they perform their identity through the identity enactment of masking pain, which in turn bolsters occupational identification (e.g., "I'm tired and I'm working hard and I'm in pain but I'm doing it for circus").

Second, aerialists reproduce the dominating Discourse of Risk in two ways: (a) performing despite risk when unexpected events happen during a performance that put

the aerialist in danger and (b) accepting occupational risk. These findings expand on literature that identifies aerialists as participating in *edgework.* Edgework is "the exploration of life and death…the fine line between being out of control and harnessing excitement in life and death contexts" (Walby & Stuart, 2021, p. 16). Whereas the relation between excitement and risk is beyond the scope of this study, these findings do accentuate the engagement of risk-taking behaviors as an enactment of occupational identity. When aerialists become aware of a rigging issue or are unsure about the safety of a trick during a performance, the findings of this study indicate that participants will (re)produce the d/Discourse of "the show must go on" and continue to perform without modification (unless previous safety measures are in place). Moreover, when risk is embedded as a feature of their occupational identity (i.e., workers accept occupational risk), workers (re)produce d/Discourses that normalize risk and act accordingly in risky situations. These findings could explain why aerialists will risk continuing a performance when put in situations of uncertainty. In a similar fashion to how athletes demonstrate pseudo agency over injury management (Zanin, 2018), aerialists will demonstrate pseudo agency when faced with potential injury and the possibility of death.

Third, aerialists reproduce the dominating Discourse of Spectacle by enacting artistic sacrifice as part of their occupational identity. Driven by the notion that "performing is for the audience and not for the performer," aerialists demonstrate a commitment to Spectacle that reflects their institutional identification. They do so by placing the audience's needs and expectations above their own artistic endeavors. Whereas aerialists draw the most artistic pride from their ability to perform more technically challenging skills, it is the audience-satisfying tricks that result in the most

accolades. Thus, although aerialists demonstrate frustration toward spectators who cannot discern simple tricks from advanced tricks, they will craft their choreography in accordance with what will entertain the audience the most (i.e., "splits for claps"). Previous research on creative workers argues for "the importance of expert observers to the identity work for creative professionals" (Elsbach, 2009, p. 1066). In contrast, these findings suggest that creative professionals perform identity enactment despite the absence of expert acknowledgement. The current findings suggests that when combined with institutional-level identification, aerialists will employ identity enactment strategies that (re)produce d/Discourses and in doing so, affirm their occupational identity. Therefore, these findings carry implications for the importance of institutional-level identification for occupational identity work.

In the backstage region, aerialists reproduce the d/Discourse of Risk by enacting a body work double bind. Drawing from previous body work and identity scholarship, this study can be used to provide support for the ways in which "d/Discourses of body commodification and injury recovery establish an ideology that athletes' bodies and bodily performances can and should be controlled to achieve organizational goals" (Zanin, 2018, p. 285). The findings of this study reveal that aerial acrobats subscribe to the ideology of training through and compensating for injury to fulfill their occupational role *instead* of taking time to rest and recover. In doing so, aerialists enact a body work double bind by training through exhaustion, pain, and injury to fulfill their occupational role. However, this identity enactment corrodes workers' ability to enact a positive occupational identity (e.g., "I'll say I'm too injured to perform, and that's literally my job"). These findings support research on the influence of health

and injury discourses and identity enactment in body work organizations (Zanin, 2018). When body work organizations (re)produce d/Discourses that discourage members from disclosing injury or expressing the need to rest and recover, they sabotage members' ability to perform their occupational role. Instead, body work organizations would do well to perpetuate d/Discourses that reconcile recovery with positive identity enactment (e.g., "I'm actually doing my job by taking care of myself so that I'll be able to have longevity").

