Order, Authority, & Identity:
A Comparative Study of Ski Patrollers and Lift Operators at a California Ski Resort

by

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B. A., Psychology
University of California, Santa Barbara, 1990

Submitted to the Sloan School of Management
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT
The objective of this thesis, resulting from two years of participant-observation fieldwork, is to explore the link between order, authority, and identity at a California ski resort. Through comparing how work gets done in two departments on the mountain, I consider how the authority effective in maintaining order is shaped by the identities of those working in each department. In particular, I demonstrate how subcultural authority shapes work accomplishment in Lift Operations, whereas organizational authority ensures that the Ski Patrol work gets done. Through ethnographic detail, these authorities are linked to the lift operators’ ironic detachment and the patrollers’ professionalism. A theoretical contribution is made in the development of an “action claims” framework for identity, the order-facilitating analysis of authority, and the presentation of their interconnections. The consequences of the configurations for the individuals and the organization are considered. Implications for managing subcultural populations are explored.

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Order, Authority, & Identity:

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Wendy L. Guild
MIT, Sloan School of Management
For my parents
Contents

Acknowledgements  6

1  Introduction  8

2  Context  44

3  Ski Patrol: Order, Authority & Identity  63

4  Lift Operations: Order, Authority & Identity  109

5  Conclusion  151

References  158
Acknowledgements

We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.
— T. S. Eliot

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1 Introduction

Let’s address the moose on the table, shall we? You are probably wondering how on earth I was able to convince my faculty committee to support the idea that I study a ski resort, particularly with participant observation as my method. Go on, you were thinking it: “what a scam!” It’s okay, say it. It’s not like I haven’t heard it before.

First, it always helps to pitch your idea to a sympathetic audience. John Van Maanen is no stranger to unusual settings for qualitative research. While the police are tame enough, his work on fisherman and, in particular, Disneyland employees makes him the ideal thesis supervisor for this fringy business school doctoral thesis. And fortunately, there is a larger readership for studies of weird and wonderful social worlds. A healthy proportion of our field-seeking organizational scholars have a reputation for the study of life around the edges of the “proper” economy. For a start, Adlers’ (1993) drug dealers, Barley’s (1983) funeral directors, Bartunek’s (1984) nuns, Becker’s (1951) jazz musicians, Fine’s (1996) chefs, Hochschild’s (1983) flight attendants, Leidner’s (1993) fast food clerks and insurance agents, and Sutton’s (1991) bill collectors, come to mind.
But it takes more than an interesting understudied setting to get a committee on board. “Can you ski?... Yes? Oh, and you already worked at a resort briefly when you were 20? Good. Now what are you going to look at?” I told them I am interested in understanding how young adults are sorting out identity issues and a ski resort is good place to find a subset of this population. As the stereotype goes, a ski bum is someone who has encountered identity defining moments relating to career, relationship, and/or educational commitments and decided to go skiing.1 Additionally, I know more than a few highly educated, well adjusted twenty-somethings who planned to move to the mountains only temporarily and never returned to city life. In the local vernacular, they got “sucked in.” While these self-selected characters bring certain identities to a resort setting which shape the goings on, there must be something about the place that precipitates a change in their plans, I argued. Either way, identity processes, avoided or consciously attended to, are salient in a resort setting. What’s more, ski resorts are clearly recognizable social worlds, neatly bound by space (remote mountain location) and time (seasonal operations), making them a good specimen for ethnographic dissection. “But where is the organizational story?” they asked. At the time I wasn’t sure I had the answer to that one, but I was confident it would emerge if I hung out inside the organization long enough. So they let me go off to Mt. Polaris2 for two winter seasons, armed only with their faith, a suitcase of books, my gear, and, such as they are, my wits.

The story I came back with is just that — an organizational, or, occupational, twist to my interest in the identities of those working at the Californian resort. During my time participating in the field I was immersed in work, and, as such, I was
afforded a view, up close, of how the work order was created. My position precipitated a shift from a focus on the ski resort setting as a whole to a more narrow interest in how work order is achieved within departments. And my initial interest in identity created a lens through which I could see the interconnections between work accomplishment and the identity claims of those performing the work. I noticed how employees' identity claims reflected desired affiliations with particular social contexts, and those same contexts gave rise to certain forms of authority effective in establishing and maintaining work order.

In the pages ahead I examine the link between order, authority, and identity through a comparison of two departments — ski patrol and lift operations. The departments chosen provide a useful contrast in their configurations of order-authority-identity: patrollers claim to be “professionals” and, relatedly, forms of organizational authority are particularly effective in shaping their work accomplishment, while the identity claims of lift operators — summarized with the theme of ironic detachment — link strongly to forms of subcultural authority that serve to buttress order in their department.

Why order, authority, and identity at a ski resort?

recently, Rorty (1989, 1992), and Joas (1990, 1993), undergirds this approach. The idea is that much can be learned of daily life in any setting by trying to understand what problems people are working on. Meaning systems and practices proliferate as people define problems, hash them out, and enact solutions. Two obvious concerns of two major employee constituencies at the resort inform my choice of constructs: management’s concern with order (that the work gets done) and the seasonal workers’ concern with their identities.

Managers struggle to ensure work order in all organizational settings. However, the resort’s cyclical operations and high turnover, in addition to a workforce more interested in the free lift pass than the work, make this problem acute. At Mt. Polaris, the winter season is five months long. Eighty five percent of the resort employees have alternative forms of employment during the other seven months, and those few who stay with the resort over the summer are doing different kinds of work with different crews (for example, golf course work instead of ski resort work). Turnover from season to season is high with 53% new seasonal employees each year, but this number varies by department (the patrol averages 15% new staff, whereas 90% of the lift operators are usually new staff). And it is no secret that many employees work at the resort because they love skiing or snowboarding; many are there a lift pass, not a career. Resort managers generate numerous approaches to meet these challenges. In this account I examine how actors within two departments address the managerial concern for order by developing and using forms of authority based on relevant social contexts.
Today Americans are concerned with the creation of their identities throughout the life course (Hewitt, 1989), but there are still influential societal pressures that make identity a central concern to be addressed in late adolescence and early adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Esman, 1990). Faced with rapid changes in the economy, increasingly fragmented career trajectories, higher graduate school entrance standards, little pressure to marry young, and “itchy feet” (a lust for adventure travel) (Hornblower, 1997), more than a few Generation X/Yers have turned to the growing leisure industries’ work circuit (Adler & Adler, 1999a). And while many in their late teens and twenties come to a ski resort, perhaps, to avoid or postpone identity commitments, one can not escape identity. Even an avoidance strategy implies the power of this concern in its ability to shape talk and action. But not all of the seasonal workers at the resort are avoiding identity issues; indeed, some actively embrace them. How employees address this concern, actively claiming or attempting to avoid claiming particular identities, generates meaning and practices that figure strongly in how the work gets done.

And while it is clear that order and identity are key concerns of those working at a ski resort, these concerns are also shared with those in different settings. Order is, of course, a general problem for all managers and it is deserving of even more attention today than in previous periods as change is increasingly more common than stability in contemporary organizations. Organizations respond to and, in part, produce the societies in which they are embedded. At the turn of the millennium, we are living in a time of rapid societal change. Stable social structures with well defined social positions that could, in ages past, allow individuals to enact non-problematic
identities, are, today, in flux. Individuals of all ages must actively construct their identities; this is not just a project for the young. When these two problems — order and identity — are considered in tandem we can learn a great deal about everyday life in organizations. And, in the ski resort setting, where these problems are central, the social processes circulating through order and identity are more apparent.

The ski resort, as a setting for the study, was not chosen just in service of a frame. It is an interesting cultural milieu and economic entity in itself. Ski resort images flood the media in the winter, attached to numerous products to impart a particular lifestyle association of hip hedonism, excitement, fun, sex, youth, health, adrenaline, beauty, fashion, leisure, and nature (among others). At least yearly, ski magazines beckon their consumers to “live the dream” by working at a resort (i.e., Powder, November 1995) or investigate the coveted life of a ski bum (i.e., Skiing, April 1998). Yet, the reality of living inside a big party on the slopes also has an often ignored darker side. For example, rarely mentioned are those days that involve eight hours straight standing in the rain shoveling slush when all you can do is smile back insults when serving as whipping posts for complaining, impossibly rich customers, who remind you that you will never be able to afford a car, not even a 25-year-old “beater ride,” and you barely have enough income to make the mind-boggling rent on the “roach motel” with decor from the early 70’s that you share with too many random slobs who steal your food. This study provides a less idealized inside view of how employees get on with the daily business of working to produce, and crafting an identity against the backdrop of, others’ leisure at a resort.
Most sociological or anthropological studies of leisure do not consider the production, but rather, the consumption of it (Bourdieu, 1991; de Grazia [1962] 1994; Elias & Dunning, 1986; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Graburn, 1988; Jarvie, 1994; Luschen, 1980; MacCannell, 1989; Rojek, 1995; Rybcynski, 1991; Urry, 1990, 1995; Veblen, [1899] 1994). Yet a number of these scholars, including Biggart (1994) and Davis (1997) in the organizations field, have recognized the growing commodification of leisure. Someone must be producing these packaged experiences. This account shares affinities with the few studies of leisure workers that have been conducted in hotels (Adler and Adler, 1999a,b; Madsen Camacho, 1996), hostess clubs or bars (Allison, 1994; Spradley, 1975), beach resorts (Crick, 1988; Hutter, 1970; Pi-Sunyer, 1989), and theme parks (Van Maanen, 1991). However, there are aspects of the ski resort context, particularly in the themes circulating through subcultures, that allow for a different spin to this account of leisure workers.

And perhaps the ski resort as an organization has been overlooked by “serious” academics for the same reason that entertainment/leisure/tourism industries have been understudied. These industries suffer from a reputation as peripheral economic entities, hardly legitimate objects of considered scholarly inquiry. Yet, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (1997), tourism related industries will be the single largest employer group globally by the year 2000. Leisure organizations as economic entities as well as the experience of workers in these organizations are deserving of much more attention than they have traditionally received.
The Framework: Order, Authority, and Identity

Order and identity are both contemporary problems in society and practical problems for those at a ski resort. To take a closer look at order and identity at the resort I make three conceptual moves to develop a framework. First, I draw on pragmatism to define order as action which can be recognized as patterned. Second, by contextualizing Weber I introduce the notion of authority to account for the workings of power and address how order is achieved. Authority is embedded in a social context and manifest in a number of forms that actors refer to in order to define action situations and options, limit the possibilities of action, and, ultimately, facilitate an act. And, third, I develop an “action claims” approach to individual identity by drawing on several existing identity theories prominent in the organization literature. Identity is actively claimed in talk, through assertions and comparisons, in displays, and in behaviors. The substance of claims made are drawn from social contexts with which actors desire affiliations. In this study, I consider the identity claims employees make in the workplace and I elaborate the contexts and forms of authority they use to create and maintain work order. As represented in Figure 1.1, order, authority, and identity are linked in a mutually determinate configuration. The kinds of identity claims employees make are drawn from contexts seen as important. These same contexts legitimate certain forms of authority. Employees act with reference to legitimating authority, and their actions, when patterned, result in order.
Order

Why autonomous willful agents everywhere produce so much social order has been the central question in social theory since its inception. In our everyday experience we observe the enormous diversity of interpretations, opinions, beliefs, and ways of getting on in the world, yet concurrently we observe a great deal of order. Patterns abound; and while occasionally there is confusion, ambiguity, or fragmentation, order usually emerges. To describe and explain this problematic, scholars of society have generated many theories of order. But here, too, there are discernible patterns, reflected in schools of thought, citation practices, and language use. Each school highlights something slightly different about society; terms are loaded with associations built up through use which privilege units of analysis (i.e., acts, beliefs, or assumptions) and explanatory logics (i.e., deterministic or constructionist). None can offer a complete portrayal of society.

To frame my study I have settled on the term order, which I define as action that can be recognized as patterned. From a pragmatic perspective, all action is
creative and purposeful, and when patterned, it can be called order. The term is closely tied to contemporary notions of culture and social control but seems a bit more precise and useful for my purposes in this study. Consider, first, culture.

Weeks’ (1998) review of the organizational culture literature finds few commonalities in the definitions used by its progenitors. However, the more popular approaches taken up by students of culture (for example, Schein, 1985) emphasize the beliefs or values held by members of a group over patterned actions. Value-oriented accounts of culture generally highlight meaning systems of relatively stable and bounded social groups. Theorists using the term culture differently, explicitly reject the “culture as a mentality that is shared” approach (i.e., Martin, 1992). But even those using the term differently still tend to lean on an interpretive approach favoring ethnographic accounts of what the culture is more than accounting for how culture is achieved and maintained. And privileging the what over the how can lead one to exclude considerations of the workings of power beyond the status differences — positional power — observed. Given that my interest is in how the work accomplishment, as patterned action, is achieved, the term culture does not suit my purposes.

The “how” of culture is often told as a story of social control. Theorists using the phrase social control account for both meaning and action while at the same time addressing the issue of how power fits into the mix (see, for example, Janowitz, 1975). The term “control,” as used by theorists aligning themselves with a Chicago School sociological and/or symbolic interactionist tradition, is akin to self-control, which, in aggregate, looks like order (i.e., Kunda, 1992). However, “control” has been used to
create “top down” accounts that, perhaps too eagerly, seek to expose how those with positional power — managers — successfully limit the terms of meaningful action and suggest the proper modes of self-control. While the ski resort managers make some effort to control the discourses and action possibilities from which employees develop their self-control, the frame of social control would ascribe far too much importance to this dynamic. As such, it does not fit my data.

The term “order” forces one to look at the patterns of action on the front line and note how the workers create and maintain these patterns. However, order is not immune to problematic associations and narrow uses. Order usually implies patterned actions at the expense of a full consideration of meaning and power. Additionally, order has been used to narrowly connote coordinated or cooperative action and often employs functionalist and deterministic explanations. However, when an approach to order is grounded in pragmatism, and linked to authority, it overcomes many of these problems.

Order has a long history in the social sciences, particularly in sociology. Parsons (1937) references Hobbes ([1651] 1968) as the originator of the query: Why do men cooperate with each other in society? ...Why is there not a “war of everyone against everyone.” Parsons brings Hobbes into the conversation of order to distinguish between a “factual” and “normative” order. Normative order is that which is explicitly coordinated, with all the patterned actions serving their “proper functions” within the social entity. Factual order is the residual patterned actions. Wrong (1994) recently revived the term order and claims it is explicit coordination that makes the term order social. I use the term to refer to patterns of action without
reference to the distinctions between normative and factual order, explicitly and implicitly coordinated order.

So suppose we still seek to explain coordinated “normative” order as our way of understanding society. A problem with this factual/normative distinction lies in the issue of how one decides what is coordinated or normative and what is merely factual. It is not acknowledged that power would have to play a part in the determination of that which is considered patterned and cooperative and, alternatively, that which is considered patterned but disruptive. Thus, this approach lends itself to accounts that assume away the problem of power in favor of functionalist explanations. Strauss (1978) overcomes the deterministic association Parsons lent this term, but his “Negotiated Order” is still oriented towards cooperation or coordination. Strauss argues that students of social order have ignored negotiation processes that can be observed everywhere (where negotiation is “one of the possible means for getting things accomplished when parties need to deal with each other to get those things done” p. 2). His approach reminds us that reality is socially constructed; meaning is worked out socially and enacted. And while his approach makes an important contribution to the use of the term order, in application, this approach tends to be used narrowly in the study of explicit negotiation and/or conflict resolution situations. Strauss acknowledges that there is more to order than the coordinated patterns arrived at through negotiations. My approach invokes a broader meaning of order to emphasize patterned actions, negotiated or otherwise.

