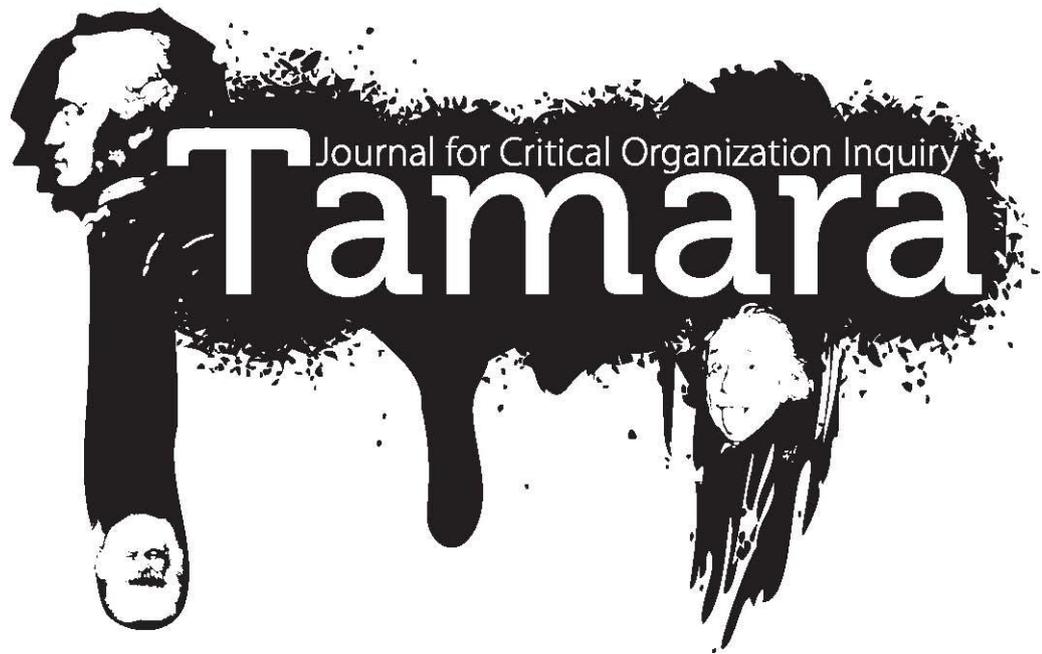


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Negotiating the Professional in Media Representation: The Carnavalesque and Privatized Security Work

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Abstract

Security work is increasingly privatized under neoliberal governance, a trend that is not without controversy over legitimacy and ethics. Public interaction with and understanding of private security contractors is in part mediated by popular cultural representations. In particular, parodies of these organizations are significant for their ability to tell audiences what organizations and members are *not*. This paper examines representations of security work by looking at *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* as a parody that creates relief from official hierarchies of security using Bakhtinian carnival, by lowering security discourses to the level of the grotesque, non-professional body. However, parodies may also encourage public acceptance of privatization by showing private security workers to be more creative and efficient. Parodies of security work can serve as temporary relief from daily need to comply with security regimes, while also aligning privatized security work with discourses of professionalism and authority.

Introduction

Security was once monopolized by the state in the form of policing and military organizations that laid claim to the legitimate use of force (Cavelty & Mauer, 2010), however, under neoliberal governance models, security work is increasingly exported to private security contractors (Leander, 2010a). Private security contractors change the relationship between public and private organizations over control of security activity: contracting out defense roles supports informal ideas of control, reduces government accountability for casualties, and leads to de-regulation, as private security contractors may subvert the rule of law in a way that is framed as giving their clients an edge in security activity (Godfrey, Brewis, Grady, & Groncott, 2013). Public perception of privatization of security is mixed— on the one hand, privatized providers are seen as more efficient and highly valued under neoliberal governance, on the other, privatized security workers have been involved in media scandals that show them to be overzealous and unethical (Leander, 2010a). Media depictions of private security workers, including the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, which implicated both US military personnel and private security contractors (Cockburn, 2013), have shaped public perception of this work.

However, security work is also carried about by less visible and likely organizational actors. Security exists along a continuum from the global to the local—consider that private security workers are increasingly hired to patrol businesses and residential areas (Owens, 2008). In an era of proliferating security risk (Beck, 1992), the onus of security also infiltrates other jobs, including the work of flight attendants (Damos, Boyett, & Gibbs, 2013), and recent calls to arm US teachers to prevent school shootings (Wolfe, Chrusciel, Rojek, Hansen, & Kaminski, 2015). For these workers, negotiating the *legitimacy* of performance of security goes beyond public approval to public acceptance of these workers—acceptance that is complicated by the always-gendered and sexualized nature of that work (Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff & Burrell, 1989). For private security guards, this role is punctuated by the appropriate security “props”—a uniform, utility belt, and vehicle; yet, public perception of these roles continues to stigmatize private security guards as not having “real” authority. These pseudo-officers are essential to consider, as they often take on responsibilities of public police officers, including safety and protection of property.