Second, aerial acrobats reproduce the dominating Discourse of Spectacle by being complicit in the anonymity that Circus affords performers. Compared to other performative contexts (e.g., theater plays) or athletic contexts (e.g., sports teams), many reputable circus productions do not provide spectators with the identities of the performers. Subscribing to the ideology that "circus is about the show, not who is in the show," performers are hyperaware of their replaceability and accept underpaid contracts and gigs that often do not cover their training and preparation costs. In other instances, aerialists agree to often inconvenient and at times dangerous working conditions to secure contracts. Their commitment to reproducing the dominating discourse of Spectacle takes precedence over their own best interests as they enact their occupational identity. This identity enactment is rooted in socialization processes of circus performers that uphold positive identity enactment occurs when institutional-level d/Discourses are reproduced. These findings also indicate a hierarchy of institutional identity (i.e., "circus is about the show") as higher ranking than occupational identity (i.e., circus is not about "who is in the show"). In contrast to athletic contexts where top-tier athletes are afforded personal branding opportunities that provide wellness and financial protections (see Arai et al.,

2014), aerialists are socialized to accept anonymity as a feature of their institutional membership. Thus, Circus perpetuates d/Discourses that deindividualize performers. These findings carry implications for how body workers are perceived as bodies rather than people, resulting in the perception of the body as a replaceable resource of the organization. Through this lens of deindividualized body commodification, pain workers' pain can be readily overlooked and devalued. Furthermore, the identity enactment of *complicit anonymity* contrasts with socialization process of investiture and divestiture. Whereas identity-affirming tactics (i.e., investiture) are conceptualized as positively related to organizational commitment and identification, divestiture tactics relate to individualized socialization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). However, this study finds that when presented with divestiture tactics (i.e., identity-disconfirming), they remain highly identified with the institution and are active participants in their own deindividualization (i.e., "that's not really the idea of circus").

Lastly, aerial acrobats reproduce the dominating Discourse of Freedom in the backstage region through self-deprecation. Self-deprecation is traditionally construed as a form of self-talk that reflects negative self-evaluation (Owens, 1994). However, more recent literature has identified self-deprecation as an interactional process to engage in identity work (Speer, 2019). In the case of aerial acrobatics, (re)producing d/Discourses of Freedom necessitates a particular look and build. Aerial acrobats can convey free-flying gracefulness in the air, but only when they look a certain way or perform at a certain capacity. In their efforts to perform Freedom, aerialists foster self-doubt, and constantly compare themselves to their peers. During instances when they are passed over for a certain contract, are unsuccessful with a particular skill, or evaluate their own

performance and presentation, participants in this study responded with self-critique. As a result, participants expressed self-confidence issues and being plagued with self-doubt, feelings of failure, and devaluation of their abilities (e.g., "I forever and always think that I'm not good enough for gigs"). These findings suggest that self-deprecation is a form of occupational identity enactment in athletic-artistic contexts (e.g., "...you are presenting your body to an audience, you're using your body to create art so it's hard not to nitpick what you see as your flaws").

Participants in this study suggested that when performing, positive occupational identity enactment is audience-determined. In the backstage region (i.e., where the audience is not present), aerialists may enact their occupational identity through self-deprecation as a way of (re)producing a d/Discourse of Freedom that is externally attributed by spectators. In short, aerialists cannot just assert their abilities, they need to *show* them (i.e., "You don't walk up to somebody [and say], 'Yeah, I do impressive shit'"). Although the author did not ask participants how peers responded to self-deprecating comments, the findings suggest that aerialists use self-deprecation as information-seeking behaviors for validation or suggestions for improvement in a low-threat manner. These findings support the notion that self-deprecating comments "make 'safely sayable' precisely the kinds of claims that may be risky or vulnerable to criticism" (Speer, 2019, p. 823). As the audience is notably absent in the backstage region, performers rely on each other for evaluation. However, considering participants' assertions that they engage in constant comparison with their peers, the use of self-deprecation can function as a low-threat strategy to receive feedback.

Furthermore, as aerialists must be both athletes and artists at the same time, they are forced to balance at-times incongruent characteristics of each aspect of their identity performance. This juxtaposition carries implications for how aerial bodies are socially constructed in the circus industry. Participant responses indicated that body aesthetic is often the determinant of their ability to secure employment (e.g., "[Cirque du Soleil] will never hire me because there are 200 tiny Russian 20-year-old gymnasts that can do what I do"). Moreover, participants indicated instances where their opportunity for employment was determined by whether or not they fit into the costumes and apparatuses that were created for an act. These findings carry implications for body commodification and materiality (Ashcraft et al., 2009) in body work organizations. Supporting the notion of the deindividualization of performers, organizations can impose unattainable standards on body workers that limit the positive enactment of their occupational identity (see Ashcraft, 2013). When bodies are perceived as deindividualized organizational resources, they can be readily discarded when they do not fit a predetermined mold (i.e., "I can have you and I can have you thinner, or I can find somebody who will replace you and will be willing to lose the weight", "they're not going to hire you for their act that is already choreographed with a specific closet full of costumes for whoever was in that first iteration of that act"). These findings contribute to how organizations' discursive practices of body work determine "whose bodies are expected to do particular kinds of work" (Harris, 2017, p. 4) and emphasize the need to attend to embodiment and social difference in organizing.