To Strauss’ (1978) negotiated order perspective, I introduce pragmatism’s emphasis on creative purposeful action. My understanding of pragmatism, as I use it
here, is based on the intrapsychic psychology of James ([1890] 1982), the situated role-taking social psychology of Mead ([1913] 1964, [1934], 1962), the individual freedom and discursive democracy of Dewey ([1927] 1954), the more recent private irony and public liberalism of Rorty (1989), and the careful purposeful creativity of Joas (1993). Joas (1993: p. 130) perhaps, defines it best:

This theory does not conceive of action as the pursuit of ends that the contemplative subject establishes a priori and then resolves to accomplish; the world is not held to be mere material at the disposal of human intentionality. Quite to the contrary, pragmatism maintains that we find our ends in the world, and that prior to any setting of ends we are already, through our praxis, embedded in various situations. There is an interplay between the manifold impulses of the actor and the possibilities of a given situation, which can be interpreted in various ways. Between impulses and possibilities of action, the actor experimentally establishes connections, of which, in any given instance, only one is realized; that one, however, is influenced in its particular manner of realization by the other possibilities that have been mentally played through. The course followed by an action then is not one that has been established once and for all time; rather, it must be produced over and over again by construction and is open to continual revision.

The phrase “that we find our ends in the world” waves away both deterministic and utilitarian approaches in one move. The situational embeddedness takes on approaches that favor aggregated data in service of the “discovery” of decontextualized, generalizable patterns (with or without claims to the status of universal laws or Truth). The reference to impulse is a nod to Mead’s ([1934], 1962) efforts to maintain a biological “naturalism” that shapes, but by no means determines, behavior. The psychology emphasizing experimentation with possibilities to settle on action is at the core of pragmatism and is emphasized by James, Mead, Dewey, Rorty, and Joas. This explanation of the agent acknowledges some shaping by biology and society (as the possibilities and ends are found through acting in the world) while allowing for creativity on the part of the agent (both in the decision opportunity and
the experimental reforming of possibilities or ends). Action is then conscious and purposeful — engaged in to bring about certain desired consequences.

But there are always unintended consequences of action. Reasoned action does not mean rational action in an omniscient, utilitarian sense. Additionally, Mead, in particular, specifies that this conscious sorting through of action possibilities occurs primarily when an actor encounters a “problematic situation” — a situation where an obvious action choice is not ready at hand. But even routines must be re-constituted and can be revised. Here order is neither determined, nor static. Rather, it is created and recreated with each action.

Pragmatism’s emphasis on creative purposeful action links back to two key analytic concerns. To do justice to the goings on in any social setting, an account must adequately address what people are doing — action — and what is important to them — meaning. By using action as an ontological anchor, the privileged social unit to which other units are attached, one concern is clearly addressed. By suggesting that agents reason with possibilities and ends that are borrowed from society, the approach integrates both a connection to the social and a conceptual place holder for meaning. Thus, the second concern is addressed. Geertz (1973: p. 5), citing Weber, is credited for popularizing a key phrase taken up by many, including pragmatists (Rorty, 1989; Joas, 1993); that we are “suspended in webs of significance [we, ourselves have] spun.” It is from these webs that we weave action.

It is popular to direct an inquiry into meaning, using a social constructionist approach, by focusing only on the content of discourse, or what people say. But as noted by a number of scholars, what people say and what they do can often be two
different things. Mintzberg’s (1973) study of managers serves as an example: managers will tell you that their job is to think through important strategic decisions, but instead of finding managers at their desks thinking big thoughts, one finds them dashing from meeting to meeting, scrambling to return calls, and striving to keep up with the piles of paper requiring their signature and attention. Looking at what people actually do is a necessary step in learning what is going on in any setting. With Orr (1996), I agree that studies of organization have, for too long, paid insufficient attention to what people actually do.

The setting is also well suited for an action orientation. The ski resort, as a business organization, produces active entertainment. Customers pay to “go skiing or snowboarding.” Employees work, in part, so they can ski or snowboard for free. The local emphasis is on “doing,” and this reaches beyond the skiing to partying, working, and just “doin’ your thang.” Here language does profitably serve as a complementary analytical unit, as it is usually rather concrete and anchored to the here and now. While the focus is on action, both words and deeds are necessary for a well rounded account of a setting.

To recap, I use the term order to connote action that is recognizable as patterned. Analytically, I try to avoid the narrow definition and functionalism associated with the term by eliminating references to a normative, coordinated, cooperative pattern. Order is just a pattern (a pattern of action generated by individuals purposefully and creatively). Any deterministic associations have been countered with the help of Strauss (1978) and, more importantly, the pragmatism of Dewey ([1927] 1954), Rorty (1989), and Joas (1993), in particular. The pragmatic
approach focuses on action and brings meaning into the concept of order. However, power has been left unaddressed.

Order is not evocative of power, and neither is pragmatism particularly well equipped for surfacing its workings. Do I need to account for power? Yes, I think so. My reading of Perrow’s (1986) *Complex Organizations* has imprinted on me the question “where’s power in this theory?” I now bring this question to any consideration of a social setting. To introduce a discussion of power, and to facilitate the discussion of how order is achieved, I include the concept of authority in this framework.

**Authority**

Authority, as I use it here, is embedded in action, not necessarily in a position. The meaning of authority in the question *by what authority are you able to sign off on this?* is closer to what I intend than that in the question *who has the authority to sign off on this?* Authority is what actors draw on to define problem situations and limit the possible solutions to settle on and enable an action. This definitional, disciplinary, and facilitative power of authority is embedded in a particular social context and is manifest in a number of forms. An act resulting from the invocation of a form of authority reflecting a social context will have legitimacy with respect to and reflecting its social context. For instance, in a bureaucratic organization, an action made with recourse to a particular rule will help form the impression that the act was competent and efficient, and thus, legitimate in that organization. Any social context has a few dominant themes that constitute legitimacy: in a bureaucratic organization acts that appear competent or efficient are legitimate, in a religious organization pious acts are
Authority gains its force through its link to the possibility of gaining desired consequences or avoiding negative consequences. For example, in a bureaucracy, acting with what is viewed as competence and efficiency will help one gain status, more income, social acceptance, and so on, as well as avoid getting fired, demoted, ostracized, etc. Forms of authority also gain legitimacy from repeated use and can be invoked simply out of habit, without an actor’s consideration of consequences. Whether or not they are invoked consciously, forms of authority help define, limit, and facilitate action deemed as legitimate with respect to a social context. People act with reference to a context of authority and through a form of authority. When actions reflecting authority become patterned, authority then buttresses the order observed.

My approach to authority owes much to Weber’s (1968) treatment of authority. Weber was concerned with trying to explain legitimized domination: why commands issued by those with positional power are obeyed by a given group of people (Weber, 1968: p. 121). He conceptualized conformity as voluntary (agents see it to be in their interest). Order, as I have discussed above, involves actions taken voluntarily, with reference to a form of authority, even if these acts are not necessarily particular behaviors specified by a commander. Weber developed three ideal types of authority — rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic — that legitimate commands. The use of the rational-legal type of authority to guide action in bureaucracies is well referenced in the organizations literature. Weber (1968: p. 216) stresses that these are pure types, that one will usually find a combination of them used in any one social world; he encourages students of society to go to the field to see what types of
authority are in use. In this study I have tried to contextualize Weber’s general idea of authority by emphasizing the context and forms of authority at play in the two departments at the ski resort. I see the legitimating force behind authority as embedded in a social context, such as an organization or subculture. The dominant themes circulating within that social world will determine which forms of authority can carry legitimacy. What Weber specifies as ideal types are more abstract categories for the specific forms of authority used by actors in a setting.16 These forms of authority are used by actors to define an action situation and options, determine which of the options will be viewed as legitimate, and settle on an act.

Numerous theorists have focused on two aspects of power implied by Weber’s concern with legitimized domination: positional power differences and the scope of legitimate action available to an agent (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Emerson, 1961; Perrow, 1986; Pfeffer, 1981). While I am less concerned with explaining positional power and the related scope issues, these notions are present in the setting and worthy of explication in the terms of my framework. They can be seen as outcomes of the workings of definitional, disciplinary, or facilitative kinds of power. Again, I rely on Weber’s (1968) work. First, Weber takes as a starting point positional power differences (commander, compliant subject), and focuses on why subjects comply. Then he elaborates the ability to command. Positional power is an internal status differentiation within a social context in the terms of the relevant dominant themes and manifest forms of authority.17 For example, in a business organization dominated by rational-legal authority, status differentiation, along with the scope of legitimate action accorded to a status position, is a function of a division of labor that
is rule- and law-bound and successful impression management in the terms of the valued themes — competence and efficiency. Status is conferred on those successful at managing the impression that their actions are legitimate. Positional power, and the scope of legitimate action afforded, is accorded in the terms of the context of authority.

The concept of authority helps us examine how order is created and maintained. By looking at what people actually do, and why they do it — what authority they draw on to act — we can not only explain the patterns as order but start to understand why there are patterns in the first place. The consistent recourse to a particular context of authority is behind the repetition of acts that makes order. And one context of authority may have a number of manifestations (forms of authority) supporting diverse actions. Authority is certainly suggested by those with positional power, but it is the staff that must act on these suggested forms of authority. There are a number of forms embedded in any context of authority and there are usually a few relevant contexts of authority at play in any social setting, but the repetition of acts (buttressed by the repeated recourse to a type of authority), creates the patterns I call order.

In this thesis I argue that certain social contexts of authority are brought into the consideration of action possibilities, to shape action and create order, in part, because of the identity of the actor. In any action situation, a number of authority contexts can be seen as relevant. The identity an actor wants to claim helps determine which authority contexts are relevant. The identity claim invoked in a particular
situation is also linked to a social context, and thus, the related context of authority, as manifest in a particular form of authority, is brought into the creation of action.

Identity

To frame identity so that it may then be linked back to authority and order, I also use an action orientation. Employing this orientation is unusual, since the study of the identities of individuals has traditionally been approached from a cognitive social perspective, as an ideational concept. In a number of social psychological and sociological theories, identity is often referred to as the conscious application of social categories to one’s self. But this self must be enacted and this enactment can be seen as claims to an identity. In this thesis I draw from a number of theories of identity used in the organizations literature to construct what I call an “action claims” theory of identity. Identity is claimed in action — through talk (particularly assertions and comparisons) displays, and behaviors — and is imbued with meaning. Identity considerations are also brought into the sorting of possibilities of action to guide action. The terms of these claims and considerations are social in nature: they take on the themes circulating through the relevant social contexts. Claims are made in particular situations, or settings, with respect to certain audiences. The validity of identity claims are negotiated; an audience must accept the claim (usually by not protesting) in order for the identity to have any lasting value for the individual. These claims have consequences for an individual’s status position and the related scope of legitimate future claims that could be made with reference to that social world. For
this framework of identity as “action claims” I draw from self-categorization theory, social identity theory, a semiotics of identity, and role theory.

Self-categorization theory is Turner’s (1987) effort to extend and refine his earlier social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Tajfel and Turner’s theory developed out of their studies of intergroup relations. Self-categorization is an attempt to better account for individual level processes. As the name implies, this theory of identity is highly cognitive. Individuals apply socially derived categories to themselves to create an identity. These categories are at different levels of abstraction and are associated with situational cues. This categorization is often done without public expression, in one’s head, but it can also manifest in the form of a verbalized self-description or assertion. Given that we only really have access to what is going on in our own heads, the externalized versions of the self-categorizations are all we have to go on to study identity with this theory. Additionally, there is no explicit connection to action made within the conceptual framework of the theory. However, self-descriptions can be very powerful in shaping action. From this theory I borrow the notion of assertion in the recognition that people often make explicit identity claims with self-descriptions.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) has been used more widely in the organizations literature than self-categorization theory (i.e., Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, et. al., 1994). As mentioned, this theory grew out of research at the group level, specifically on intergroup conflict. Tajfel (1981: p. 255) describes identity as a “system of orientation which helps to create and define the individual’s place in society.” The theory has much to say about in-group and out-group behavior, and
consequently highlights group boundaries. The focus on identity derived from in-group associations is much like Cooley’s (1902) idea of a self dependent on primary groups. In this view, boundary management becomes particularly salient. This boundary management involves comparisons with the “other” which usually enhance the in-group’s status. Again, while we can not know directly what individuals think about in- and out-groups, we can listen to their comparisons to gauge this aspect of identity. The strong emphasis on cognition and the lack of connection to actions make this theory limited for my purposes. However, the attention to comparisons is retained in my framework. When comparisons are made, in-group membership, group distinctiveness, and, usually, superior status on some dimension is claimed.

A number of colorful semiotic studies of clothing have been conducted of late (Barthes, 1983; Davis, 1992; Hollander, 1993; and Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). While only Davis (1992) and Rafaeli and Pratt (1993) wrap up much of their studies in terms of identity, each has something to say about the social significance of the signs displayed on a person’s body through clothes. These signs are often claims to group membership, political opinions, or personal traits such as organization or fastidiousness. The nature of the claims are, quite obviously, context-bound and audience-specific, but these can be powerful claims. This semiotic approach to identity does not necessarily help us understand action claims beyond the act of the display, but the display itself can be an important, rich source of meaning, particularly in settings oriented to leisure subcultures where style is all important (Hebdige, 1979). Identity displays are not restricted to clothes, they include the whole arrangement of
oneself: clothes, hair, posture, accessories, etc. Any display that is imbued with meaning is a claim to identity.

Role theories of identity are the most useful for my purposes. These theories usually involve some idea of appropriate actions. Most of these theories take Mead’s work on role-taking as a starting point. “Taking the role of the other” is the phrase often used, but it is a tricky one. What it ultimately signifies is the reflexive application of the social expectations of one’s own behavior held by others in sorting through action possibilities. To take the role of the other is, first, the ability to conceptualize what actions the other deems appropriate for herself. It is the other’s role that is internalized. But in taking that role, the self is able to observe and estimate its own behavior in relation to the other. A ”generalized other” is the concept used to refer to the universe of expectations that define all role- and situation-appropriate behavior for the self and others. The generalized other is taken into consideration in the sorting of actions. The resulting enactments by the self can be seen as staking out a position within the universe of expectations, and is usually referred to as role specific behaviors.

Ralph Turner has been a key figure in the development of a role theory which relies heavily on the Meadian concept of role-taking (Turner 1962; 1978-1979). Joas (1993: p. 226) sums up the general use of the term role nicely: “Role is thus the normative expectation of situationally specific meaningful behavior.” Role theory has retained the Meadian emphasis on social expectations in the general writings on organizations (i.e., Van Maanen, 1977) and in studies specifically oriented to socialization in organizations (i.e., Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Van Maanen and
Barley (1984) cite Goffman's (1961: p. 87-88) apt summary: “A self (then) virtually awaits the individual entering a position: he needs only to conform to the pressures on him and he will find a ‘me’ ready made for him ... being is doing.”

My formulation of an “action claims” theory of identity is very close to a role theory of identity. Action is creative, reasoned, and reflective of where one stands vis-a-vis others. Action stakes out one’s role, and meaningful action sets up expectations through repetition. In his early writings, Ralph Turner (1955-56: p. 317) uses something like this idea; he defined a role as a “meaningful unit of behavior.” To this I would add that role related behaviors are meaningful units of behavior that serve as identity claims. In this framework I have used the category “behavior” to serve as a placeholder for the discussion of particular activity participation, or modes of participation claiming identity. This is analogous to role-related behaviors that are performed outside of the work setting, but complement and support the primary identity claim.

Action claims need not be just embodied acts, the kind of acts we think of when we think of how manual labor is performed: they can be speech acts and displays as well. This approach to language also uses the pragmatic in the linguistic triad of syntax, semantics, pragmatics. People are always “doing things with words” (Austin, 1962) and in the above discussion, I have pulled from existing theory the two identity claiming speech acts of assertions and comparisons. This framework does not ignore the semantic or syntactic aspects of talk, but the pragmatic is taken as a point of orientation, particularly for the exploration of the semantic used. Displays are active selections of signs to signal meaning. In the punk culture, for example, one can signal,
through the severity of dress (which requires a commitment to deviate from the mainstream by wearing highly unusual hairstyles or multiple body piercings), whether one is claiming to be a part of the core, the active periphery, or a weekend participator (Fox, 1987).