There are numerous ways to ascertain how security workers and the public assess the authority and professionalism of private security work, including through popular culture analysis. Popular cultural representations can inform public expectations of security work (e.g., that it is efficient and extra-legal, as in the case of 24; Andrejevic, 2007; that surveillance in security work is inevitable and highly accurate; Gates, 2011). Discourses of security work value heteronormative masculinity as key to achieving security (Bean, 2014) while feminizing the public by encouraging citizens to limit their participation in security work to becoming good, transparent citizen-subjects (Hall, 2015a), or consumers (Andrejevic, 2007). Critical/cultural studies of security organizations have examined how multiple narratives create conflicting public perceptions of these organizations (Taylor, 1993a; 1993b), presenting and reflecting dominant cultural imaginations of the inner workings of security organizations.

Organizational communication and culture are mutually influencing (Carlone & Taylor, 1998), and cultural representations of work are influential to public audiences as well as workers themselves, as cultural representations can act as organizational pre-socialization (Buzzanell & D'Enbeau, 2013) and as useful case studies for organizational members (Czarniawska-Joerges & Monthoux, 2005). Cultural depictions can indicate the value of specific kinds of work, labeling some professions as meaningful and altruistic (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Media representations of private security workers may frame them as illegitimate actors, drawing attention during scandals as an under-regulated and highly paid industry (e.g., Kelly, 2011). The private security industry represents a rapidly growing field that is a microcosm of the effects of neoliberal governance. Private security companies are working to position themselves as legitimate (see Brewis & Godfrey, 2017), professional speakers and actors in the security sphere and public perception of these organizations is key to their acceptance, de-regulation, and continued allowance to act alongside the state to achieve security. Security workers draw on norms of professionalism, as it is linked to the disciplined, masculine body, to enact this authority. Therefore, analysis of specific popular cultural representations offers a means of understanding the ways that heteronormative masculinity and professionalism are tied to authority to create security, and as a representation of how the public makes sense of ongoing privatization of security work.

Within these cultural representations, parodies of security organizations and their workers can be understood as a moment of relief from the security hierarchy and space for sensemaking about what security work is *not*. Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of carnival can help scholars to understand how parodies of security organizations provide temporary relief from organizational security hierarchies, while also reinforcing and normalizing the privatization of security. Toward that end, one film that functions as a parody of security work is *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. *Mall Cop* tells the story of an overweight, middle-aged mall security agent named Paul Blart, who must save his shopping center from a hostage situation, despite his physical shortcomings. *Mall Cop* parodies security professionalism by showing audiences what professionalism is not: that is, that professionalism requires a masculine, fit body that Paul Blart lacks. However, Blart's journey to become the security hero could also encourage audiences to accept his authority as a private security worker, hired by the mall rather than the state. Thus, carnivalesque parody can open up space to reconfigure the relationship between masculinity, security, authority, and professionalism, while at the same time encouraging public acceptance of neoliberal trends in the privatization of security. Parodies of security work serve as both public relief from official hierarchies of security and reinforcement of dominant discourses of security as requiring masculine professionalism. Thus, within neoliberal frameworks of security, private security contractors can gain perceived legitimacy and authority by re-inscribing heteronormative masculinity as key to performing professionalism, and public perception of this legitimacy comes from media representations of privatized security workers.

This essay first examines the potential for productive intersections between organizational communication and security studies in cultural representations of work. Next, I argue that using Bakhtin's concept of carnival, scholars can understand parody of security work as both a site of temporary relief from official security hierarchies of heteronormative masculine professionalism and as reinforcement of these themes in security work. Finally, I consider the ways that parodies of security work may create a space for the public to make sense of privatization and reconcile privatization with previous cultural ideas of security work. In addition to serious depictions of professionalism and authority, carnivalesque parodies can both alter the articulation of these discourses and reinforce dominant discourses of professionalism.

Literature Review

Security and Organization Studies

Security studies, a sub-field of International Relations, has remained relatively isolated from organization studies and organizational communication. Security studies traditionally focuses on the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force via military and policing; however, the scope of security studies has expanded to consider economic, societal, political, and environmental security, at levels that range from the individual to international systems (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). Broadly, security is a concern for a threat toward a chosen object of protection, and this object of protection is at its most basic level survival (Cavelty & Mauer, 2010). Grey (2009) invites organizational scholars to take up security as a central reference point and problematic for organizations and to consider how organizations function as arenas where people attempt to achieve security in a variety of ways, including economic security and secure, stable identities. Security studies is compatible with studies of organization because organizations are often the sites where security work (e.g., security of premises/property, concern for health/life, and defense of the state) is carried out.

Similarly, neoliberal imperatives of security have impacted organizational forms that carry out security. Leander (2010a) traces the increase in private security companies to post-Cold War imperatives to shrink defense budgets, along with off-the-shelf security technologies that bring private and public security workers into collaboration and new post-Fordist organizing. The commercialization of security is also suited to private security companies, who must sell their messages about insecurity and how they offer appropriate responses (Leander, 2010b). Neoliberalism both creates new security threats through deregulation and positions consumption of privatized security services as the resolution of these threats: for example, in the deregulation of industry, which has led to more organizational data breaches, and the rise of identity monitoring services, which offer consumers protection from these threats for a price (Gates, 2011). Security work and changing organizational forms are both tied to neoliberal imperatives, which reduce state involvement and marketize security logics.