Taken together, these frontstage and back-stage identity enactments exemplify the link between occupational identification and institutional identification. Specifically, in

regards to pain work, implications for how pain can function as a "social glue" that bonds members together (i.e., pain bonding, see Bastian et al., 2014) are provided through this study. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, the common moniker reproduced in circus organizations is "*Circus* hurts," not "aerial acrobatics hurt." Granted, "Circus hurts" makes for a catchier phrase than the latter, however, the findings of this dissertation suggest a hierarchy of institutional-level identification as primary, occupational-level identification as secondary, and organizational-level as tertiary. For example, circus performers celebrate "World Circus Day" on the third Saturday of April to showcase their institutional-level identification. This research can be used to expand on the conceptualization of institutional cohesion beyond military groups (see Sundberg & Ruffa, 2021). Institutional cohesion is the "process of social integration with larger military institutions to which soldiers belong…based on affective rather than instrumental components" (p. 93-94). Military personnel demonstrate institutional cohesion bonding through demonstrating a sense of pride. Similarly, aerialists demonstrate a positive affect toward pain work when linked to their membership in Circus (e.g., ("I'm in pain but I'm doing it for circus," "the pain…feels good even"). Therefore, a contribution of this study is to understand how pain bonding (Bastian et al., 2014) is a tool for institutional cohesion (Sundberg & Ruffa, 2021) in pain work occupations. Importantly, institutional cohesion enacted through pain work can carry dangerous implications for workers, especially when masking is integrated as an occupational norm. Moreover, workers socialized in occupations with institutional cohesion can more easily transfer from organization to organization (see Kramer, 2011a; Russo, 1998; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). This transient occupational identity, therefore, can place workers at a disadvantage

of being exploited by the organizations they join as these organizations do not have to provide them with basic provisions such as health insurance coverage. In contrast to existing literature that suggests professionally identified members may leave an organization that fails to meet their needs (Russo, 1998; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), body workers are at a higher disposition of being marginalized as the social construction of body work is undermined in comparison to knowledge work (i.e., intellectual laborers, see Harris, 2017).

Methodological Contributions

An arts-based elicitation technique of Photovoice was used in this study (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants provided visual representations of their front stage and backstage identity enactments of their occupational identity of aerialist. The front stage photos portrayed how participants wanted to be seen by the audience when performing. The backstage photos portrayed what audience participants do not see and the reality of having the occupational identity of an aerialist. By presenting these dual-images side by side, these images reveal the material consequences of pain work occupations. Guided by questions of theoretical interest and emergent data, this research is the first to pair Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis with the Photovoice method to a body work context. As arts-based approaches can "access emotion, tacit assumptions, and collective sensemaking" (Tracy, 2020, p. 70), the pairing of Photovoice with a dramaturgical framework allow participants to use images to demonstrate their lived experience and reveal hidden or underlying perspectives of backstage experiences that would be difficult to articulate through words.

Previous literature has employed the use of Photovoice to navigate the relationship between social construction and materiality in the context of unemployment and food (in)security (Dougherty et al., 2018). Using Photovoice, the authors explored "how discourses of unemployment happen in a material context that co-constitute the content and meaning of the participants' communication about their experiences related to food (in)security" (p. 461). Building on the use of Photovoice as a tool to explore social construction and materiality, this study was useful to explore how institutional d/Discourses (re)construct workers' bodies. Participants' images and their corresponding excerpts illustrate the tangible, material corporeal effects of d/Discourse. By applying a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), the research design of this study provides a way to extend the utility of Photovoice to reveal the dynamics of occupational identity enactment in various contexts (i.e., front stage and backstage). Furthermore, this methodological approach aids in the conceptualization of the interplay of social construction and embodiment in qualitative research (see Ellingson, 2017). In doing so, the research design of this study can be replicated by scholars interested in embodiment in organizing as a tool to explore social construction and materiality through a Photovoice lens.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are both theoretical and methodological limitations within this study. First, participants shared a collective occupational identity but were socialized through different organizational memberships. Although listed here as a limitation, there is value in the emerging cross-organizational similarities that shaped this analysis. However, there could have been more nuanced findings in terms of specific socialization processes had

the study been conducted with participants who belonged to a single organization. Furthermore, it is possible that occupational identity emerged as most salient among participants because the scope of the study was not focused on a specific organization. Future research should be contextualized within a single organization and employ fieldwork as a way of witnessing first-hand participants' actions and interactions that are not readily observable through interviewing practices (Tracy, 2020).