Obviously, not every action a person performs is imbued with identity-relevant meaning. Action claims to identity are a subset of actions that are claimed as more meaningful to the self than others. Goffman’s concepts of role embracement and distance (1961) relate to this idea. Deviations from the expected role one is meant to play have clear identity-claiming power. These are, first and foremost, acts of identity. How one determines which actions claim identity can not be formulated in the abstract: this is contextually defined. Action claims should be intentionally imbued with meaning if they are to be brought into the sorting of action possibilities. Not all claims are intentional, and some identities are not claimed, but given by others. These identities, while they might be important for the formation of a sense of self, are not as germane to the discussion here of how order is achieved.

For the purposes of this study, the setting I explore is one in which work is getting done. While I consider the larger universe of identity claims made by individuals, I do so to understand what kinds of identity claims inform the work. A number of theorists have asserted that an actor will strive to make his or her identity coherent over time (i.e., Linde, 1993). Following the pragmatists, I use the concept of situated identity claims to acknowledge the co-existence of many social selves. In this way, coherence is not a necessary feature of identity but a possible configuration of identity. And what is important for this study is just that situated nature of identity,
both for the meaning of the claim, and, particularly as it shapes an actor’s sorting of possibilities of action to guide behavior. A number of relevant identity claims — linked to different social contexts, manifest in a number of themes — can be brought into the consideration of action possibilities in any instance.19

I have called this framework for individual identity an “action claims” framework, with an emphasis on claims, for two reasons. First, as discussed above, claims create a narrow subset from the many identity possibilities available and only refer to those imbued with meaning. Second, using the term claims avoids issues of “authenticity” and assumed validation. This approach to identity calls attention to the fact that identity is actively constructed, not a “deep authentic structure,” and it is constructed on a social stage. For any particular identity claim to endure, the relevant audience must endorse, or at least not contest, the validity of the claim. Additionally, these claims have social consequences. They affect the individual’s status vis-a-vis the social context from which the claims are drawn, and they help determine the pool of possible future claims. What is important for this study is the consequence identity claims have for the determination of action. Ultimately, an individual’s identity claims do not have to be accepted by others to shape the individual’s actions, but the ability to act with legitimate authority is diminished if the claims are not seen as valid by others.

To recap, my framework of action claims, as massaged from existing identity theories, includes assertions, comparisons, displays, and behaviors. The discussion of the identities of patrollers and lift operators is organized through three main units of analysis: talk, displays, and behaviors. I look at the claims that are brought into the
sorting of possibilities of action — actions that constitute the work order. These are not independent units of analysis: talk is also a behavior, meaning embedded in speech acts (assertions and comparisons) can be analyzed as displays, and displays can be subsumed into a discussion of behavior as well. While one can easily take issue with the lack of logical exclusivity of this three category frame, I find that it helps me organize my account of identity claims.

Framework Summary

In this section I have sought to present my frame of order, authority, and identity. Order is used here to mean action that can be recognized as patterned. Authority is definitional, disciplinary, and facilitative power shaping action. It is embedded in social contexts, and manifest in a number of forms in particular settings. Identity is formulated as action claims, also made with reference to social contexts, and manifest in talk (assertions and comparisons), displays, and behaviors.

The central theoretical contribution is in the exploration of the interconnections of these terms. I argue that individuals’ identities are constructed with reference to social contexts; these same contexts constitute the power of forms of authority. Authority legitimates action and buttresses order. Herein lies the link between order and identity. The connection is brought to life through the detailed accounts of order, authority, and identity in the two departments selected for comparative purposes: ski patrol and lift operations. The exploration of the detailed interconnectedness of order, authority, and identity is saved for the conclusion in these chapters.
Methods: Participant Observation Fieldwork

The work presented here rests on participant-observation fieldwork, with a stress on the participant side of the method. I worked as a “normal” seasonal employee for two winter seasons at a California ski resort (December 1994-April 1995 and December 1995-April 1996). The resort I chose is a medium-sized, “full amenity” resort catering to families from cities and suburbs in Northern California. It has intermediate terrain and a large “bed base” (lodging near the base of the mountain). The resort is profitable (well above the norm in the industry) and has a reputation for being a good place to work. I chose this resort largely for these reasons; I wanted to study a work environment that was working. The resort also chose me in that the General Manager (GM) went out of his way to try to create the in-the-trenches access I desired.

The GM and the Human Resources Manager allowed me to rotate into five departments in the first year, while remaining in just one in the second year. Department Managers were told by the GM to consider me an “intern”: I was paid at the same rate as all other seasonal workers in each department and I was treated no differently (I was asked to do the same kinds of work and work the same hours).

In each department the managers and my co-workers knew I was conducting a study. I started the first month of my first season in lift operations as a ticket checker, then moved to lodging where I was a phone reservationist. From there I went to the food and beverage department, stationed at the restaurant at the top of the mountain, and did whatever work they needed picked up in the schedule (food prep in the kitchen, bussing tables, and filling stations on the line — salad station, burrito/fajita
bar, steak and chicken bar, and drinks). Already experiencing what is conventionally called “burn-out,” I joined the ski school for my fourth month and was stationed in the Children’s room as a “helper” (we set up ski school equipment daily, assisted in sorting children for classes, prepared, served, and cleaned up after lunches, and “baby-sat” stray or sick children). In the last few weeks of the first season, I helped the human resources employees check in the uniforms and complete the “separation” papers for the seasonal workers on their way out. We had structured my stay so that I would enter the organization in a department with relatively low social status (lift operations and food and beverage) and work my way towards departments with higher social status (ski school and human resources; status rankings were from management’s perspective). At all times I kept my distance from “management” and socialized almost exclusively with first year seasonal workers.

I became friends with employees in each department that first season, but my primary informant and companion was PJ, a slightly older than the norm (24-year-old) female snowboarder and ski rental employee from New Zealand. Her friendship opened doors to the snowboarding subculture I would have had difficulty achieving on my own as a 26-year-old skier and researcher who jumped from department to department. PJ was well liked and was in the party and gossip loops of the diffuse snowboarding group (with employees in ski rentals, lift operations, food and beverage, parking, grounds, lodging, sport shop). Together we went to an average of four to five parties or social gatherings a week to keep up with the scene.

Through this extensive socializing I developed numerous relationships with snowboarders in different departments. It was in this season of fieldwork that I
learned much of what is conveyed in this study about life in lift operations. My exposure to lifties range from direct experience working in the department, observing work and interactions on site, and talking with lifties while at parties, on the lift, during group rides, over lunch, on the phone (during work). My understanding of their work is rounded out by knowledge gained in conversations with managers and supervisors (conversations occurring in occasional informal chance interactions and semi-structured interviews).

In my second year of fieldwork, I stayed in one department as a “courtesy guide” all season. My job was to distribute the daily ski report, to field customer questions in the information booths, provide public announcements (and make calls to lift operators) for the companions of injured parties on the behalf of the ski patrol, greet customers as they entered the resort, manage the lost and found, survey customers on the lifts, give occasional mountain tours, and on busy days, assist in ski rentals and lift operations. This position allowed for consistent access to a number of departments (ski rentals, grounds, sport shop, lift operations, ski school, and ski patrol) without the dislocating rotation of the previous year. My socializing shifted to reflect the social position of my occupational title; I hung out with other courtesy guides, a few instructors, and my primary companion and informant, Greg, who was in the ski patrol department. His friendship also allowed for access I would not have achieved otherwise, as those in the patrol do not usually socialize outside of their occupational boundary. PJ and a few others I had spent much time with during the previous season had not returned to the resort: they were off traveling, working at different resorts, or had gone back to a “city job” or graduate school.
It was in this second season that I learned about life inside the patrol. My tasks as a courtesy guide kept me on the mountain; I often shared rides up the lift with patrollers while surveying customers and spoke with patrollers on the phone daily regarding the notification of an injured person’s party. But it was my close connection to Greg that brought me into the social world of the patrol. He explained much of their work and facilitated relationships with a few patrollers in both on-mountain and off-mountain activities. While I never worked on patrol, I would observe the patrol doing their morning work each morning I worked in the information booth, and I observed patrollers handle numerous wrecks (incident responses). Additionally, when I returned in the following two seasons after my participant fieldwork, I shadowed a few patrollers, conducted informal interviews with patrollers in lift shacks and on lifts, and interviewed those in managerial and supervisory positions on a few occasions.

In my first season, like many first time fieldworkers, I made the mistake of asking too many “stupid” questions too soon. In particular, I learned that direct questions around identity themes were getting me nowhere. I quickly shifted my strategy to one of a more traditional “fly-on-the-wall” participant observer, trying to avoid sticking out as a researcher and being present for as much as possible. To ensure I was on target, I checked many of my interpretations against those of my primary informants. I wrote fieldnotes as much as possible when not participating, and captured quotes and frantically scribbled descriptions on numerous bar napkins, but ultimately my fieldnotes are shamefully incomplete.
In my second season, while sitting in the information booths I used the backside of the 8”x14” ski report each day to record quotes and observations. In spite of these limitations, my notes, and other assorted field-related effluvia fill two file cabinet drawers. I made a conscious choice early on to use my time in the field for participation. Additionally, I had little flexibility in my schedule and worked many long hours when the customer numbers where high and staffing was low, which was often (e.g., on average I worked a six-day week and about 8-9 hours a day).

I have returned to the resort for a few visits since my fieldwork; in November 1996, December 1997, and December 1998. During these visits, I checked the accuracy of my information and gathered supplemental information by shadowing the patrol, interviewing patrollers and lift operators, and interviewing managers. I also used these opportunities to bounce the theoretical ideas and descriptions in this thesis off the participants to see if they resonated. I am happy to report that they recognized the processes described as “order” in their operations and found the descriptions of their co-workers’ identities fitting.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 addresses the larger context of the two departments I contrast and the organization in which they are embedded. Starting at a macro level, I briefly address leisure/tourism industries in the economy, the ski resort industry within that larger umbrella, and this particular resort as compared to others in the skiing industry. I look to the local market and community before considering the organization
structure, operations, the winter organization, and its employees. I focus, in particular, on the social worlds — friendship cliques — present in the resort and situate the ski patrol and lift operations within the social organization. This overview provides background information for the next two chapters on order, authority, and identity in the Ski Patrol and Lift Operations departments.

In Chapter 3 I first describe the work order much as a ski patroller experiences a day in the life on the job. After quickly previewing the chapter, I describe the forms of organizational authority that create order as they would be encountered through the season by the patrollers. Throughout this chronological account, I note who is elaborating this authority: those with positional (hierarchical) authority or peers. I then turn to a discussion of the patrollers’ identity claims, summarized as claims to “professionalism.” The theoretical frame developed in Chapter 1 for identity as action claims is used to organize the presentation. First, I address their talk — particularly their assertions and comparisons — then their displays and behaviors. I briefly use what patrollers mean by their claim as “professionals” to speak to the literature on professions, but, more importantly, I conclude by briefly tying this claim back to the organizational authority effective in creating order in the patrol.

Following the same order of presentation in Chapter 3, I start Chapter 4 with a brief description of a day on the job for a lift operator to provide a sense of the work order. Again, after previewing the chapter, I turn to a discussion of authority. The forms of organizational and subcultural authority that create order are highlighted as they would be encountered through the season. Some of the same forms of organizational authority are described as they are used in lift operations, but the
chapter focuses on the forms of subcultural authority effective in creating order. The actors—management or lifties—generating the forms of authority are discussed. The identity discussion first introduces the primary context for identity claims—the snowboarding subculture—then briefly previews the lift operators’ claims to coolness as a pose of “ironic detachment,” or the less often utilized pose of “chick cool.” The account is focused on an elaboration of the claimed pose of ironic detachment present in lifties with talk (or talk avoidance), and, in particular, their displays, and behaviors. Briefly overviewed is the link between the lifties’ claimed ironic detachment, the punitive role of organizational authority, and the more pervasive role of subcultural authority in creating order.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by establishing the links between order, authority, and identity through a comparison of the configurations observed in the two departments. I then consider the consequences of these configurations for the employees and the organization. I conclude by tying this study back to the literature, particularly the literature on identification, in staking out my contribution, and suggesting how this work can inform managerial practice.
Notes

1 See, for example, Economist, Feb. 22, 1997, p. 96 “Full Time Pastime.”

2 A pseudonym for a Californian ski resort.

3 Some ski resorts operate for only a few months, some operate for as many as 9 or 10 months. The management at Mt. Polaris open the resort to skiers when there is ample snow (usually November) and close winter operations in April.

4 I have included a discussion of authority in this framework to elaborate how the more central managerial concern of order is achieved. However, authority could be seen as a concern of both management and employees. Management is concerned with creating forms of authority that are taken up by employees to guide behavior. Employees are concerned with acting in a way that appears legitimate. To do so, they use relevant forms of authority (i.e., rules or traditions) to guide their behavior. Generally speaking, employees are motivated to act with legitimate authority either to avoid punitive consequences, or reap rewards afforded by such behavior, or, it is possible that they are simply acting on habit.

5 See Buchman (1989) on the central problems for young adults. For insight into how a diverse selection of young adults compose their lives, see Cohen (1993).

6 Generation X is a term coined by Douglas Coupland (1991) to denote those born in the 1960’s (the twentiesmethylene of the early 1990’s). Gen Xers, as the stereotype goes, are in a reactive mode to much they encounter in the world, but they still search for meaning in the possibilities afforded in this culture. Coupland (1991: p. 5) describes a popular career strategy when faced with confusion: to “temporarily” settle into a “McJob: a low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service sector.”

7 I have used the term Generation Y to denote those born in the 1970’s for two reasons. It is the next letter in the alphabet, but also because it summarizes one of the key themes for this generation: “Why?;” as in, “why care, why bother?” While this is certainly a gross generalization as well, it picks up on some of the themes I will discuss that circulate in the snowboarding subculture, also recognized by other scholars of adolescents/early adults of the 1990’s (Danesi, 1994; Esman, 1990; Rice, 1990). Danesi (1994: p. 35) calls this group the post-modern teenager, “reflecting a radical response [the ironic search for meaning (p.34), and the pursuit of coolness (p.35)] to the disenchantment with the traditional moral codes and models of our culture.”

8 My reading of Van Maanen (1988) helped me arrive at the distinction between the what and how of culture. While there are certainly numerous studies of culture which include explorations of the production of that social world, the representational emphasis of ethnographies remains on the translation of one meaning system to another. Writing an account emphasizing how culture is created and recreated would likely be described by ethnographers as doing theory, not translation.

9 The Parsonian (1951) approach to action and order has other problems that are not addressed here (i.e., universalizing abstract explanatory logic), but that are overcome by a pragmatic orientation.

10 Mead’s ([1934] 1962) definition of a “problematic situation” is that in which a line of conduct is unexpectedly blocked or impeded. This is an important addition to Joas’ definition of pragmatism as it allows for habitual behavior and what might appear to be unthinking inertia. Institutional theorists (i.e., Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), in particular, have shown considerable evidence of cultural persistence despite a change in situation, or the falling away of the initial reason for the action. Pragmatism would
explain persistence in one of two ways: either the actor not did construe this new situation as problematic, or, the reasoning for the action relies on the authority of tradition (this is the way we have always done it).

12 This approach shares many affinities with Giddens (1984) structuration theory. Because I arrived at my understanding of an action orientation through pragmatism, my discussion centers on these works, using their terminology.