In organizational *communication*, security organizations have been approached through paradigms of critical theory, crisis management, risk prevention, and high reliability organizing (HRO). HRO and risk and crisis literature identifies communicative challenges to organizations that respond to unexpected events, which can include security threats. Internally, organizations communicate to make sense of evolving enacted environments during emergency response (Weick, 1995). Externally, organizations that respond to crisis must communicate the legitimacy of their response, especially if the public deems the response inadequate, to restore trust (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2009). These subfields demonstrate the compatibility suggested by Grey (2009) that organizations are often the site where people attempt to achieve security and frequently contest its ideal forms and practitioners. HRO and risk and crisis literature also demonstrates the importance of *public perception* of organizational risk-taking and sensemaking. However, as the next section makes clear, official organizational communication is not the only way that the public or organizational members receive information about security organizations, and popular media also plays an essential role in this perception.

Organizational communication scholars have taken an interest in the nature of security work, and especially in the *performance* of this work. The performance of security is key to achieving legitimacy in public perception—a challenge that is especially key for private security workers, who may be judged as not having a “real” job (see Clair, 1996). Tracy's (2003; 2004) studies of correctional officers at two women's prisons demonstrates that the performance of security is riddled with contradictions: to be both tough and compassionate, to follow administrative rules and flexibly implement them, and to trust and rely on colleagues for back-up while also acting self-sufficient in the area of emotional processing of the job. Organizational communication research, then, can be used to explore the performance of legitimacy in security work—an ongoing tension in private security work. Traditional military and policing units benefit from legally-created authority and the monopoly over “legitimate use of force” traditionally afforded to the state. However, many professions are expected to

create “security” in performance. For more specialized security workers, acting and talking tough is one way to demonstrate that authority (including border patrol agents, Rivera, 2014; and correctional officers, Tracy, 2003).

Security organizations both engage in strategic communication campaigns and strategic silence. For example, nuclear weapons organizations have attempted to create official narratives of their work, which can be contested by worker accounts and media investigations (Taylor, 1993a). Security organizations also support specific popular culture representations when these representations are beneficial, by financially supporting the creation of fiction that glorifies national security, thus encouraging public respect (Melley, 2012). Security organizations use official channels and unofficial media representations to craft campaigns that skillfully manipulate the boundaries between public visibility and public accountability. Converse to these public communication campaigns, some security organizations wish to remain concealed from public recognition, fitting into Craig Scott's (2013) concept of "hidden organizations." Scott (2013) defines hidden organizations as organizations that do not want to be identified or recognized. These organizations communicate their identity differently than organizations traditionally studied by scholars—covert security organizations may conceal their identities to create security, and the communication of their identity to others may cause harm to members or the public. The concealment of identity poses a challenge to the study of security organizations (Grey, 2009). This is also a barrier to public recognition, which explains why cultural depictions of security organizations are ever-present and capture public interest. Thus, media representations of security organizations can both fill the gap for information about these organizations, and present accounts that are supported by or run in conflict to official narratives of security work. In the next section, I look to popular culture depictions of security organizations as a site of study.

Cultural Representations of Work and Security

Organizational scholars have moved beyond communication within organizations to look at how organizations are communicated about by broader society, and how public discourses shape participation in these organizations (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Carlone and Taylor (1998) argue that organizational communication scholars should examine how popular cultural discourses shape employee and public sensemaking of organizational identities and relations. For David Boje (2008), the stories of organizations are not agreed upon texts, they are dynamic, changing, and reinterpreted continuously in the telling. Scholars have taken up this call to study a variety of texts that depict organizational life, including autobiographies and autoethnographies (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Warwick, 2016), fiction (Clair & Hearit, 2017; McDonald, 2016), news articles (Buzzanell, 2001), reality television shows (Lair, 2007; Thackaberry, 2003), and success literature (Holmer Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Cultural representations can depict meaningful work as work that is challenging and time-consuming, without acknowledging economic challenges and problems this causes for work-life balance (Buzzanell & D'Enbeau, 2013; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Additionally, scholars have studied how cultural depictions of organizations and gender produce problematic representations of how women should navigate the workplace, by advocating for individual competence and not acknowledging broader sources of inequality (Buzzanell, 2010). Scholarship on culture and organization argues that these depictions do not act merely as entertainment, but that "cultural socialization is organizational pre-socialization" (Buzzanell & D'Enbeau, 2010, p. 59), which informs audience-cum-employee expectations of work and meaning in organizations.

In particular, this research has noted that cultural resources offer workers depictions of how to “act professional.” Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) consider professionalism an often invoked and unquestioned term that exists as an orbit of meanings, functions, and consequences. Professionalism "lurks as a means of shaping, containing, and legitimizing appearance, decorum, behavior, and attitude" (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 157). Popular cultural references to professionalism shape perceptions of embodiment, or who can perform professionalism, that are classed, racialized, sexualized, and gendered. Trethewey's (1999) study of professional women, for example, indicates that women are told to equate fitness with professionalism on several levels: fitness indicates being in control and disciplined, and also indicates the body's capability to endure the requirements of work. Conversely, bodily excesses, including sexuality, fertility, and bodily waste, were viewed in opposition to professionalism. Scholars have noted that popular cultural discourses influence worker identification/presentation of professionalism, and perpetuate the idea that fitness and bodily control are essential to being professional—a depiction that is parodied by Paul Blart's overweight body in *Mall Cop*.