Immersive fieldwork would incorporate first-hand observation of the socialization processes in situ (Tracy, 2020) and thereby provide a more well-rounded understanding of the various complexities that contribute to enacting pain work. Future studies can contribute to embodiment in qualitative research by engaging in an ethnography of a circus organization as a way of illuminating researcher processes of "how we do embodiment, our participants do embodiment, and our modes of doing intra-act with one another and the objects and place(s) of field settings" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 81).

Moreover, the recruitment criteria established that participants identify as professional aerialists. Professional was defined as having experience in either coaching or paid performing in aerial acrobatics. The criteria also required that participants had learned aerial acrobatics through a circus organization to differentiate from artists who were self-taught. An important issue surfaced from the range of the criteria that separated participants into two categories. Some participants trained circus skills in a circus school that provided a professional track for circus performers with an established curriculum and requirements for entry (e.g., audition process). The second category of participants trained circus skills through recreational circus studios that catered to hobbyists as well as members who sought to pursue a professional career in Circus and did not have

requirements for entry. These varying pathways toward occupational identity could influence how pain is conceptualized during early socialization. For example, hobbyists may be less motivated than professionals to (re)produce pain d/Discourses as they are paying for a recreational service. Future research in this context should divide these two demographics to gather a more concrete perspective of the socialization trajectory of hobbyists who crossover to professional and professional-track aerialists.

Lastly, data collection for this study occurred at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when global lockdowns protocols were in place (i.e., late June-July 2020). As a result of the pandemic, live performances were shut down impacting the livelihood of circus performers. Cirque du Soleil laid off 4,679 staff members, including performers, resulting in the displacement of 95% of its staff (Martin, 2020). On June 30, 2020—when data collection was taking place—Cirque du Soleil filed for bankruptcy (Cirque du Soleil, 2022b). Given the degree of institutional identification that participants exhibited, the global pandemic was a period fraught with uncertainty for circus performers across the globe. Although participants in this study did not report membership with Cirque du Soleil during layoffs, the fact that the most notable circus production company in the world filed for bankruptcy and laid off most of its employees likely influenced occupational identity uncertainty among participants. Furthermore, participants indicated that they were available for interviews because they were not working or training as production companies, circus schools, and training studios were shut down. These circumstances may have influenced participant responses related to occupational identification, however, most of the interview protocol asked participants to provide retrospective accounts of their experiences. Future research directions could explore the

influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on how aerial acrobats enacted their occupational identity and/or made career decisions.

In addition to the future research that is suggested by the limitations above, future research directions on circus organizations and pain work can be extended to include all circus performers as this study was limited to aerial acrobats. Ground acrobats could provide further insights into how they reproduce institutional d/Discourses and enact their occupational identity. A pain work lens should also be applied to other performative contexts, such as burlesque, as well as non-artistic contexts such as the military, beauty industry, sex work, and athletics. Lastly, the author was interested in exploring the discursive-material interplay of resilience d/Discourse in pain work. Future research should analyze if and how resilience can be (re)produced alongside pain work socialization processes.

Conclusion

Through this study, the author introduced the sub-category of *pain work* in body work occupations. *Pain workers* are those employees who are required to sustain, endure, and manage pain to enact their occupational role. Workers assimilate to and (re)produce *pain work* norms via d/Discourse. The author proposed a four-phase cyclical process model to identify the meaning-(re)making of pain. Furthermore, institutional Discourses were traced alongside occupational identity enactment as a component of the research design of this study. The findings revealed six identity enactment strategies of aerial acrobats corresponding to the front stage and backstage arenas. Both *pain work* and the occupational identity enactment strategies carry implications for organizational communication theory related to socialization, identification, and body work. Lastly, the

research design of this study is a methodological contribution to the use of Photovoice in conjunction with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis in a body work context to represent the corporeal effects of d/Discourse. Taken together, this study demonstrates how discourse simultaneously changes collective embodied experiences and social realities by portraying the vivid, tangible material consequences on members.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL FORM