13 The dominant themes within a social context are empirical questions, these examples are ideal-typical and are only provided as an illustration. Which acts are seen as legitimate is often highly contested and the dominant themes are also subject to change. For example, Bartunek (1984) shows how nuns accommodate and resist the growing legitimacy of economic concerns in their religious order.

14 The consequences of value in a social context are also an empirical question and are subject to change. For example, Schein (1990) has observed how MIT graduate students have chosen and pursued career options with a growing consideration of lifestyle concerns. While workers have often considered the context of their full lives in making a career choice, the actual consequences considered have been linked more clearly to traditional financial, community status, and family related concerns.

15 In this study I consider how peers, subordinates, superiors, or even the actor can suggest forms of authority that are taken up by an actor to guide action.

16 In this study, my description of authorities used are more concrete than Weber's formulation allows for, but, it is possible to bring these descriptions up a level of abstraction to reflect his ideal types. For other concrete examples of forms of authority (what the authors call control) used in occupations, in particular, see Van Maanen and Barley (1984).

17 Weber does not explicitly mention contexts and dominant themes, but contexts, in particular, are implied in his writings.

18 Those with positional power often try to suggest forms of authority for their status inferiors to take up, but any relevant other can suggest forms of authority. Ultimately, these forms have to be used by the actors to have effect.

19 In what follows, I build a case that both the patrollers and lift operators rely rather uniformly on a primary social context for their identity claims, as brought in to shape their work acts. This reliance on a dominant context was empirically observed and is not a theoretical necessity.

20 Although I can not know exactly which identity claims are used in the consideration of action possibilities (as this goes on in the actors' heads), I can infer this from their acts and their talk.

21 Pseudonyms are used for all real-life characters making appearances in this thesis.

22 While I observed the patrol work on many customer accidents, I also had the unfortunate opportunity to observe and interact with the patrol as they performed their incident response work from start to finish on a friend visiting me from Boston. Thankfully, her knee has fully recovered and I believe, in her great generosity, she has forgiven me for taking her down that last run at the end of the day.

23 I found the writings of Geer (1969), Jackson (1990), Messerschmidt (1981), and Van Maanen and Kolb (1985), to be very helpful in thinking about and developing as a researcher in the field, particularly during my first months in the field.

24 To maintain a connection to resort life while writing I occasionally went skiing at various resorts in New England, California, Utah, and Colorado, and read fiction, essays, and magazines related to similar settings (i.e., Fayhee, 1994; Houston, 1992; Rember, 1994; and such publications as Skiing, Powder, Snow Country, and Snowboarder Magazine).
2 Context

Mt. Polaris is located in California, in the heart of the Sierra Nevada. It is situated among a cluster of 12 ski resorts within a one hour drive of each other. As noted in Chapter 1, it attempts to differentiate itself through its family-friendly image: many services, a large bed base, and intermediate terrain. While Mt. Polaris had been up and running for over 20 seasons (in 1994), it was only acquired and "developed" in the late 1980's by a parent company that has invested over 25 million dollars for infrastructure improvements to bring the resort into the market of "world class family resorts." With that money, the base was redesigned with a new building (including a casual restaurant, a large bar, two conference rooms and a day care center), four new high speed quads were installed (chair lifts that seat four per chair), 800 acres of advanced terrain were opened up, and an additional on-mountain restaurant was constructed. It has one of the largest "bed bases" in the area, with over 1,000 units and a shuttle system for customer convenience. Mt. Polaris is now a medium-sized resort in terms of square acres of in-bounds terrain and number of lifts, but the skier numbers, at close to a half million a year, are higher than the mean in the industry. As a result, Mt. Polaris has seen its operating profits grow steadily from 1991
to 1996: in 1994 the profit margin was almost 20%, and in 1995, the profit margin was even healthier at almost 25%. And while the resort was sold again recently in one of the industry’s many consolidating acquisitions, more capital keeps coming in, more infrastructure investments are made, and the skier count keeps growing. During these changes in ownership structure, the management team, the organization structure, and the broad outlines of the resort operations remained virtually unchanged.  

**Ski Resort Economics**

It deserves mention that, historically, many ski resorts barely turn a profit. According to a study of the financial reports of North American ski resorts over the past twenty years, the industry boomed in the 1970’s as families and singles descended on this newly trendy sport (Goeldner, et al., 1994). Through the 1980’s growth slowed, skier visits stabilized, and competition for customers became fierce.  

Many resorts went into a development frenzy, opening up more terrain and installing high speed quad lifts. With the introduction of snowboarding, the market shifted. Those resorts opening their lifts early to snowboarding prospered (Mt. Polaris was among them).  

Skiers were becoming snowboarders but there were fewer beginner skiers and snowboarders each year. In the 1990’s, pervasive consolidation has created a few powerful conglomerates. Four of these parent companies are publicly owned and traded on the New York Stock Exchange (including the most recent owner of Mt. Polaris). The so-called Mom-and-Pop operations of the 1970’s no longer compete with the resorts backed by massive conglomerate investment. Small resorts have been
either squeezed out of the market entirely or occupy an "old school" niche with limited operations and outdated technology (Mc Cune, 1994). Mt. Polaris’s early developments (with respect to capital investment) and experience operating as just one of many holdings of a publicly owned parent company have left it well placed in the industry.

Currently, the ski resort industry has hit an apparent growth plateau. According to the National Ski Area Association (Lakewood, Colorado), nationwide skier visits were at 50 million in 1983-84, 54.6 million in 1993-94, and 54 million in 1995-96. In 1994, $1.6 billion was made in lift revenues, customers spent $3.3 billion on amenities, and a whopping $6 billion was spent on ski-related retail products (skis, clothing, etc.). Approximately 5% of Americans make it to a ski resort at least once a year (Dortch, 1996). But this is not the case for the leisure and tourism sector of the economy. Tourism, as an industry, is growing at a rate of 5-6% per year in the US and at a faster rate globally (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997). With the "mainstreaming" of snowboarding and the general growth of tourism, resort operators and shareholders are optimistic and project steady growth while investing in infrastructure development.

**Ski Resort Seasonal Operating Patterns**

From late November through April (depending on snow conditions), Mt. Polaris is in full winter operations. When the snow melts, usually in late May, the golf course and mountain bike parks are open until early September. During the "shoulder
season” in between summer and winter operations, only a few salaried employees can be found in the offices, making preparations for the upcoming seasonal operations.

For most employees, the winter season starts with both a departmental and organizational orientation in November. The resort opens to paying customers based upon snow coverage, and while the resort operators would like to open for Thanksgiving weekend, usually the snowpack only allows for an early December start — right before the Christmas crunch accompanying school holidays. Within a few days of opening, Mt. Polaris is bustling with capacity crowds near 8,000 skiers a day and the crowds can remain for up to three weeks. During this time, managers are most worried about breakdowns and employee mistakes. Chaos often ensues as much of the staff is new, under trained, and quickly overworked.

Things quieten down in January, making time for what employees call the “mountain crud” (many people get sick — colds, flus, sore throats, coughs — in January). The season settles into a pattern of slow weekdays and heavy weekends, with peaks in the skier count occurring on school holidays, such as Presidents’ weekend, Martin Luther King day, spring break, and Easter vacation. Managers use the occasional rainstorms or large snowstorms to reduce their “labor hours” to meet budgets and give their staff a break.

As spring comes, a different mood settles upon the resort. Employees get “antsy,” ready for something new, yet also try to “suck as much life out of each day as possible.” Some of the best merry-making comes near the end of season. The season ends with fun events [the pond skimming contest meant for customers but drawing more employees than customers, the annual department parties paid for by Mt.
Polaris (i.e., the patrol pig roast, or the lift operations bowling party), and a few great
days of skiing, particularly on “the Powder Bowl” — terrain that is usually closed all
season]. Regardless of the snowpack, the resort closes in mid to late April (both years
there was ample snow for a longer season, but, according to senior managers, not
enough customers to make it worth staying open).

Mt. Polaris as a Winter Organization

Mt. Polaris has a strong local reputation. It is described as being a place with
employees who are friendly to customers and each other. Customers repeatedly
remark that Mt. Polaris employees are much nicer than employees at other resorts. Management tries to foster this friendliness with an intensive emphasis on customer
service. And while not all employees go out of their way to greet customers and
help solve their problems, enough do follow through with this credo to perpetuate
the reputation. Additionally, in a walk around the base of the mountain, any number
of friendly interactions between employees can be observed. These interactions — just
a brief hi, or more sustained conversations — cross all social boundaries. The general
rule of friendliness seems to be that, if someone is wearing a uniform, you can strike
up a conversation and it will be well received. And while employees do not
necessarily greet anyone in uniform around the mountain, they usually say hi to those
they have met. Near the end of the season, employees grow weary of all the
friendliness, as many people know each other; over time, the greetings and
conversations do get a bit more selective. Generally, in all employment categories,
the within group and boundary spanning socializing is relatively upbeat and respectful.

Mt. Polaris has a carefully cultivated reputation with “locals” in the community as a benevolent paternalistic employer and good corporate citizen. The management of Mt. Polaris is often heard crowing about their generous employment practices that are well above the norm in the industry (higher wages, more benefits). Not all employees buy the rhetoric, but from the survey (referred to below), it appears that quite a few have. Employees also cite the friendly work environment as the key reason they favor this resort over others. Additionally, management funds a number of organization wide and department parties, ostensibly, to reward hard work and keep morale high. However, the happy security offered by the extended-family managerial approach was violated by a massive layoff in 95/96 with damaging effects on the resort’s reputation and employee-management relations. The PR department tries to ensure that Mt. Polaris is a community-leading organization with highly publicized philanthropy, active participation in community development decisions (i.e., Chamber of Commerce involvement), and quick conformity to numerous regulations.

There are a number of employment categories used at the resort, but the dominant distinction is between year-round salaried employees — generally holding management positions — and seasonal workers paid by the hour. While both salaried and seasonal employees must conform to the general organizational rules, the rules are more strictly enforced for the seasonal workers. There are rules regarding appearance, smoking, attendance, parking, and drug use. The most uniformly
enforced rule involves uniforms; uniforms vary by department and they must be worn, with nametag, and they must be clean, and without modification (no strange hats, etc.). Management usually wears “mountain casual” but they do have standard issue parkas and pants as well. No facial hair (or hair below the collar) for men, unusual hair colors, or facial piercings are allowed. Men are not allowed to wear earrings, and women can wear only two earrings per ear. Smoking is not allowed in uniform, or on the job in general, but on a daily basis an employee can be spotted wearing a uniform parka inside out, “draggin’ on a cig.” Employees are expected to be punctual, two weeks notice should be given if an employee wants certain days off, and an employee must call in sick in the morning if he or she is not able to come in to work. Employees are required to park in a distant parking lot during certain high periods, and are never allowed to park in the paid parking area.\textsuperscript{39} While drug use is a sticky subject at resorts, it is forbidden by rule and one can be fired, particularly if caught using drugs on the job.\textsuperscript{40} Drug testing is used for the shuttle drivers, but it is not used on any other employee group.

In addition to organization wide rules, policies and procedures around payroll, scheduling, and some kinds of information dissemination are also uniform at the resort. Pay checks for all employees are issued weekly, on Thursdays. Thursday night is a good night in the bars. Scheduling is based upon projected skier counts that are established at the beginning of the season, but revised one to two weeks in advance (based on snow conditions, storm projections, customer flows, etc.). In addition, a 10 a.m. skier count is broadcast over voicemail to all the department managers and supervisors. This is done so they can monitor their labor hours, and ask staff to go
home early if there is not enough business. Both the projected skier counts and the 10 a.m. skier counts are numbers of great interest and discussion at the resort. The resort also publishes a monthly newsletter to “keep the lines of communication open.” In the newsletter are stories of Mt. Polaris in the news, policy reminders, events at Mt. Polaris (customer events and employee events), employee birthdays, customer kudos letters, and, most importantly, the announcement of the “MVP - most valuable person” awards. MVPs are those who have been judged by Human Resources to have gone “above and beyond the call of duty.” They can be nominated by anyone, and for this award, they get a pin to wear on their uniform, food scrip, and if they were particularly deserving, lift tickets to another area resort.41

As with many business organizations, ski resorts share a departmental structure to standardize the division of labor. Of the 17 departments at Mt. Polaris,42 the largest departments are food and beverage (5 locations - 31% of seasonal employees), lift operations (13% of seasonal employees) and ski instruction (11% of seasonal employees). Ski patrol accounts for 3% of the total employed. Additionally, 13% of the approximately 800 total employees are year-round salaried employees.

At the time of this study, the starting wage for most positions was $5.50/hour, slightly above the regional norm, and most positions peaked at $7.50/hour (at the time the federal minimum wage was $4.25/hour). Benefits, not wages, usually drew employees to the resort and while most were interested in the free lift pass, the 50% discount on food at Mt. Polaris’ restaurants also helped. Other benefits included employee parties, 50% off a friend’s lift ticket coupon with each paycheck, discount
skiing at all local resorts, discounts in local stores, and optional group health care and dental plans.

**Mt. Polaris Employees**

Seasonal employees are hired in October and November (and through the season, as needed) to start work in mid-November, if snow allows. All but the few college students hired for the peak period of Christmas vacation are expected to stay until the season ends in late April. Many find their way to the resort through the job fair for resort work in October. Most first time employees (53% of seasonal workers) come to the resort through word of mouth (as recommended by a friend) or prior experience as a Mt. Polaris customer. At the end of the season, human resources typically surveys the employees on a number of dimensions. To the question “Why did you work at Mt. Polaris this year (1995)?” 14% of the employees listed instrumental reasons (need the work), 35% cited a general interest in being at a resort (skiing, fun, environment), whereas 50% cited the strength of Mt. Polaris as an organization as their reason (Mt. Polaris is a good resort to work for).

Under the recommendation of the personnel office, approximately 30% of the seasonal workers file for unemployment insurance at season’s end to provide an income bridge to a summer job or another line of work (estimate given by a human resources employee). When surveyed at the end of the season, 25% of those responding either did not know what they were going to do next, or were headed on a vacation (with no plan after that), 60% had a local summer job lined up [the most
popular jobs were recreation guides (rafting, golfing, mountain biking), fire/forest service, construction and restaurant work], and 9% planned to return to school (usually to pursue undergraduate degrees) in the fall.

The majority of these seasonal employees are Generation Xers, or younger; 75% of the seasonal employees are ages 19-30, 54% are ages 19-25. They are an educated lot; 82% having had some college education, 30% have a BA/BS degree, and 11% have completed some graduate work (6% with advanced degrees). Turnover mid-season is low, as only 3% were fired, and 4% left voluntarily in 1994-1995. While I do not have adequate data on class backgrounds, my impression was that approximately two thirds of the employees came from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. Approximately one third of the employees came from lower-middle class backgrounds. A few mentioned the lack of a “safety net” — the impossibility of moving back home with their parents. With the exception of those working in back-stage occupations (lodging or food and beverage), the vast majority of the employees are white, Californian, and suburban. And a majority, but not a vast majority, are male. They are not particularly diverse.

The Social Organization of Mt. Polaris

There are five distinct friendship cliques on the mountain: managers, ski instructors and patrollers, snowboarders, the Spanish-language contingent, and private socializers. In all cases they consist of employees, but the most relevant boundaries defining the cliques are not necessarily organizational (i.e., departmental
boundaries). These friendship groups are maintained by socializing outside of work. They consist of people performing different kinds of work, pursuing different kinds of leisure, and having different demographics (in particular, age and ethnicity). Below, I describe who participates in each group, what activities they participate in, and how the boundary around their friendship group is maintained.