Cultural depictions of organizations can also become formal and informal resources for sensemaking and communication practices by the members of real organizations (Lair, 2010). As Knights and Willmott (1999) point out, fictional accounts of work enable us to see work more clearly, leading to stories (real or not) of that work. For security workers, cultural depictions of security organizations inform interpretations of security work. Pacanowsky and Anderson (1982), for example,

look at “cop talk” to examine how police culture is constructed/displayed by police officers in conversation. They find that officers use media references to police work as a discursive tool to explain their own behavior. Police officers attended to the media as part of their broader cultural membership when they adopted “cop talk” from media portrayals of police by speaking in ways that are depicted in pop culture as police slang, while distancing themselves from media cops to explain the “reality” of the job (Pacanowsky & Anderson, 1982). Security culture is influenced by and also a foil to media portrayals of security, which are used as a cultural resource in conversation as police officers make sense of their profession. Despite the lack of access or information about certain security organizations, cultural depictions of these organizations are widespread. At the intersection of security organizations and culture, media depictions may instruct the public on how to think about security organizations and instruct organizational members on how to make sense of and perform their own work.

Organizations, security, culture, and humor

Beyond cultural depictions that mold expectations of organizational life, humorous depictions of organizations in popular culture serve other purposes, namely, relief from organizational hierarchy through inversion and parody. One way to understand these comedic portrayals is through Bakhtin’s frame of carnival. Organizational scholars have displayed ongoing interest in Bakhtin’s work, positing that organizations exist as polyphonic texts through multiple storytellers (Boje, 2008) that exists and are recirculated and altered in differing organizational times and places (Sullivan, Madill, Glancy, & Allen, 2015). For Bakhtin, carnival is a historical tradition, dating back to the Middle Ages, of folk humor that opposes monologue and undermines official hegemony. Carnival employs irony, pageantry, and ritual that mock “official” meaning. Analyzing the writings of Francoise Rabelais, French Renaissance writer, Bakhtin defines carnival as “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin, as cited in Morris, 1994/2003, p. 199). In particular, the grotesque realism of imagery of the body in carnival is a uniting force. The grotesque body represents the universal body of the people, in opposition to religious repudiation of flesh. The suspension of hierarchy in carnival allows for new meaning given to old forms of speech, for example, through the use of mockery to demonstrate affection. Similarly, the grotesque realism of the body is portrayed positively, which functions ironically as “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level” (Bakhtin, as cited in Morris, 1994/2003, p. 205). For Bakhtin, carnival is a break in monologic meanings that is upset by irony and parody in depictions of food, excrement, and sexual bodies. Carnavalesque depictions of organization still exist today, often in popular culture.

These carnivalesque representations of organizations can provide commentary on various aspects of hierarchical organizational life, including masculinity and the modern workplace. Like Buzzanell and D’Enbeau’s (2010) analysis of *Mad Men*, scholars have examined more humorous depictions of work that depict discourses of meaningful work and masculinity. In relation to security organizations, parody can function to lower dominant discourses to the level of populist response by the public. Hariman (2008) argues that parody succeeds by lowering discourses through imitation, which invites public response, placing serious discourse beside itself, allowing the public audience to claim capacity for independent thought. Notably, Hariman ties parody to “carnavalesque spectatorship” that invites public response. The topic is brought down to “the body and all its desires, embarrassments, and infirmities” (p. 256), and put in front of a mixed audience that “pollutes” it. The lowering of dominant discourses of security allows the public to interact with and respond to these discourses. Carnavalesque acts today oppose the humorlessness of the state (Bruner, 2005). Parody creates ruptures in the totality of discourse and exposes limitations of dominant discourses to the public.

Carnavalesque parodies of security organizations can be read as commentary on the intersection of discourses of organization, gender and sexuality, and security. Parodies of security can invite public reflection on the discursive framing of security threats, including narratives around blame and the appropriate response (Achter, 2008). Humorous depictions can also create space for audiences to challenge the heteronormative masculinity of security work, as in the case of *Reno 911!* (Griffin, 2008), however, more conservative audiences can read this parody as a reinforcement of the necessity of heteronormativity in security work. Cox’s (2012) analysis of *Police Women of Broward County*, a reality show focusing on policewomen, finds that the show both asserts that women can be police officers and reinforces gender stereotypes of women’s private duties to be mothers and wives. In these portrayals of security work, gender and sexual stereotypes are both laughed at and with—audiences can enjoy carnivalesque displays of excess sexuality, or they can view the depictions as true to life and perpetuating of barriers to security work.