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED
REVIEW

Sarah Tracy

CLAS-SS: Human Communication, Hugh Downs
School of 480/965-7709

Sarah.Tracy@asu.

edu Dear Sarah

Tracy:

On 4/20/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Circus Hurts: Exploring the Discursive Constructions of Pain and Resilience of Aerial Acrobats
Investigator:	Sarah Tracy
IRB ID:	STUDY00013853
Category of review:	
Funding:	Name: Arizona State University (ASU)
Grant Title:	
Grant ID:	
Documents Reviewed:	• IRB_Martinez_Circus Hurts.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • recruitment_methods_consentform_19-04-2021.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • recruitment_methods_emailmessaging_17-04-2021.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • recruitment_methods_socialmediacall_17-04-2021.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • supporting documents 19-04-2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB approved the protocol from 4/20/2021 to 4/19/2022 inclusive. Three weeks before 4/19/2022 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 4/19/2022 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Laura Martinez
Alaina Zanin
Laura Martinez
Sarah Tracy

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Hello!

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Dr. Sarah Tracy in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand the socialization processes of aerial acrobats in circus organizations.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve completing a 5-10 minute Qualtrics survey, and two separate interviews (expected to last between 45 to 65 minutes per interview). If you would like to participate, both interviews will be scheduled at the same time and at your convenience. Preferably, the second interview will take place within one week of completing the first interview. During either interview, you have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

During the first interview, I will ask you to provide two photographs for use during our second interview meeting. I will give you a set of questions that will prompt you to choose two photographs that you think best answer these questions. Please do not include images of individuals who have not consented to have their image shared publicly (i.e., images that have been posted on social media are acceptable and considered public). I will ask you to upload your images to a password-protected private Google Drive folder. Your images will be used during our analysis process and may be used for academic presentations, papers, and/or publications.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You will receive a $25 USD Amazon gift card (or equivalent for participants outside of the US) that will be sent to your email immediately after the first interview is completed and a second $25 Amazon gift card that will be sent to your email immediately after the second interview is completed. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

As stated, we will collect your email contact information to send compensation. We would also like to contact you in the future in case we do follow-up focus groups or additional interviews. Please let us know if you would not like to be contacted.

You may find that recounting your experiences as an aerial acrobat is cathartic. Your participation can also benefit the circus community by promoting organizational practices that encourage overall well-being and reduce propensity for trauma and sustaining injury. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. However, if at any point you do feel discomfort or distress, you are invited to refuse to answer any questions or stop participation in the interview and study.

Your responses will be confidential. We will de-identify any data collected from your survey and interviews by using a pseudonym in lieu of your real name. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I would like to audio record (if in person or via telephone) or video record (if conducted via Zoom or a similar platform) this interview. The interview will **not** be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: sarah.tracy@asu.edu for Dr. Sarah Tracy (Principal Investigator) and lauramartinez@asu.edu for Laura Martinez (Co-investigator). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please sign your name below to agree to participate in the study. Thank you!

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

PRIMARY SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information

1. What motivated you to try circus?
    a) Did you have an athletic or performing background prior to trying out aerial?
2. Can you talk me through the first time (i.e., first class) you tried aerial?
    a) What was the first apparatus that you tried?
    b) What do you recall feeling during the class?
3. What do you recall the instructor saying during the class?
4. How did your first experience align with the idea you had about aerial beforehand? Any surprises, challenges, etc.?
5. What made you want to continue to learn aerial acrobatics?
    a) What was your first aerial breakthrough?
    b) How did that make you feel?