The most apparent social distinction at the resort lies between the “salaried” and the “seasonal” employees, in the vernacular of management. Seasonal employees recognize the division as “management and everybody else.” The management clique does not include all of the 100 or so salaried employees; only about 60 of the managers socialize together outside of work. As the average age of this group is late 30’s, the majority are married, and their socializing is more sedate than those in the other friendship cliques. They have the occasional dinner party, birthday party, or night out at a restaurant in smaller groups. The boundary around this group is rather easily maintained: the opportunities for seasonal workers to interact with management are limited, and interests, as well as tenure and age, separate the groups. The situations for possible interaction include deli visits (this is the only place to buy a sandwich within a reasonable distance) and monthly employee parties. Employee parties are telling of the dynamics between these two groups. Managers arrive on time and stay for a few hours. Seasonal workers show up late and stay late, claiming that the party gets “swinging” only after three or four hours, after “the parents have gone to sleep” (Jade, 1st season Lift Operator).

The ski instructor/ski patrol group is also separated from other groups by age and tenure at the resort. The average tenure of a ski instructor is four years and the
ages range from 18 to 70, with a concentration around the late 20s and early 30s. Many intend to stay longer. Half of the patrollers intend to patrol for life and many have families and secure summer jobs. These groups occasionally socialize together as they not only share age and tenure differentiations, but also share the claim to being "legitimate professions" on the mountain (in addition to management).

In the Ski School department, many after-hours social events are organized by the younger instructors and most of the instructors date only other instructors. Their social group (approximately half of the instructors) accounts for approximately 10% of all of the seasonal employees (this estimate is based on my observation of who participates in parties and who doesn’t). The group’s homogeneity is facilitated by other shared dimensions. 90% of the instructors have some college education and 65% have BA/BS degrees. The vast majority of the instructors are white and many come from middle and upper middle class backgrounds — many grew up skiing with their families on vacations.

The patrollers socialize with each other after work at the bar, at poker parties, and at the occasional pot luck events. On occasion, instructors will come to patrol parties and vice versa, but they do not tend to hold parties together. Patrollers also white and highly educated, with educational statistics similar to those in ski school, but their socioeconomic backgrounds are a bit more diverse with local and suburban working, middle, and upper-middle classes represented.

The departmental socialization of the instructors is intense and, consequently, they tend to keep an even strong boundary around their socializing. They have morning departmental meetings, weekly training, and parties to facilitate in-group
socializing. The department socialization and in-group socializing in the patrol is covered extensively in the next two chapters, but has some of the same features in its regularity, intensity, and boundedness. The on-the-clock socializing helps construct friendship relations that are then taken up off the clock, to the exclusion of employees from other occupational groups.

The occupationally diffuse snowboarder group is closer to the image of a stereotypical ski bum. Their group is large, and their activities are focused on riding and partying. My sense is that there is intentional cross-occupational socializing in attempts to drain the meaning from the departmental boundaries — create role distance from unattractive work affiliations — and maintain a friendship clique based, instead, on a leisure subculture — snowboarding. This group draws its members from departments that employ over 50% of the seasonal workers (lift operations, ski rentals, food and beverage, parking, grounds, customer service, and sportshop). Of those who actually partake in the socializing, this diffuse snowboarding group accounts for 40% of all seasonal workers, whereas the skier/instructor group only accounts for 10% of the seasonal employees (estimates based on observations). Those aged 24-28 are said to be on the cusp of the boarding/skiing generations. This impression is bolstered by the fact that most in this snowboarding group are ages 19-24, in their first season at the resort, and occupy positions that rarely retain employees past three seasons. But these employees share the same educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The immediate leisure concerns of snowboarding and partying dominate this groups' interactions. This is elaborated in the chapter on lift operators, but briefly,
they participate in four to six parties a week, be they small social gatherings, happy
hours, or large keggers. On days off, they will meet at the resort base in the morning
and go snowboarding together as a group.

The entrance into public, and partially private, situations creates the
opportunity for cross-departmental relations to form. While there is certainly plenty
of within-department socializing, these situations — morning coffee in the deli,
shared gondola rides, after work drinks, and parties — allow for the mixing of
occupational groups. The resort norm of friendliness allows for off-hand
conversations with other employees in public situations and creates the opportunity
for friendships to form. It is through these highly public encounters that the news of
semi-private gatherings flows [e.g., when in the deli, I run into my friend in rentals
who tells me about a party at Dave’s house on Wednesday night, she shows me the
flyer and I write down the directions (Fieldnotes, 2/14/99)]. And it is also through
these public interactions that the snowboarding group tries to maintain an inclusive,
open boundary.

The Spanish-language contingent comprises approximately 12% of the seasonal
labor. Most in this group are employed in “backstage” positions in food and beverage
and lodging. The average age of these employees is 30, and only a few, usually in
supervisory positions, are heard using English regularly. Rarely does this group
socialize outside of work with any of the other groups on the mountain. Even at work,
within-departmental interactions with non-Spanish speaking employees are minimal,
although there is considerable playful language instruction around immediate
problems. The Spanish-language contingent does have a healthy community that
extends beyond resort employment, and at the end of the season the food and beverage group hosts a fiesta at the softball field for all interested resort employees complete with carnitas, kegs, kids and Latin music.48

I have labelled as private socializers the 40% of the employees who were not observed participating in social events. When they socialize it is either at work, most often with their co-workers, or in their private lives with families or smaller groups of friends — many of whom are not Mt. Polaris employees. This group tends to be slightly older (late 20’s, early 30’s and up) and they have usually seen enough seasons to be bored with the practices of the other groups. The private socializers are more heavily concentrated in customer service, lodging, ticketing, the higher end restaurant, and ski school (the seasoned instructors) but they can be found in each department.

**Context of Ski Patrol and Lift Operations**

While this chapter has provided assorted background information pertaining to the resort, I will quickly recap the particulars most germane to the two departments discussed in the next two chapters. Patrollers, compared to lift operators, are fewer at 23 employees, mostly male (3 of 23 patrollers are female, whereas half of the lifties are female), older at 21-45 (average age of 30), have longer tenures (with an average of four years), and are on a higher pay scale, at $7.00-$9.00/hour. During peak operations, lifties can number up to 90, and during droughts or a slow year they may be reduced to a crew of 46, but they average around 70 employees. They are younger
(17-23, average age 20), and almost 90% are in their first season. And although they come from the same educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, the lift operators participate in an occupationally diffuse snowboarding subculture, while the patrollers mostly socialize with each other.
Notes

25 Details on the specific location, amenities, skiable acreage, financial information, customer volume, and ownership history are glossed in attempts to preserve anonymity.

26 Reported in an article in the January 6, 1997 issue of Marketing News ("Ski Industry Forced to Look at Young Crowd to Survive," Marketing News, 31, 11), the editor of American Demographics, Brad Edmonsen, believes that the flat skier numbers are forcing resorts to seek out new markets. He reports that the prime targets of these marketing efforts are children, women and ethnic minorities. This trend, particularly as it applies to women, was also reported in an article in the February 15, 1997 issue of the New York Times ("Changing Skiing's Macho Image: The $1.6 billion US Ski Industry is Paying More Attention to the Women's Market," New York Times (National Edition), CXLVI, 50, 704, 21). The article reports that, according to the National Skier/Boarder Opinion Survey, in 1993, 46% of the market was women (in 1996, 41.2% of the market was women). Additionally, in 1993, 61% of the women at resorts were with their children, while in 1996, 72% of women were with their children.

27 According to an article in the March, 27, 1995 issue of Forbes ("The Culture that Jake Built," Forbes, 155, 45-46), in 1990, 6% of lift tickets were sold to snowboarders nationwide. In 1994, snowboarders' share of lift tickets almost doubled to 11% of the total. In 1995, snowboarders bought 14% of the tickets (Economist, January 31, 1998, p. 70). In 1993, 1.8 million Americans snowboarded, and that number is expected to more than double by the year 2000. [Dortch (1996) reports that snowboarding had already grown to 2.1 million by 1994]. Not all of the snowboarders are newcomers to ski resorts, many skiers are crossing over to snowboarding (particularly in the late 1990's), so total skier visit numbers have not grown.


29 According to the National Ski Area Association (Lakewood, Colorado).

30 Reported in Dortch (1996), according to the National Sporting Goods Association annual sports participation survey, approximately 10.6 million Americans (older than age 7) went downhill skiing (bought at least 1 lift ticket) in 1994, making skiing the #1 winter recreational choice (ice skating was #2 with 8 million).

31 According to customer surveys conducted internally, 80% of Mt. Polaris' customers are from California. 65% are male, 35% are female. Just over 50% are intermediate, 33% are families, and 33% are between the ages of 35-44, and 31% make more than $75,000 annually. These numbers (with the exception of the income) are higher than industry averages. A full breakdown of ethnicity data was not available, but the resort was trying to market itself to Asian-Americans, and in 1995, 8% of the customer base was Asian-American.

32 The charge to "exceed customer expectations every time" is drilled into the employees in every instance of communication between "management" and employees (orientation, monthly newsletters, departmental meetings, etc.).

33 For a more extended discussion of service interactions at the resort, see Guild (1999).

34 This analysis is obviously a gloss on the interaction order. My sense of this boundary-spanning friendliness is formed in comparison to other ski resorts, ir reports by customers and employees and through my own experience. Greetings (i.e., wha 'sup, howzit, hi!, dude) and conversational topics (i.e., the weather, snow conditions, crowds, parties) show enormous regularity and can be easily decoded to determine the kind of relationship shared between those in the encounter, and the kinds of social identities claimed through this interaction. This analysis is beyond the scope of the dissertation topic -- work order -- so this friendliness discussion is provided as context. Talk reflecting identity claims will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters.
In an admission from a few Human Resources employees, this reputation is vital to the ability of the resort to secure enough labor to meet its needs. Mt. Polaris does not have the "big resort" reputation to draw enough ski bums seeking a lift pass to ride and ski challenging terrain in exchange for work. They need to keep the reputation as a "good place to work" to draw refugees from other resorts, gain employees through "word of mouth," and keep the turnover as low as possible. Even with this strong reputation, a few departments — those with some of the less desirable jobs (parking, grounds, housecleaning, occasionally lift operations) — go understaffed from year to year.

There are usually at least 4 organization-wide parties a year: Thanksgiving/Xmas party held after the holiday rush in early January, two themed mid-season parties (luau or crazy hat party), and a highly ceremonial end of the season reward dinner and dancing party held at a local casino. The funding for the department parties varies with ski school and patrol getting the lion's share of the money for "morale boosters" in the form of kegs and pizza. Each department has a Xmas party, at least one mid-season party and an end of the season party (also with departmental rewards).

In mid January, 1996, only 1/2 of the runs were open due to poor snow coverage. Revenues were only 62% of the projected amounts to date. Senior management decided to cut back to a "skeleton" crew and instructed department managers to layoff 280 of the resort's 680 seasonal workers. Seasonal workers openly critiqued the decision to lay off such a large number of employees. Management was viewed as hypocritical in light of their claim as benevolent employers. For a detailed discussion of the layoff and its effects see Guild (1998).

The resort makes a number of philanthropic gestures; they have a few days throughout the season where locals ski at a reduced rate and all proceeds go to a local educational philanthropy. The resort gives away a number of lift ticket coupons for charitable event contests. The PR department is highly involved in helping with local events (festivals, and the like, designed to boost the economy of the whole region). While one can question whether these involvements are altruistic charitable acts or self-interested organizational promotional attempts, the high level of involvement and the positive reputation in the community are easily observed.

The resort encourages carpooling and a shuttle is also provided once in the morning and once in the afternoon from two major areas of concentrated residences locally. A system has been instituted to reward carpooling and shuttle use, so that with each instance, one builds up points. These points are converted to food "scrip" to be used in any of the resort restaurants or in the deli/general store. This system is encouraged because (as written in the employee manual) "One of our values is 'The environment is our livelihood.'" But it is also encouraged because the resort's ability to sell lift tickets is only constrained by the number of parking spaces available. The more spots available, the more revenue possible.

The enforcement of this rule varies greatly by department. Regarding marijuana use, some managers "look the other way, because otherwise, [they] would have no staff" (Lift Operations Supervisor), but others adopt a zero-tolerance policy.

There is much discussion of the MVP system amongst employees. Some departments have managers that routinely submit nominations, whereas others do not. For example, lodging often had a least one MVP in each newsletter, whereas the lift operations department rarely had MVPs. Within each department, co-workers usually try to learn why someone recieved an MVP award. If the MVP was event based (i.e., assistance was provided during a lift breakdown), little is made of the award. If the award was issued though a nomination by a manager for daily work well done, there are numerous interpretations made to sort out if the employee is a "brown-noser," someone who works too hard, someone to be respected, or someone to be "dissed." Additionally, many employees find it odd that lift tickets to other resorts are given as a reward. It is seen as eroding organizational pride. Some employees have suggested that paid vacation days would serve as a better reward. But that would cost Mt. Polaris money. There is no cost to Mt. Polaris to provide other area lifts tickets because resorts exchange a certain amount of tickets with each other at the beginning of each season.

The department structure is standard in the industry of some 800 ski resorts in North America, with each resort having only a few local differences. According to The Ski Resort Employment Program guide, published by the Vertical Employment Group (1995) in Seattle, the main resort departments are: resort operations (outdoors: grounds, grooming, janitorial, lifts operations, parking, snowmaking; indoors: lift
ticket sales, food and beverage, front desk/reception, housekeeping, child care, reservations, switchboard, accounting), ski shop, ski and snowboard instructor, ski patrol, ski coach. Mt. Polaris had all of these functions, perhaps with other names and drawn together into departments in other ways, but with few real differences.

43 50% of the seasonal employees were surveyed. Each employee turning his or her uniform in to the human resources department at the end of the season was asked to participate in the survey. The survey was short, and the department manager estimated that 80% of those who came into the office filled out the survey. The total number surveyed was 354 seasonal employees.

A similar demographic statistic is observed in Colorado's Summit County ski resorts, as reported in an article in the April 1990 issue of American Demographics (Hamel & Schreiner, 1990).

One instructor told me a story about how she was told that she should not date a lifty, but she had to try it out for herself. She went on two dates with the guy and decided that all of the stereotypes were accurate "an instructor should just not date a lifty" (Karen, 2nd year instructor).

46 Each morning at 8 a.m. all the instructors meet for "the word of management" to be spoken. The Director of the ski school usually shows up about 15 minutes after everyone has gathered. The word is spoken and the instructors leave for an hour either to participate in a "clinic" on the mountain where they ski together and receive instructional tips or they are free to take a break (often they take in 2 or 3 runs). Throughout the day they see only their students and other instructors, with the exception of brief interactions with lift operators while loading onto chairs. The ski school is given a healthy party budget to keep morale up, as management and the instructors are well aware of the income generating importance of their work. Every other week Mt. Polaris sponsors an after-work pizza and beer party for their employees - yet another occasion to strengthen the boundary around the friendship clique.

47 Given that the instructors' and patrollers' inter-departmental interactions are primarily with lift operators, it is not surprising that most of the boundary work is done in terms of this group. The common terms "knuckle draggers" and "Neanderthals," amongst others, are used to characterize the large snowboarding population of lifties. Lifties are rarely invited to ski school and ski patrol informal or formal social gatherings.

48 I did not learn much about what goes on in the Spanish-language circle. I did ask around and use some of my high school Spanish to find out that a number of people in this social category were originally from Latin America, particularly Mexico. In an article in the February 3, 1996 issue of the Economist it is estimated that 10% of the resort employees in Summit County, Colorado are from overseas ("Coming to America 2: Yearning to Ski," Economist, 338(7951), 22-23). In Summit County, the early flow of immigrants was from Latin America and Asia, while the newer arrivals are from Eastern Europe and West Africa. At Mt. Polaris, the resort had not yet seen this second wave, and the first wave (which continues) is primarily of people with Latin origins.
3 Ski Patrol: Order, Authority & Identity

Patrollers are suited up, clocked in, and ready for morning meeting by 8:00 a.m., or by 7:30 a.m. on storm days (the lifts open at 8:30 a.m.). Tardiness is inexcusable; the Director recommends getting to the locker room 15 minutes early, leaving time for socializing while changing out of street clothes into uniforms. After the daily meeting announcements, including anticipated skier counts, special events, weather forecasts, and other pertinent information, the Director sends her patrollers up the mountain with radios, drill batteries, complex sheets, first-aid “butt packs,” and anything else they will need for the day.