These parodies of security organizations lead me to ask if these depictions can provide emancipation from the social control enforced by security discourses, and, by extension, organizational concepts of professionalism. Security rituals place the public at the bottom of the hierarchy, to act as good citizens by accepting that they will be treated with suspicion (Hall, 2015a), and engaging in consumption, rather than deliberation, as their only means of participation (Andrejevic, 2007). One scholarly concern is that carnival can actually reinforce social control (Bruner, 2005). Studying "zombie walks," or public performances in which people dress and walk like zombies, Orpana (2011) determines that it is unclear whether carnivalesque spectacle functions as opposition or simply as a cathartic release that maintains political hegemony. Similarly, Achter (2008) notes that carnival cannot be revolutionary because "what we learn in carnival is not transported back out of it, so it can serve the purposes of the powerful—people have their fun, reverse the hierarchies and mock power, and then go back to an unreflective daily life" (p. 281). However, parody can rework and complicate dominant discourses. This is not to say carnival is an ideal form of resistance, as it often occurs because meaningful interaction between elites and the public is already stifled. Nonetheless, we may appreciate how culture maintains a corrective capacity for vital and undistorted relations among security authorities and their publics. With these functions and dysfunctions of carnival in mind, I now turn to a modern example of security organization parody—*Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. I ask what potential carnivalesque laughter in *Mall Cop* provides, as relief from the security hierarchy through commentary on security, masculinity, and organization.

Carnival in *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*

In my analysis of *Mall Cop*, I first consider the symbolic resources provided, and how they might intervene in existing discourses of privatized security, organizational professionalism, and masculinity. I begin with a brief summary of *Mall Cop* before moving through more specific examples of how each of these themes is depicted in carnivalesque terms. *Mall Cop*, directed by Steve Carr and starring comedian Kevin James, was released in 2009. The film received mediocre reviews at best, earning a 32% based on aggregate critic ratings, with critics calling it "unmemorable" and "room-temperature" (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). However, *Mall Cop* grossed over \$183 million worldwide (USD) (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). The PG rating and made it a film targeted at and viewed by families, with reviewers noting that it was a rare "clean comedy" (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). Some critics did recognize James's performance as earnest and displaying humanity—making it a good choice as a family movie, and one of the top 10 grossing PG-rated movies of the year (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). Because the movie targeted families, it was especially criticized for the amount of in-movie product placement and advertising (Goble, 2009)—an irony because real mall security officers protect "things," but the end message of the movie is that the *Mall Cop* cares for the people inside the mall itself. *Mall Cop* is an intriguing text for analysis—certainly not regarded as an excellent film, yet, in its ordinariness, the movie was widely viewed. *Mall Cop* is among a recent group of films that parody security work using an unlikely, bumbling hero (e.g., *21 Jump Street*, *Hot Fuzz*, *Observe and Report*, *The Heat*, and *Spy*) and attends to a myriad of private security concerns, including negotiation of authority and professionalism to enact security.

Paul Blart: Mall Cop opens with Paul Blart, an overweight, middle-aged man, preparing to take the physical part of the municipal police qualifying exam. Blart makes it through most of the obstacle course, sweat streaming down his t-shirt, before he passes out, failing the exam. Blart returns to his house, where his mom and daughter (he is a single father who lives with his mom) tell him that he should have packed more snacks to deal with his hypoglycemia: Blart faints if he goes too long without food, and often downs a Pixie Stick (a tube of colored sugar) before launching into action at his current job as a *Mall Cop*. Blart loves his job: he drives a Segway scooter around the mall, helps lost shoppers, and flirts with his love interest, Amy, who works at a mall kiosk stand. He is depicted as bumbling and bashful but also filled with a rudimentary impulse toward honor. He has even painted the *Mall Cop's* creed ("detect, deter, observe, report") on the archway to the mall's locker room, and ceremoniously slaps the words before rolling his Segway out into the mall—a la the pregame ritual of a sports player exiting the locker room. Over the course of the film, Blart's early clumsiness in getting shoppers to comply with mall rules gives way to his success as protector of the mall when he rescues hostages and takes out a band of bicycle-riding criminals who have taken control of the mall in order to try to steal credit card information from the stores. The movie is filled with double-crossing agents, including Blart's newest *Mall Cop* trainee, and the leader of the police SWAT team, who initially helps Blart retrieve the hostages before taking them himself. In the end, Blart saves his daughter and love interest from the criminals and marries his newly won girlfriend in the mall food court.

Security, mobility, and the professional body

Mall Cop parodies discourses of security, technology, and mobility, demonstrating Blart's failure to use technology and mobility to create security. Technology and mobility occupy fetishized or esteemed places in the security hierarchy, as

disembodied threats and solutions to security that should be harnessed (Salter, 2014). Security organizations often display a concern with mobility, which can be considered threatening unless controlled through systems of governmentality, which induce mobile citizens to move in specific ways and using specific modes of transportation to demonstrate that they are not threatening (see Monahan, 2010; Packer, 2006). *Mall Cop* lowers these technologies to the bodily level, and Blart's own bodily shortcomings interact with these resources in ways that create insecurity and chaos.