Socialization to Pain

6. When was the first time you experienced pain in aerial?
    a) How did you react to feeling pain?
7. What is the most painful apparatus you have worked with? Why?
8. What parts of your body are most affected when you are on (specialty apparatus)?
    a) Are there any bruises/lacerations/tears that you recall (prompt for pictures)?
    b) Are there any bruises/lacerations/tears that you have felt proud of? How do you talk about these with other members?
10. How do other members talk about experiencing pain in aerial acrobatics?
    a) Are there any common phrases that you hear about pain?
    b) In your opinion, what is the relationship between experiencing pain and being an aerialist?
11. Imagine you are taking (or teaching) an aerial class with someone and it is their first aerial experience, and they comment on how painful something is, what would you say to them?
12. How have your coaches responded to complaints about pain (observed or experienced)?
    a) What are some suggestions you have heard or personally received from coaches to manage pain? To build pain tolerance?
13. In what ways, if at all, do you mask pain? Do you exaggerate it? How so? What does that look like?
    a) Can you tell me about a time when you continued to train/perform while experiencing significant pain?

    b) How do you recognize the limit of your pain tolerance (i.e., when is it time to stop)?
14. Have you experienced any significant injury from aerial?
    a) Can you describe what happened and how that (has) affected your training?
    b) How have your coaches responded to you having an injury?
    c) What are some suggestions you have received or observed about training with an injury?

Socialization to Performing

15. How would you describe aerial performance to a non-member?
    a) What ideas do you think most people have about aerial?
    b) What is the biggest misconception that people have about aerial?
16. Can you tell me what an average training session looks like for you?
17. Can you talk me through how you would prepare for a performance?
18. What does an ideal performance look like for you?
    a) How do you know what makes for a "good" performance? A "bad" one?
    b) What is the best advice someone has given you about performing? The worst?
    c) What is your biggest performance pet peeve? (i.e., things that you hate to see)
19. Can you tell me about a time when something went wrong while you were performing?
    a) How did you feel?
20. Some people say that being an aerialist is not any different from other types of performers (e.g., dance), what are your thoughts on that?

Photovoice Method Prompt

For our second interview, I'd like for you to take or gather two pictures (these could be pictures that you already have) and upload these to the Google folder I will share with you. The pictures can be of you, others, an object, or anything that comes to mind with the prompts below. Please do not include images of individuals who have not consented to have their image shared publicly (note: Images that have been posted on social media are acceptable and considered public).

1. Provide an image that portrays how you would like the audience to see you.
2. Provide an image that represents the reality of being an aerialist.

The prompts are intended to inspire your creativity, so there are NO right or wrong choices. Choose whatever you feel best answers the prompts and I'm excited to talk about your images in our follow-up interview! Please let me know if you have any questions.

APPENDIX D

SECONDARY SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Photovoice

3. Can you describe this image?
4. Why did you choose this image?
5. How do you feel when you see this image? What comes to mind?
6. If you had to choose one word to describe this image, what you would use?

Managing Challenges, Emotions, and Self-Reflection

7. How does being an aerialist make you feel?
    a) How do you feel when you are in the air?
    b) How has aerial changed your body or your relationship with your body?
8. What do you consider are your biggest challenges or weaknesses as an aerialist?
9. What are your biggest strengths? What are you most proud of?
10. Consider a time when you were significantly frustrated when training or performing. Can you tell me a story about that?
    a) How have coaches responded to you (or others) expressing frustration?
    b) When have you felt most validated as an aerialist? Least validated?
11. What is one of the scariest tricks you've done? Why?
    a) How do you manage your fear when doing it?
    b) How have coaches/other members responded to you being afraid?
12. What is your biggest fear when doing aerial?
    a) Can you tell me about your scariest experience?
    b) How did you feel? How did others respond or react?
13. Some people may think that you have to have a ton of resilience to deal with the pain in aerial (i.e., that the pain is trauma and you build resilience to endure it). On the other hand, some aerialists may say that they were drawn to circus because of trauma they have experienced, and they have a lifetime of practice building resilience and masking their pain. If you had to choose, would you say that:
    a) Circus is a refuge from the trauma of life?
    b) Or, does circus give you additional trauma? How so?
14. There is some research that suggests that training circus skills builds transferable life skills. Would you agree with that?
    a) How has being an aerialist influenced other areas of your life?
    b) What are some lessons that you have learned through being an aerialist that apply to your life outside circus?
15. What would you like to see change in circus as an industry?
16. What is next for you in circus? What are some of your goals/things you are excited about or looking forward to?

Closing the Interview

17. To wrap up our interview, what does circus mean to you?
18. If you could go back in time, what would you say to yourself when you first started doing aerial?
19. Is there anything that you would like to add/clarify/expand on or anything that you feel is important for others to know about aerial and circus?
20. Would you like to choose the pseudonym we use in our analysis?