They head out to one of the four complexes — Polaris, Lakeview, Picnic Peak, and Base — to their assigned “zone.” The daily work schedule is organized by assignment to a zone where a patroller is responsible for monitoring the conditions of four to ten runs. Patrollers ensure that obstacles, including snowmaking equipment and hydrants, have been marked with “boo” (bamboo), signage is visible, ribbon lines are taut (orange ribbon tied at waist height to block entry to an area), and tower pads are set at the correct height (to dampen impact should a skier collide with a lift tower). By 9:30 a.m., each patroller records on a “complex sheet” that each “job” has been completed, that each run has been “visualized” or skied — including a record of the snow conditions and that the equipment in the patrol shack is accounted for. Throughout the day, each run is skied at least three times by the patroller assigned to that zone and a record is made of the snow conditions observed.

While out checking conditions, patrollers are also looking for those in need of assistance, as well as those in need of a reprimand — customers skiing too fast or trying to duck under the ribbon lines to ski out-of-bounds. Patrollers have the authority to revoke the lift ticket of reckless skiers or snowboarders. While they usually issue “warnings” they will exercise this authority particularly if someone has an “attitude.” But patrollers will tell you that their primary job is to “run wrecks,” even though, on average, they are only dispatched to a “potential incident” twice a day, with a “positive” response occurring, on average, once a day. “Running wrecks, that’s the best part of the job, a day without wrecks is a LONG day” (Jayson, 1st season Patroller). Some patrollers stand above known danger spots, waiting for accidents. Two patrollers are legend for doing just this — their season total responses are more than double that of an average patroller working the same number of days.
Patrollers receive radio-transmitted notifications of wrecks, including, at least, the location, unusual equipment needed, and some descriptive information. For example, “Patrol dispatch to Lakeview Patrol, potential incident, skier’s left, 1/3 way down Steeplechase, snowboarder in black and brown.” The closest patroller is meant to respond to a call. If someone is on a run and wants it they will call in quickly, otherwise a negotiation in the shack takes place; “usually there’s a volunteer, but if nobody wants it, we make a rookie take it (Mick, fourth season Patroller).” The patrollers try to figure out from the few details provided if it is going to be a “good” wreck under the often espoused rule “the gnarlier, the better.” Courtesy transports, “milk runs,” are lowest priority, both officially and unofficially; they have the slowest response times and are often delegated to the rookies.

Often they don’t know what sort of potential incident lies ahead. It could be anything from a non-incident — some customers picnicking on the slope mistaken for an injury — to a life threatening, Code 3, situation. These patrollers are all at least EMT certified, and, much like a paramedic dispatched in an ambulance (to whom they compare themselves), their job is to treat minor injuries on the spot and, in more serious cases, to stabilize patients for transport. When a patroller arrives on scene, he first radios dispatch with his location and the injury, requests any needed equipment, reports on next steps (care/transport), notes if there is potential liability exposure, then administers the appropriate care using the standardized protocols of the Department of Transportation First Aid and CPR.

If the incident is a minor injury (for instance, a nosebleed) the customer may refuse treatment, sign a Refusal of Care slip, and be on her way. If care of any kind is given, paperwork must be filled out, and the injured party will often be transported by sled to the nurse’s station or off-mountain. In event of a serious injury, the first responder acts as a “scene manager” to control the logistics of the situation (call for additional equipment, manage crowds, etc.), while supervising the medical and transportation efforts of the other patrollers on site. Preliminary attempts at documentation are supposed to be, and most often are, made before the skier leaves or is transported. A short form is used on scene to detail the essential information, while the full page National Ski Areas Association (NSSA) Incident Report, a.k.a. “blue form,” is filled out when the patroller returns to the patrol shack.

Patrollers spend the remainder of the day rotating to shacks, waiting in shacks — writing up paperwork and telling stories, and, when lucky, running a wreck. On crowded days, particularly when there is extra staff on duty, patrollers will be assigned to field customer questions at the top of the main lifts after the morning jobs are completed. The Director likes to have the patrol out and visible, both for PR and prevention.

There are no scheduled breaks for patrollers — they “catch lunch whenever possible.” They are encouraged to bring their lunches and a day’s supply of water, particularly when assigned to Lakeview or Picnic Peak patrol. Polaris patrol has access to the Grill for food, water and bathrooms, but due to the rotation system and the unpredictable nature of the work, patrollers are told not to rely on the restaurant for food.

At the end of the day, 3:30 p.m., more than half the patrol meets at Polaris Patrol for trail closure. A ribbon line is put up to prevent skiers from heading back down the Backside runs. The lift is scheduled to close at 3:45 and the patrol waits until 3:45 to start the trail closure process. They ski down the runs looking for stray customers and announcing a “last call,” to encourage customers to move down the mountain. Formerly called “sweep,” these shouts are used by the patrollers within earshot to gauge speed, thus providing a uniform announcement of closure on the mountain. They ride the chair back up to the top, wait for the lift operators and
other employees to go down first, collect their gear from the patrol shacks, then proceed with closing the trails on the front side.

Back in the locker room, beer is brought out, stories of the day are exchanged, paperwork is submitted, and clothes are changed. When they want to get a “six-pack ski tune” by the techs in the Sportshop, they have to buy a six pack of beer at the resort market and get the skis in the shop by 5 p.m. Particularly if it was a hard day, some of the more social patrollers will congregate in the bar at the base.

Order, Authority, and Identity

The above account of a day in the life of a patroller suggests a sense of the work order in this department. The patrol is responsible for medical assistance, transport of injured parties, safety, on-mountain security, protecting the resort from accident-related liability and, as a consequence of their visibility, public relations. The patterned means for accomplishing these tasks are achieved with reference to a number of forms of organizational authority. In particular, patrollers show respect for hierarchy, rules, and the ways of the experienced, and they will sanction each other for deviating from the proper order of conduct. And as the context for authority is the organization, so is the context from which they draw their identity claims. Patrollers assert that they are “professionals;” they make comparisons with others that bolster this claim, and they manage their local displays and performances in accordance with this identity. The configuration of order, authority, and identity on the patrol is mutually determinate and complementary. These “professional” patrollers draw on organizational authority to get their work done.
Authority

At orientation, the Ski Patrol Director reminds her crew of their charge, to "maintain a safe mountain." To ensure that the crew knows their work and accomplishes the work in accordance with management’s specifications, there are a number of forms of organizational authority at play. This organizational authority is invoked by those higher up in the hierarchy, as might be expected, but it is also used by peers on each other.

This account of organizational authority in its many manifestations in patrol work is organized chronologically — the reader will encounter the varied forms of authority in the same order a rookie patroller would experience it as he or she moves through the season. To be hired, candidates must have the proper certification, skills, and experience. When patrollers arrive on the bald mountain in early November for orientation, they are reminded of the hierarchy, their tasks, the many protocols and procedures, and the numerous forms of paperwork. As the season starts, those with hierarchical positions of authority provide training and try to model proper behavior, while the veterans provide informal coaching for the rookies. With the passing months, peer influence grows to reinforce organizational authority through sanctioning and storytelling. Managers still play a role in the late months through rewarding work well done. For example, out-of-bounds skiing with the Assistant Director is a sought-after honor bestowed on a few shining examples of the model patroller. Still, organizational authority is effectual within the patrol, in large part, because the patrollers use it on themselves and each other.
Hiring

Usually all but two or three of the Department’s 23 “pro patrollers” return each year. To fill those slots, the Director starts screening early — a year in advance of a position opening. After the December holiday rush, she accepts letters of application, evidence of Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification, and references from previous employers detailing the applicants’ work performance and, in the case of ski resort work, skiing skills. Out of the 20 applicants, twice as many applicants as there are expected positions (i.e., four for two positions) are invited for interviews and ski and sled handling tests in the spring. The director says she uses the interviews to assess the candidates’ sociability and intentions to stay with the patrol. She says she wants sociable patrollers first, because “personality conflicts are the source of the biggest problems on patrol” and second, because “an important part of a patrollers’ job involves interacting with the public” (Sheri, Ski Patrol Director). She notes a preference for hiring those who are willing to stay for three years or more because she feels — and this is echoed by the veteran patrollers — that it takes about three years to become a good patroller: “Those who think they are good patrollers after two years are fooling themselves” (Dave, Assistant Director). Before she offers a position to a candidate, she waits until she hears from her patrollers assigned a “rehire” status at the end of the previous season. Each patroller is assigned either a “rehire” or a “rehire with competition, re-interview if needed” or just “rehire with interview” status. “A rehire with interview is bad. Not too many come back with that status. I can’t think of one” (Joey, 4th season Patroller). But almost 95% of the rehires return. She gives the rehires until late September to give her notice, then their position will
be filled with candidates found suitable during the screening process. As a last resort, if positions are not yet filled, candidates will be sought at the Mt. Polaris career fair in October.

**Orientation**

The director says that after a seven month break, her patrollers need a refresher on how things are done. The patrollers return to Mt. Polaris in mid-November for three days for orientation. The material laid out by the Director in the Mt. Polaris Ski Patrol Manual — rules, procedures, and paperwork — and the departmental objectives are covered, but most of the time is spent on lift evacuation training and informal socializing. Organizational authority, in its many forms, is previewed here for the patrollers, with special attention to hierarchy and task protocols.

The Director reminds her flock that medical, transport, safety, security, CYA ("cover your ass"), and PR (public relations) tasks are the responsibility of all the ski patrollers. Throughout the season, she reinforces the patrol’s visibility as an important public face as well as the patrol’s importance protecting the resort against liability. The related tasks — directing traffic, fielding questions, and completing paperwork — are consistently resisted, so she starts early in stressing their importance.

In order to address the organizationally specified departmental goals and objectives, performance statistics from the previous season are covered. Important to this department are response time averages (goal — average under four minutes from dispatch to on-scene arrival), customer survey responses to patrol visibility and first
aid delivery (goal — 75% of responses as “exceeded expectations”), operations within labor plan and department budgets (relative to business volumes), and operations without employee accidents. Patrollers, including the director, complain constantly to senior management that these numbers provide little indication of the fine job they do. A few patrollers note that only three lawsuits, unsuccessful ones at that, have been brought against Mt. Polaris in 25 years of operation. “There’s no good measure for prevention” (Dave, Assistant Director); even so, patrollers do show a mild interest in these statistics.

Also reported are statistics on the number, type, and location of responses, as well as the number of responses per patroller. These numbers are used by the directors to monitor workload for scheduling and budgetary purposes. The patrollers find this last statistic, number of responses per patroller, most interesting — it confirms hunches on who “chases ambulances” and who slacks off.

Protocols

Although the focus of the work review is on evacuation training, it also covers first aid scenarios, helicopter evacuation procedures, paperwork, and legal matters. Each day is dedicated to the evacuation of a different style of lift at the resort: the gondola, fixed chair “riblets,” and high speed detachable quads. This is done before crowds arrive — this is their only chance to practice in daylight. First aid scenarios are covered briefly as the Director relies on the institutional authority of the EMT certification and re-certification courses to ensure reliable memorized compliance with protocols. An insurance agent comes up to brief the department on changes in the law affecting resort liability. Paperwork is reviewed in light of changes in the law,
but more importantly, to assure uniform completion. In each of these domains, the
Director tries to ensure that patrollers conform to accepted behavioral protocols when
executing their work in the season ahead.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy is the most prominent manifestation of organizational authority
encountered during orientation. Those with positional authority (i.e., higher rank)
lead all of the sessions. Additionally, the first page in the manual depicts the
department’s hierarchy — four layers of management. Under the Ski Patrol Director
are the Assistant Director, the Mt. Polaris National Director (with a staff of 25
volunteers, each working one weekend a month), and the Skier Safety Supervisor
(with a staff of six). Under the Assistant Director are the Administrator-Lead and the
Patrol Lead. The Nationals and Skier Safety staff operate autonomously; this account
focuses exclusively on the “pro patrollers.” For such a small department, 23 patrollers
including managers, this layering might seem unnecessary. Necessary or not,
patrollers seem to accept hierarchical organization and respect those with years of
experience. Of course, there is an attendant rationale of functional specialization; each
title is oriented to specific responsibilities.

At least two of the titled positions were created to provide the “lifers” a secure,
higher paying job. The patrol staff is composed of 15 full timers and four part-timers,
paid hourly, starting at $7.00/hour. After five years, hourly rates top out at $12/hour.
The average tenure is four years, but they divide their work force into two types:
“lifers” and “rookies.” The lifers have been around for years — 5, 10, 12 years. Senior
Management approves higher wages for these “expert” patrollers since they are seen
as having specialized skills. “Rookies” are usually younger, are in their first or second season and do not necessarily intend to make a career of patrolling.

Most importantly, the orientation is a time for patrollers to get reacquainted and re-learn the order of things. Hierarchy and task protocols during the scheduled orientation combine with informal storytelling over pizza and beer to get the patrol back into the organizationally specified swing of things.

**The First Few Weeks**

Week two, I walked into the patrol office. “How’s it goin’?,” I ask. “It’s chaos!,” Jerry, the patrol dispatcher for the day, responded. “We are totally understaffed for the number of people on the hill and we have a bunch of people out there that don’t know what the hell they’re doin’. Actually only two, no, really one is clueless, but when we only have half the staff we need, it really screws things up.” Jerry went on to explain that the director is under pressure to keep the labor hours down in the early season, which makes training the rookies a bit more of a challenging.

**Training**

There is little formal training for rookies, with the exception of on-the-job skill execution recorded in small handbooks. The skills developed and recorded are: skiing, sled handling, incident reports, knots and hill safety, first aid scenarios, and radio protocols. Each patroller is responsible for being checked off periodically on these skills, but this is the extent of the training.

This skill demonstration style of training is initiated by rookies when they can catch a moment with the Director or Assistant Director. For the first two months or so,
the importance of these “training checks” are emphasized in morning meetings for all rookies. Managers will initiate a training check if a rookie has been remiss in this responsibility. After two months or so, perhaps even earlier, some rookies will be told that further training is not necessary, while “[we] have to baby-sit others all season” (Dave, Assistant Director). If, for example, a rookie patroller is asked in March to demonstrate how to tie a knot just so it can be ticked off in the training handbook, he should know that he is not likely to receive a straight “rehire” status the following month at season end. Early in the season, this training ritual is used by managers as a skill test, whereas, late in the season, training checks are used by managers to signal poor performance.

The EMT accreditation is relied on heavily; the director assumes medical aid delivery competence. Additionally, it is assumed that it just takes time to learn the terrain and runs of the mountain, and that ski skills will improve through practice. To get the rookies in line with how things are done in the department the managers rely heavily on veteran coaching, and, to a lesser extent, managers’ modeling of desired behaviors for the best results.

_Presenting_ 

The directors and supervisors act as examples of behavior they would like to see modeled by the employees. The Assistant Director of the department is said by patrollers to be one of the best skiers on the mountain; he is always in control and in the presence of crowds his speeding is kept to a minimum. He makes a special effort to get out on the mountain often in the first few weeks for the benefit of the rookies. And he takes special care to attend to the clear marking of obstacles and boundaries,
and hopes rookies catch him in the act.

The Director holds two US patents for lift evacuation equipment. This story is circulated with admiration and respect. It sends a strong positive signal to the staff encouraging innovation. But there are also gender issues at play with respect to the Director’s credibility. No one would admit it, of course, but the extra scrutiny she receives indicates that these men feel a bit ill-at-ease being managed by a woman. Her irrefutable ability to innovate, as demonstrated by her patents, earns her the patrollers’ respect, and she can use all the sources of status she can get in this context.