For example, Blart initially demonstrates an inflexible commitment to creating security in the mall, even when the perpetrators are unlikely suspects, for example, when he attempts to "pull over" an elderly man who is a "reckless driver" on his motorized wheelchair. Using the siren and intercom on his Segway, Blart says "please pull to the side, sir, out of traffic." Stopping his Segway, he retrieves a ticket book and saunters toward the motorized wheelchair, approaches the elderly man, and says "Driving kind of recklessly back there, sir. I don't joke about shopper safety. I'm gonna have to issue you a citation." The elderly man gives Blart an incredulous look and drives off. Blart attempts to seize the wheelchair and is pulled along the floor of the mall as the man ignores him. Blart's body squeaks and swivels, eventually he loses his grip and lays on the ground as busy shoppers walk around his body, indifferent to his authority or his suffering. Blart parodies security actors by taking professional commitment to security to extreme levels.

This scene also parodies security concerns with mobility and transportation. Blart's exaggerated concern with a man who is not moving threateningly could provide comic relief from the daily policing of movement that audience members likely experience. His incompetent use of technology and mobility parodies the ideal precision and effectiveness of police work (Reeves & Packer, 2013)—his Segway, like a police car, has lights, sirens, and an intercom. However, Blart's body itself fails to display agility in movement, and as a result, he is unable to secure the mobile suspect, who escapes. Blart's bodily failures provide a carnivalesque source of laughter and relief from serious discourses of security. His physical shortcomings in mobility parody the dominant value of efficient, secure mobility. Even with a technological advantage regarding speed and agility (the Segway), Blart fails to create security. His is a presumptuous and overly dependent body.

In Bakhtinian terms, this scene functions to lower dominant discourses to the level of bodily functions, especially using the shortcomings of the grotesque body. Blart's body continues to intervene in dominant ideas of security organizations throughout the film. In contrast with conventional ideals of creating security by creating secured bodies, Blart's body does not fit. Hall (2015b) argues that the grotesque body is considered unsecured—and perhaps even dangerous—by security organizations. Fit, masculine bodies are held up as ideal sites of security because they are rendered transparent and unable to conceal threat by surveillance technologies. In opposition, grotesque bodies are dispreferred due to gender non-conformity, obesity, or femininity, which create concealed or unfamiliar spaces, rendering the body opaque. For security organizations, grotesque bodies are unpredictable and therefore threatening. In this scene, Blart's body creates insecurity and chaos, as he is dragged along the ground, allowing the perpetrator to escape and disrupting the secured, orderly mobility of mall foot traffic. Blart's body is also the site of comedic laughter about professionalism and organization, which will be discussed next.

Professionalism, masculinity, and the private security organization

Mall Cop also parodies depictions of professionalism and the private security organization. Blart takes his job seriously, unlike the rest of his colleagues, who appear annoyed at his enthusiasm and bored at work. Blart parodies professionalism in his attempts to enact it, which go unrecognized by others or are challenged. For example, Blart is called to mediate between two shoppers fighting over an on-sale bra in the mall's lingerie store. Blart attempts to act professionally and demonstrate his authority; however, the shoppers refuse to show identification when he asks for it. One of the shoppers, an overweight older woman, refuses Blart's orders. He attempts to console her by saying "I understand your sensitivity; I've had some issues with weight myself." She takes offense, and he continues, saying "As soon as I started eating healthier, I noticed I wasn't so moody. And, P.S., your skin's gonna clear up." The woman asks Blart to hold her earrings, and, after he agrees, punches him in the face. The two begin to fight, knocking over racks of bras. Blart tries to grab onto the woman, accidentally pulling her shirt up, revealing her stomach, back, and bra. The woman bites Blart, throwing him into a clothing rack, while he yells for "back up" in a high pitched, comically undesirable feminine voice. Blart loses the fight.

Blart functions as a parody of masculinity, on the one hand, due to his unsuccessful performances of it, but on the other for his stereotypically masculine mannerisms. In this scene, Blart demonstrates his shortcomings as he fails to act tough during a physical confrontation. Simultaneously, he parodies unsolicited male opinions of a woman's appearance. Blart does not act like a man, instead getting beat up in a "cat fight," symbolized by the setting, bra racks, women watching nearby, and the familiar line of "hold my earrings." This failure to perform masculinity connects with professionalism and

organization, as the inability to be masculine enough causes Blart to lose his cool in his confrontation with the shopper. Discourses of professionalism include acting with control and competence—two things that Blart does not have when this woman questions his authority. Again, his body gets in the way, as he cannot act professionally, and is not up to the demands of the job, and is physically bested by a woman who appears to be as unfit as he is.

Additionally, Paul Blart's professionalism is parodied because he is a private security worker. *Mall Cops* are often the target of comedy because they are labeled as fake security workers (Walter, 2015). Blart's attempts to act with authority exist at the intersection of this comedy and the increasing presence of private companies in security work. Shoppers' refusal to yield to Blart's commands spoof his overly professional attempts at authority, reminding us that he is only an imitation of a security worker. In an opening scene with a *Mall Cop* trainee, Blart instructs the recruit to "give the illusion that you have a gun" by reaching for the side of his belt during confrontations. The authority of private security actors is precarious and ambiguous. Depictions of Blart as unprofessional, then, resonate with larger cultural unease toward privatization of security, providing relief from the serious scandals of private security companies.

However, in the end, Blart demonstrates his loyalty and redeems himself by saving the mall, in contrast to his public security work foil, SWAT Team Commander Kent. As the only person in the mall during the hostage negotiation, he ignores Kent's commands to exit the mall. Kent is left outside, unable to rescue the hostages, while Blart takes on the criminals. Blart saves most of the hostages, using his unconventional, unfit body as he unwittingly disables criminals by, for example, falling out of an air duct and landing on one. After saving most of the hostages, his rivals disappear with Amy and his daughter. Blart pursues them with Commander Kent, who at the last minute betrays Blart, revealing that he has been the criminals' inside enabler, and attempts to escape with the stolen credit card information, but is stopped by another *Mall Cop* who shoots him in the arm. At the end of the movie, Blart's bodily struggles become assets, and he is portrayed as the humorous, unlikely hero. The grotesque bodily depictions and focus on food become central, as an old piece of candy revives Blart. In an inversion of the hierarchy, Blart's body becomes heroic, and his bodily excess aids him on his mission. In contrast, SWAT team commander James Kent stands as a fit, tall, and traditionally masculine, but he becomes the site of insecurity as he betrays Blart. Paul Blart's ultimate success at securing the mall is part of the larger cultural politics by which we assimilate to security privatization, eventually deeming private security workers as efficient stand-ins for previous state activities. Blart's success, and what it means for parodic interpretations of security work, is discussed in the next section.

Discussion

With this analysis in mind, I ask what purpose the carnivalesque serves in parodies of security work. Parodies at the intersection of security, organization, and masculinity can provide the audience with depictions that creatively rearrange these articulations by altering perceptions of who can enact security work. However, these openings can also ultimately reaffirm the hierarchies of security, professionalism, and organization. In *Mall Cop*, Blart's failure to behave as a man is redeemed as he proves his physical and romantic capabilities, which ultimately lead to the creation of security. Additionally, the parody encourages audiences to accept private security actors and supports discourses of suspicion circulated by security organizations, which include that idea that anyone can be an unsecured subject and encourage the public to remain vigilant against threats.

First, if *Mall Cop* has transformative potential, what tools does it create to reconsider discourses of organization, security, and masculinity? *Mall Cop* creates a rupture in the linkage between these three themes, by demonstrating that professionalism does not always create security and that masculinity is not always required to create security. *Mall Cop* allows the audience to consider more creative actions as acts of bravery and honor, creating a rupture in the official script of the security organization. Blart's creative take-downs of the mall's enemies include an air duct and a ball pit. These improvised solutions prove more effective than the lights, sirens, and intercom on his Segway. This success allows the audience to laugh at the inefficiencies of traditional modes for creating security, which can be viewed as slow and ineffective. Instead, the audience can root for a creative (private) security agent, who thinks on his feet and uses the resources at hand.

Mall Cop also creates the potential for regeneration of public discussion of security by complicating binaries of what bodies are secure and insecure; however, this continues to serve official discourses of security by proving that all identities can be threatening. Inverting the hierarchy of fit, masculine bodies as transparent and secure (Hall, 2015), Blart is the character rendered loyal and transparent in motives, while his fit, hyper-masculine counterpart, Commander Kent, conceals duplicitous motives. This inversion complicates the binary of secure/insecure bodies by demonstrating that anyone, even seemingly traditionally fit and masculine (i.e., secured) identities, can be concealing something. Vice versa, Blart's body is treated with more suspicion by regimes of biopower, which induce citizen cooperation through routines of bodily control

and health (Holmer Nadesan, 2010). In *Mall Cop*'s inversion of this hierarchy, Blart can successfully perform security for this regime despite his bodily shortcomings (Plotz, 2013). Unfortunately, in the end, this message may play into official risk society mentalities, following Ulrich Beck, in which threat is universalized, and citizens are assumed to be threatening until they prove otherwise (Andrejevic, 2007). This discourse complicates the binary of secure/unsecured but does not ultimately allow audiences to escape the security mentalities of vigilance and suspicion.

This is one of many examples of how security parodies can also reaffirm hierarchies of security and professionalism because parody struggles to escape the dominant reality (Clair, 1998). In the story arc of *Mall Cop*, laughter at the beginning of the film may not even be considered an inversion of hierarchy, because the comedic effect is produced by watching Paul Blart try and fail to act out officially sanctioned ideas of security, professionalism, and masculinity. The resolution of the film also affirms official meanings of these discourses, as Blart succeeds by acting more "like a man." However, Paul Blart still creates a rupture in these discourses, allowing for polysemous readings of the movie, by performing security in creative ways and from his unlikely subject position. Early in the film, Blart is unable to perform professionalism successfully, or create security, because he lacks control of his unfit body, thus supporting official discourses of who can perform security work. The discourse of professionalism is at work, shaping fellow characters' perceptions of Blart, as well as audience members' perceptions. Ideas of professionalism are classed, raced, and gendered in ways that would seem to benefit Blart (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007), yet his overweight body cannot successfully perform control and discipline (Trethewey, 1999). Despite the valid assertions by women Trethewey (1999) interviewed that men have more leeway in performances of professionalism, Blart still fails to achieve control. Here, discourses of professionalism and security compound to make Blart unfit for his job, because of the way that overweight bodies are depicted as opaque and therefore threatening (Hall, 2015), and physically at risk and therefore unable to take on responsibility for their own safety in the ways the state would prefer (Andrejevic, 2007). Early in the film, *Mall Cop* does not produce carnival laughter by inverting this hierarchy. Instead, humor comes from Blart's apparent position in the hierarchy of official discourses: he is unprofessional and unable to create security due to his own subject position.