Innovation, then, is encouraged. In effect, any improvised means of getting things done is in line with the organizational charge, as long as the improvisation solves a problem in an efficient and acceptable manner. For example, a number of patrollers run a 2 mm fabric cased rope through the middle of their tape and clip it into a carabiner connected to the butt pack. However, not all forms of creative problem solving are endorsed by management. For example, when the pants seams around their knees started ripping out late in the season, a few patrollers took to duct taping the seams closed. The patrol directors were amused: “They’ll try to duct tape anything” (Sheri, Patrol Director). But senior management, on the other hand, was not nearly as amused. The Director of Mountain Operations and the General Manager told the three patrollers that it looked bad; they were to exchange or repair the pants with thread if there were problems with the seams. Innovation within acceptable parameters is encouraged as modeled by department managers, but discouraged beyond that.
**Veteran Coaching**

The Director intentionally pairs rookies with veterans early in the season as the primary source of training. A veteran will respond to a call with the rookie and let him handle the incident until the rookie decides he is in over his head. The Patrol Lead said that they rarely have to step in. However, John, a 3rd season Patroller, suggested that rookies often fail to act as scene manager when they are met with a serious incident; they just jump right in to caring for the injured. More importantly, veterans are there to discuss how things went on the chair lift ride back up to the patrol shack. Veterans prompt the rookies’ reflection with questions: “how do you think that went?,” “what worked well?,” “what didn’t work at all?,” “what would you do differently?” During these conversations veterans will suggest how they have handled similar situations in the past. While medical skills are discussed, and tips are shared, much of the conversational emphasis is on how to manage the customers. Veterans share how to signal authoritative scene management; how and to what extent one should share information on the victim’s injuries and the procedures to be performed, and how to draw in additional resources — family members, other patrollers on scene, and the patrol dispatcher — to facilitate care.

Zack, a seventh season Patroller, says that the coaching develops the rookies’ ability to handle interactions with customers and administer care in varied conditions. Most importantly, veterans establish what the rookies should keep in mind when they handle any incident; thus veteran coaching reinforces both the organizational objectives and the informal status order.
Rules

The departmental authorities also provide rules and schedules to create structure. The Director’s most rigid rule relates to the time clock: “I am a stickler on punctuality” (Sheri, Patrol Director). The locker room is to be kept clean and each person is allowed to store only two pairs of skis here. Two weeks advance notice should be given for extra time off. Paperwork is generated for many aspects of the work, and which form one uses, who it is submitted to, and when are all procedures governed by rules. And so on. The organization also helps create order through cross-department rules that are enforced for all employees, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Patrollers all observe these rules. Violations are rare.

Institutional Authority

Organizational authority also draws on external, institutional sources. Patrollers are expected to come to the resort ready to enact standardized protocols to provide care. Certification in a number of related medical courses can satisfy this skill requirement: Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Wilderness First Aid, Outdoor Emergency Care (OEC), or Paramedic training. The standard “scope of practice” provided at the resort is set by the EMT training parameters. Each of the other classes entail training that goes beyond that of the EMT curriculum (e.g., injections or the resetting of fractures). If a paramedic is working at the resort, he agrees to provide care specific to EMT guidelines and no more.

Another external institution, the National Ski Area Association (NSAA), helps lend order to the work. The paperwork filled out for each positive response is standardized by the NSAA across the industry for liability reasons. All response-
related paperwork structures the details collected and actions taken. The complex sheets, another form of paperwork, provide structure for the maintenance of the slopes and equipment stocks.

Both types of paperwork — response related forms and complex sheets — are reviewed by a manager to ensure that each job has been executed and documented (or, at least documented) properly. 76

Surveillance

Authority also acts in an omnipresent, Big Brother-ish, but, passive manner through the radio channel. Beyond the fact that protocols and codes are used, everyone in the department can hear what is said over the radio. Additionally, patrollers share a channel with Lift Maintenance/Mountain Operations and Senior Management. Although this helps in coordination, it also minimizes any unsanctioned radio talk. There are certainly the occasional jibes, jokes, and non-work related conversations over the radio, but patrollers know that Management is listening.

Radio talk is one of the most public aspects of patrol work. As such, performances are the most rule-governed of all work actions. As early as orientation, and in the patrol manual, radio protocols are reinforced. To demonstrate work competence, a patroller must know the general protocols, when to respond, the names of all the terrain features, the lingo for injury and customer descriptions, when and how to request additional assistance or equipment, and when and how humor can be used. In some cases, the person on patrol dispatch will correct mistakes (calls for equipment, or in restating the situation in proper “patrol speak”), but in less critical
matters, the proper mode of conduct is reinforced in face-to-face interactions with veterans and managers.

Into the Season

Throughout the season, organizational authority is used effectively by management through recourse to the above mechanisms: protocols, hierarchy, training, modeling, rules, institutionalized standards, and surveillance. Early in the season, peers use some of these forms of organizational authority on each other, but veteran coaching is the most important form. As time goes on, rookie patrollers learn the ropes and their influence on each other’s work performance increases. Management’s efforts to encourage patrollers use of organizational authority are still influential, but two new peer-based forms of organizational authority evolve: peer sanctioning and narrative reinforcement of the received order.

Peer Sanctioning: Owes

For all the attempts to prevent errors, they still occur. Less serious mistakes are dealt with through a system of “owes.” No one is quite sure when or how this important ritual started, but it is now practiced regularly, and with verve. Beer is “owed” to the department staffers by “the cad” who made a mistake. And it had better not be that “piss-cheap domestic stuff.” A six-pack offense would be something minor: taking the “book” (complex sheets) home overnight, leaving the drill batteries in the lift shack, forgetting one’s keys to the shack, showing up 10 minutes after clock-in (8 a.m.) or taking a good “digger” (crashing) under the lift. A 12-pack offense might be something like a full yard sale (a bad fall littering the slope with equipment and
clothing) in front of a ski school clinic, or a crash with an empty sled (sometimes they like to see how fast they can go with empties). A case might be owed for falling off the lift or getting caught hanging off a lift. In each case, if no one notices, nothing is owed. Owes are a fun way for patrollers to keep each other in line, but it is also an important point of honor. Fellow staffers will rib each other when the mistakes are getting too frequent and out of hand, "What do you have on tap today, Mike?" or "You might as well just turn your paycheck over to Henry Weinhard's, Inc."

Some mistakes are not handled in this light manner. Calling for the wrong equipment is usually corrected by the dispatcher and nothing more is made of it even though it is less than professional to make this kind of mistake. Failing to fill out one's paperwork adequately is a similar offense, an act reprimanded by the Lead Administrator. On powder days, patrollers are often itching to hit the great terrain in the out-of-bounds areas. If they decide to scratch that itch, they can be fired, but more likely, they will get a serious talking to by the Assistant Director.

One mistake is not forgivable — a patroller who crashes while transporting a person on a sled can be fired. It rarely happens, but if it happens, perhaps if a patroller's skis run under the sled or if he pops out of his bindings, a patroller must not let go of the sled as it has no brakes. During my time in the field, a patroller notorious for his reckless skiing allegedly ran into a tree with a loaded sled, got pegged there by the handles and had to radio for help. By the time I heard this story (a story confirmed by a number of patrollers), no one had seen him for weeks, and the Director had not yet had a chance to talk with him. He had just disappeared.
Apparently he could not face the sanctions he would have to endure from his peers, or, in this case, management.77

Stories

A critical facet of peer-socialization is the storytelling that goes on, particularly surrounding wrecks. Stories circulate local knowledge and folklore, providing patrollers with “virtual” experience of bad wrecks. Stories also highlight the moral/political/social order of the place, and locate the individuals within that order. The key types of stories patrollers circulate are the “gnarly” tales, the “nothing” tales, the emotion sharing tales, the entertaining tales, the other’s poor judgment tales, and the boastful tales.

The gnarly and nothing tales are the opposite sides of the same coin. Gnarly tales are reactions to the “gore-factor” of life or limb threatening injuries. The gnarly story might also be told to “rib” (poke fun at) a fellow patroller for taking a good fall. These are incidents begging to be shared as narratives. “Nothing” stories elaborate with great detail just exactly how “nothing” an incident (run) was or how boring the day was. Both types of tales note something out of the ordinary, thus indirectly establishing a baseline normalcy.

Sometimes patrollers have an emotional response to an incident that they share with their co-workers. This could come in the form of expressing empathy for an injured person (usually a stoic child), or, more likely, expressing a frustration about a “nothing call” or obnoxious customer. The latter is usually just a quick reference to a situation just experienced when entering a patrol shack or the locker room. The
former kind of story reveals compassion and is told less frequently in a smaller group setting in the context of a thoughtful, reflective conversation.

Some stories are for entertainment purposes. This story, described here in an excerpt from my fieldnotes, was told by the Patrol Lead:

When I was visiting a year after this incident, this story was retold to me in a shack with five others. The Patrol Lead was called for a courtesy transport late one spring afternoon. It was a drunk woman walking down the mountain holding her skis. Not three minutes after he had her strapped into the sled she announced she had to pee, NOW! He stopped, got her out, and she proceeded to pull down her pants right there. She was having trouble keeping steady, and asked if he would hold on to her. She lost her balance and fell back with all of everything showing — when he noticed she had no tan lines and was not the least bit ashamed, he concluded that she was a stripper. This story was told with great animation and embellishment and was welcomed with an enthusiastic reception by the full audience. — Fieldnotes 11/28/96

Interestingly enough, I had already heard this story a number of times from different patrollers and one lifty during the previous season. It typifies the entertaining story genre, appropriate for lighter moments and larger audiences.

Some stories reinforce the order by challenging the judgment of someone else’s work performance. These kinds of stories are often triggered by a situation heard on the radio. While riding the lift together or sitting in the patrol shack, someone will share a judgment of a previous incident handled by the person who just spoke over the radio. Then the story is told to back up the judgment.

Jayson sure does like to call for assistance. I have shown up on scene at three of his wrecks now and each time I just watch. It is a waste of my time. — Mick, 4th season Patroller

I rode the lift with a patroller close to the source on this controversial story. This is what he told me:

A femur break occurred on the backside and the Director overruled the call for an air ambulance. She had recently been reprimanded for the “overuse” of this service (Mt. Polaris had to cover the costs in a few cases). A few on staff felt that the snomo transport was far too long, it prolonged his pain, and it was bad risk taken. With femur
breaks, there is a possibility that a blood clot can form and circulate through the system leading to an aneurysm, stroke or heart attack. This did not occur, thankfully. Shawn (2nd, season Patroller) was very angry with Sheri, the Director, as were many other patrollers. This incident created quite the controversy on patrol. — Fieldnotes, 2/20/96

This story was told to work through opinions on how the incident was handled. The Director’s judgment was called into question as the story was told and re-told. This was the most egregious instance of a judgment called into question. The consequence of this instance is that the work order was reinforced, but the competence of the Director was challenged. Ultimately, the blame was shifted to Mt. Polaris Management for the pressures they had created in this situation. More frequently, many smaller incidents are recounted as stories to call out another’s bad judgment.

Other stories only serve as a vehicle for boasting. The “aren’t I innovative” tales could be about something as minor as describing yet another use for duct tape, to something more important, such as a new way to subdue an emotionally overwrought or physically violent injured customer. More often tales reflect a self-conscious “in-the-know” attitude. Included are tales about where the “freshies” are, recent “epic” backcountry adventures, or stories about last night’s great party. I also heard stories about upcoming storms, good equipment, and where the good conditions are at what time on warm sunny days “follow the sun — about an hour after it gets there, or less, depending on temperature” (Jayson, 1st season Patroller).78

All of the stories, in some way, call out the received order and reinforce it. The gnarly and nothing tales reinforce a sense of what is normal and abnormal. The emotion sharing tales allow patrollers to call out and develop solidarity over difficult aspects of their work. Stories told for entertainment purposes always involve the violation of received social conventions. More importantly, the telling of these tales
demonstrates to the crew who has earned veteran status, as usually the veterans are doing the entertaining (they have a larger stock of entertaining stories and have earned the right to an audience). Working through other’s poor judgment tales allows patrollers to explicitly negotiate the proper order of things. And boastful tales position patrollers favorably within that order.

Rewards

While there are a number of small rewards for work well done, patrol parties hosted by Mt. Polaris and invitations to ski on “sacred” terrain with the director are the most coveted rewards. Filing paperwork without errors, being punctual, volunteering for unpleasant duty (cleaning the locker room), these types of desired work behaviors are rewarded with accommodations in the work schedule for days off and desired posts. When the patrol as a department has responded well to an organizational problem —a broken lift, a search and rescue, an inordinate number of wrecks — Mt. Polaris will usually pay for a pizzas and a keg out of their morale-boosting budget. But it is the rookie rite of passage, the special terrain adventure by invitation, that is this department’s coveted reward.

What was once a fun little ski outing with the Assistant Director has turned into a signal of full member status for rookie patrollers. Most of the strong skiing and snowboarding employees love to explore the out-of-bounds terrain, but to do so without permission from the patrol is cause for termination. The Assistant Director also loves to ski out-of-bounds, and he has been there so long, he has named most of the prominent, distinctive terrain. Because they are in-bounds, but hidden, fellow
patrollers show rookies where to get “phat air” off “the cracker,” in “jumpland” or off “the wind lip skier’s left of a certain backside run.”

The legendary “Punch Bowl,” also in-bounds, is only open according to the wishes of the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director is very particular about when the Punch Bowl can be opened. On cold powder days he will open it for a few people for a few runs. Powder days require telemark skis — or an arranged snomo transport as the long flat base of the run makes it difficult to get back. On warmer powder days he keeps it closed, waiting for the snow to “set up,” without tracks (the warming and re-freezing process in tracked up snow creates “crud,” but letting it set will produce an almost groomed even surface). These warm powder days are usually followed by spring like conditions (warm days, below freezing nights), turning the top layers into “corn snow” a week or so after a storm. When the snow has “set up” the Assistant Director will open the Punch Bowl for the first hour or two before it gets slushy.

Patrollers, and to their great chagrin, instructors, have a field day on this special terrain (tree skiing through patches of well-spaced pines on a nice pitch for “rippin’ it up in corn” or “keepin’ a rhythm” in up to 2 feet of powder). Patrollers feel that all special features and terrain are their domain. A few other resort employees have learned of the magic on the Punch Bowl, as well as a few “annoying regulars” (customers). Patrollers don’t want to let others play in their sandbox, and the Assistant Director has the gate keys. He gets to decide when the kids can play, and he invites only the best kids.

But it is an escorted adventure to the truly out-of-bounds terrain that constitutes a rite of passage. There is a topological map of the mountain in the Polaris patrol
shack with grease penciled names on the plastic cover just taunting the rookie; “one day, you will be taken here, if only you are good enough to be one of us.”

Authority Summary

The work of the patrollers, while rhetorically oriented to wrecks, is diverse and highly structured. They do run wrecks, but more often they are doing jobs — marking obstacles, doing “PR” work, hanging out in lift shacks and “taking laps.” Their performance of their tasks draws heavily on organizational forms of authority. Protocols, hierarchy, modeling, veteran coaching, institutionalized standards, peer sanctions, narratives, and rewards all reinforce the organizationally sanctioned way of doing things. During the entire season, management effectively uses different forms of organizational authority on patrollers. Their influence does not wane. Peer influence gains steadily from an already strong base established with veteran coaching. As the patrollers get to know each other they circulate more narratives which reinforce the order and sanction each other’s mistakes.