Instead, security is ultimately achieved by Blart's successful recovery—however clumsy and precarious—of masculinity, using physical strength and violence, which again supports official connections that tie masculinity to the professional and creation of security, while also encouraging audience acceptance of his abilities as a private security worker. However, Blart's position as the unlikely hero who creates security using creativity to overcome his own shortcomings complicates this discourse. Blart engages in physical violence to save the mall—he crashes through a glass door, pushes one of the criminals off of the second floor and into a children's play ball pit, and, as previously mentioned, incapacitates one of the criminals with an air duct. These actions can be read polysemously: as humorous alternatives to traditional state actions in order to achieve security (e.g. the SWAT team waiting outside, riot gear), or as comedic inversions of violence that still support the dominant message that *force is necessary to create security*, and that private security actors can legitimately use force on behalf of the state to establish security. While this polysemous meaning complicates hierarchical representations of security, the latter message ultimately supports official discourses of security in ways that do not liberate the audience or change their expectations of security action. Similarly, Blart's motivation to save the mall is influenced mainly by the fact that his love interest, Amy, is trapped inside. Fitting in with traditional ideas of masculine motivation, Blart successfully performs masculinity by saving Amy and is then rewarded by her interest in him—a decidedly non-progressive representation of the women in relation to security.

Mall Cop ultimately creates some new possibilities among audience members who watch this carnivalesque parody of security. As Achter (2008) argues, carnival can complicate binaries, which *Mall Cop* does by interrupting the unquestioned relationships among discourses of security, organization, and masculinity. The depiction that all three are needed to support each other is complicated and questioned by Paul Blart's successes, despite his unfit, unprofessional body, and unsuccessful performances of masculine aggression. However, after *Mall Cop*, audiences can go back to their daily life in the security hierarchy, potentially unreflective of the value of this inversion for their everyday encounters with security organizations, as Blart ultimately succeeds by attempting to fit within these official ideals. In this way, as Bruner (2005) argues, carnivalesque laughter in *Mall Cop* can end up reinforcing social control. In particular, *Mall Cop* strengthens the image of private security contractors as more efficient than public security workers. Paul Blart demonstrates to audiences that the best security workers are loyal, professional, and creative. Thus, the distinction between public and private is not as important as the distinction between efficient/inefficient, which resonates with broader themes of neoliberal security (Godfrey et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Paul Blart: Mall Cop produces carnivalesque laughter about the security organization by inverting official meanings of security. Blart is an unlikely hero who cannot successfully perform professionalism or secure the mall because of his failure to enact masculinity properly, yet he eventually becomes successful through his creative enactments of security. The resolution of *Mall Cop* both challenges the official hierarchy of security, by questioning who can perform security, and affirms this order by supporting traditional ideas of how to achieve security. As other carnivalesque parodies of organization suggest, carnival is not a purely liberating force from official meanings and orders of organization; however, Paul Blart demonstrates that these parodies can function beyond merely comic relief, by transforming hierarchical meanings of security organization, however slight these transformations may be.

As organizational scholars continue to look at popular cultural communication about organization, the role of humor can be viewed as having polysemous meaning, as Bakhtin argues. Humor both provides relief from the daily hierarchy, so that people can continue living in the realm of the official, and transforms consciousness of this hierarchy, creating ruptures in tightly bound discourses of security, organization, and masculinity. Paul Blart has the potential to make audience members rethink who can perform masculinity, professionalism, and security work using depictions of the grotesque body, which complicates dominant frames of threatening/nonthreatening bodies and identities. In the end, Paul Blart succeeds by enacting official ideas of security, using violence and masculinity to best the mall's antagonists. However, Blart's position remains the lowest of low for security actors, as he decides to stay at his job as a *Mall Cop*, rather than take a more respected career as a police officer, leaving the audience with the message that security work values loyalty and that private security work is deemed satisfying and even honorable by the protagonist.

Despite this, Blart demonstrates that depictions of security work as creative, efficient, and professional can create space for acceptance of private security workers, who have the potential to uphold these discourses of security, and perhaps perform better work, under neoliberal models of security. As security work becomes increasingly privatized, media depictions like *Mall Cop* encourage public acceptance, which further supports privatization and decreases demands for oversight and accountability of security contractors by the state. Parodies like *Mall Cop* offer an entry point for discussions about privatization, professionalism, and authority in security work.

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