Organizational authority is accepted and used by this group largely because their identity claims are drawn from their work context. In the next section, I explore patrollers’ identity claims as “professionals,” elaborating the configuration of order-authority-identity in the Ski Patrol.
The section will flesh out what is meant by “professionalism” by exploring the many facets of the patrollers’ identities in relation to their work. In Chapter 1, I drew from three theories of identity used in organization theory to construct an “action clair-i" framework for identity. From Self-Categorization Theory, I retained the notion that identity is, in part, an assertion made by an individual about herself. From Social Identity Theory I maintained the emphasis on social comparisons underpinning identity construction. Role Theory enters the framework for its emphasis on “appropriate actions” that are reflective of and help to claim a particular position within a social world. I have developed three sub-categories of actions for the purposes of presentation: talk, displays, and behaviors. I use the notion of talk to explore assertions and comparisons made to claim an identity. Displays, borrowing from semiotic theory, are presentations of signs that carry symbolic meaning. Behaviors are embodied acts —what is usually thought of as meaningful action.

Patrollers claim to be professionals. This claim is, of course, a common representational strategy in the United States for individuals attempting to raise their occupational status (Wilensky, 1964). Such a strategy has risks. Most scholars associate the notion of “professional” with certain properties, of which ski patrollers seem blissfully unaware. Sociologically, the label goes with only those occupations which are:

... based upon intellectual study and training, the purpose for which is to supply skilled service or advice to others for a definite fee or salary. (Carr-Saunders, [1928] 1966: p. 4).
Patrollers would be disappointed to learn that Carr-Saunders (ibid) considers firemen’s claim to be professionals and rejects their case for a lack of specialized intellectual training and definite remuneration. Abbott (1988), in his recent study of professions, concurs and extends this definition by suggesting that professions are marked by extensive socialization, which restricts membership, and are privileged with a great deal of control over the organization of their work. Patrol work hardly meets these criteria. There are standards of practice, but they appear to be locally determined. Socialization (through EMT certification) is neither elaborate nor exclusive. Patrollers are not in it for the money; they are not highly paid, at maximum $12.00/hour; they have little autonomy; and, there is little to indicate that they are dedicated to a life of the mind (the senses, perhaps, but not the mind).

So what do they mean when they describe themselves as professionals? I believe they are referring not to highly specialized practice involving the application of esoteric knowledge, but to a code of conduct and attitude towards their work. Through their actions, patrollers use the claim of professionalism to set themselves apart from others and provide an orientation towards their activities. Their talk is characterized by assertions of a “serious attitude” towards their work, the “responsibility” they feel for the care of others and a “stiff upper lip” about difficult work conditions. They are often heard comparing themselves favorably to others in their specialized knowledge, discipline, high rate of pay, skill competence, career trajectory, and lifestyle. When not in uniform, they display themselves in carefully chosen technically designed clothing and gear reflecting, to a practiced eye, years of use and abuse. And while their behaviors do not always demonstrate by-the-rules
“organization man” characterization, they do try to give the impression that they work hard, as well as play hard.

Talk

Patrollers describe themselves as professionals. They assert that they take their work seriously, feel responsible for the proper medical care of injured customers and are willing to endure difficult work conditions without complaint. Everyday conversations have much to do with work and have a tone of certainty about how one should deal with work performance; they will sanction peers’ mistakes, tell endless stories of wrecks, and engage in sustained technical problem solving. These conversational topics serve as efforts to assert and maintain proper codes of conduct within patrollers’ circles. When claiming distinctiveness on the mountain, they often cast themselves as the highest credentialled, highest paid seasonal workers, more disciplined than lift operators, and more competent skiers than ski instructors. They construct a career trajectory in comparison with other local resort area patrols. And they can often be heard defending their “fun, but real job” from comparisons with the “stuffed shirts” of the city jobs. When they are not hashing over the details of patrol work they talk about their future plans, relating them to their summer and winter occupations, and worry about “nailing down the seasonal thing” for a few years. No other group at the resort is as future focused, except perhaps management.

Assertions

When representing their work to outsiders, workers everywhere use descriptions that enhance the status of their occupation. Patrollers mark their status
through a claim to "professionalism," as evidenced by the volume of elaborations around the term. Their use of the term "professional" is an assertion of the seriousness with which they approach their work, the responsibility they say they feel for the care of others, training and credentials they must possess above that of other resort employees, the detached competence with which they handle difficult situations, and their "no whining" attitude towards work performance.79

The patrollers will tell you that they behave "professionally," meaning that:

they take their job seriously and carry out their tasks responsibly:

Sure, we joke around, ride each other, call each other names. But when we are on a wreck together, we are professional, we call each other by our real names and respect each other. We are professionals, we’re serious about our work. — Matt, 2nd season Patroller, Rookie of the Year runner-up in his first year of patrolling.

Matt, like many other patrollers, says he is serious about his work and he provides as evidence the formal tone used when addressing his co-workers in the presence of customers. The public patrol persona is "serious," performing his tasks with due diligence in conformance with the professional code. But the quote also tells us something about the line patrollers draw between being on-stage with customers and offstage with each other. Knowing where that line is and the behavior appropriate to each domain is also part of the professionalism ski patrollers must understand and respect. It is this knowledge of the appropriateness of certain behaviors in different situations that they take seriously.

What aspects of the work do they most identify with? What gives patrol workers the self-perceived and felt status of professional? They say that the most meaningful aspect of their work is providing medical assistance to customers in need:
We all are interested in helping people... We love to run wrecks, we hate paperwork but we do it. Basically, we want to help people. — Jayson 1st season Patroller

Helping people is what gives the work meaning. It also provides a socially acceptable basis on which to stake the claim of being a professional. Responding to the popular idea that ski patrollers are merely “paid ski bums,” Jayson suggests that they wouldn’t be patrolling if they didn’t want to help people too. This sentiment is echoed by other patrollers.

If I just wanted get paid to ski, I would be a courtesy guide or an instructor. I had to put in a lot of hours in a classroom to get my EMT. And, the thing is, when I go home at the end of the day, I know I helped people that really needed it. — Shawn, 2nd season Patroller

The patrollers call attention to the fact that they are paid to ski (which they describe as an “earned privilege”). However, they unfailingly note that their medical skills provide an important service and, on this basis, they should be differentiated from other ski resort employees. As reflected in the tone of the comment above, they take pride in their specialized skills. Yet, if compared to the amount of training required for most medical occupations, a semester-long college course hardly seems like extensive training. There is little application of esoteric, highly valued knowledge in a patroller’s job. But compared to the training required for most of the other occupations on the mountain (with the exception of ski instructors, lift maintenance, and accounting), they do seem to have a claim to elite credentials, however local such a claim may be. The Patrol Director even goes as far to note that the medical competence of her patrol is beyond question:

I am more worried about their skiing abilities. They all have the medical skills, that is not an issue. They are all certified, they take refresher courses, and at the beginning of each season we do first aid scenarios, so there is re-training. No, I don’t have to worry about their medical skills at all. — Sheri, Ski Patrol Director
And while they only draw on their first aid skills, on average, once every other day, 
this unchallenged and locally exclusive skill competence implies the professionalism 
they claim.

Yet helping people by using medical skills while on skis is not the whole story. 
Professionalism for patrollers also implies an ability to calmly and authoritatively 
manage emergencies. I often heard of stories of wrecks ending with the judgment, 
“(s)he handled it like a pro.” Such judgments imply that a patroller is able to manage 
the emotions of oneself and others, administer medical aid, and attend to the logistics 
of the situation in an unruffled and appropriate fashion. Becker, Geer, Hughes, and 
Strauss (1961) note that learning to become emotionally detached is one of the key 
tasks of medical students in their informal socialization into the profession. This 
detachment, or, at least, the ability to calmly manage emergencies is an explicit 
organizational concern. The Director pairs rookies with veterans so they can learn 
from example and experience to manage a scene in a professional manner. “The 
veteran is there to take over if things get out of control” (Duke, Lead Patroller). A 
number of rookies surprise themselves with their uneasy reactions to messy or 
serious wrecks. Duke, the Lead Patroller, mentions that broken femurs and head 
injuries, in particular, can be “real bleeders ... The volume of blood can incite a wave 
of panic [in the uninitiated].”

Patrollers have to learn how to manage their own reaction as well as the 
reactions of the injured parties, their companions, and witnesses to the accident. 
Attending to an injured person’s response is obviously important, and is well 
illustrated in the following story:
The ones that get hit on the head are the worst. They get disoriented and combative. I had this one guy who was huge — he was 6’5’’ and he must have weighed at least 250 pounds. He had tried to use a tree as a race gate and had a broken shoulder, arm, and jaw. He was totally non-responsive and spastic, he was thrashing all around. He didn’t want to be held down. I’m only 5’2” and I couldn’t get him on a C-spine. He got away from me and tried to run down the hill. I had to tackle the guy and lay on him to stop him. I finally got him calmed down and got some O2 on him. Oxygen really helps. By the time we got him to the ambulance parking area he was just fine. — Kristi, 3rd season Patroller.

In extreme situations patrollers are called upon to be resourceful. Additionally, they must often show patience in dealing with the customers’ emotions. For instance, they say it is frustrating to have to wait until an injured party decides it is worth the embarrassment to ride in the toboggan to the nurse’s station. These are examples of what Hochschild (1983) calls emotional labor:

This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others ... This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality. (p. 7).

Like many other professionals, patrollers have to learn to manage the emotions they experience while working.

In addition to managing emotions, a real “pro” is one who knows how to execute the details of his or her roles. For example, in a serious wreck if he is the “first responder” he needs to know how to “manage a scene,” acting as “incident commander” in requesting assistance, ordering equipment, assigning patrollers to “patient care” and “crowd control,” and following through with the “transport,” “clean-up,” and “documentation.” All are distinct activities involved in the formal categorization of “running a wreck.” These are highly specified procedures that patrollers are expected to execute flawlessly.81
Patrollers respect those who handle difficult situations “like pros.” Difficult situations can be the obvious “gnarly” wreck, managed smoothly without panic, but the conditions of everyday mundane work can also be difficult:

We have these work days right after snow days where we have to reset the ribbon line, re-mark the snowmaking hydrants with bamboo, move the tower pads up, work snow removal, that sorta thing. It’s nasty work no one wants to do, but we just deal. Nobody likes a whiner. — Jayson, 1st season Patroller.

“Nobody likes a whiner” is a constant refrain in their talk. Their hands freeze regularly when they are working a wreck, they have a form for every task, and they are often asked to do things they would just prefer to avoid (courtesy transports, assisting customers in finding items in powder snow, answering customer questions, removing rocks from runs, etc.). But in the face of both unusual and far too usual annoyances, one must refrain from “whinging” (British slang for whining brought to the patrol by the “Kwis” — New Zealanders). Professionalism is, in part, putting up with all the boring tasks and the difficult conditions without complaining.

Comparisons

Patrollers compare themselves with a number of other groups in their claims for distinctiveness. Against the “Nationals” they are paid “pros.” They use their medical skills to help with “real” problems and try to leave the lesser problems to the customer service employees. Compared with other seasonal workers, they are the highest paid with the most credentials. They assert that they are more competent skiers than the ski instructors and they have more discipline than lift operators. A career trajectory is constructed in the comparison with patrol groups of other resorts in the area; Mt. Polaris is a “feeder” patrol to these other, more demanding, resort patrols. And when turning their comparisons outwards they disparage the lifestyle of
the “flatlanders” employed in city jobs in assertions of their superior life choices paired with serious work.

They use their job title, “Pro Patrollers,” to distinguish themselves from the “National Patrollers” or “Nationals” who are not on payroll. The National Patrol is a volunteer organization with its own authority structure, requirements for work, compensation systems, schedules, and systems of accountability. The mountain is staffed with paid “pro” patrollers, and the Nationals are thought of as extra bodies floating from zone to zone and available when needed. There is considerable cooperation between the Nationals and the Pro Patrollers, but they are different groups who often use their titles to maintain a distinction between their roles.

Patrollers claim that the kind of help provided and the application of specialized knowledge in the service of helping others makes their work professional and distinctive from those providing general customer service. They compare themselves to other occupational groups charged with answering customer questions and solving customer problems. Patrollers often asked ask courtesy guides and activity center employees how they can tolerate this kind of work:

I don’t know how you can deal with the public all day. They are a bunch of whiners with ridiculously high expectations, these Very self-Important People. I mean, you help them solve their problems, but most of the problems aren’t real — they aren’t really problems at all. They just want to complain. — Todd, 2nd season Patroller.

This same attitude is reflected in grumbles heard in the locker room on the busy mornings when the Director assigns to patrollers the “PR” task of fielding customer questions at the top of lifts. Patrollers detest such tasks. They are of the mind that the only problems that matter — “real problems” — are those that are “life and limb
threatening” (personal injury and safety problems). And they are the only staff on the mountain to help with these kinds of problems.

Patrollers also assert that salary and certification set them apart from other seasonal workers. They are quick to argue that since they are EMT certified, they are entitled to more pay than other seasonal workers. Yet, the difference amounts to no more than a few extra dollars an hour. Patrollers find this wage differential to be significant, which is worthy of note, even if other seasonal workers do not.

Ski instructors share the higher wage status, and from the number of comparisons with this group, it was obvious that there was some social status rivalry between the two. As a requirement of the job, ski instructors must be solid intermediate skiers, or better. They are the other major group of seasonal employees that are paid to work on skis. As such, patrollers often compared their own skiing abilities with those of the instructors. And as one might suspect, instructors rarely emerged unscathed in such a comparison:

The instructors, check ‘em out. Sure, they can ski pretty on the groomers, but throw ‘em into the trees or in crud and they’ll crater every other turn. We ski ugly, but we’ll ski anywhere, on anything. Ski ugly, ski everything!! — Shawn, 2nd season Patroller.

Ski instructors can often be seen on the groomed runs, taking a few runs between classes. This, together with the fact that they teach the majority of their classes on moderate groomed terrain using well-honed technique, feeds material to patrollers to portray instructors as safe, controlled skiers. The patrol, on the other hand, can be seen skiing with more abandon in a wide range of conditions and terrain. While this is a function of their job, the patrol often called attention to their apparent adventurousness as evidence of “all-mountain skiing competence.”
In an obvious grab at social status, patrollers also compare themselves to the lift operators, referred to by some as the "stoned Neanderthals chained to the lifts" (Mark, 1st season Patroller). These comparisons are often derogatory, and they can be patronizing as well: "they envy us, so we try to be nice" (Jayson, 1st season Patroller). A few patrollers confided in me that they thought most of the seasonal workers wanted their job. Lift operators, in particular, are forced to stay at the lift, while the patrollers are "free" to ski while on the clock. To them such "freedom" is justified. Patrollers assert that, unlike the lift operators, they can handle the autonomy in their work conditions due to their maturity and self-discipline — they can be trusted with the responsibility their position demands, whereas the lift operators can not because they are both younger and "flakier."

If their comparisons with lift operators boosted their social status, their comparisons with other local area ski patrols diminished it some. But comparisons with other patrols also add to the constructions of the occupation as a profession. Mt. Polaris is known for its family-friendly gentle groomed runs, whereas other area resorts are known for their avalanche prone steeps, cliffs, and chutes. The patrols at these area resorts need all the same medical skills, but their skiing skills need to be even stronger and, more importantly, they need to know how to work avalanche control. There is only one small area of Mt. Polaris that could possibly slide, according to the Assistant Director, and he takes responsibility for monitoring that area — the "pro" patrollers do not need avalanche control skills. The Mt. Polaris patrol, then, is seen as a "feeder" patrol to these other more "serious" patrols. During the two years of my participant observation study, three patrollers, each with two or three years at
Mt. Polaris, secured jobs with these demanding patrols. So while these comparisons with other area resorts do not reflect favorably on the Mt. Polaris patrol, they do assert an inter-organizational career ladder which boosts the status of the occupation.

Patrollers can often be heard defending their occupation. They say they have the best job on the mountain — the best job anywhere. They ski as a part of their work, they are providing a needed service, and they are able to live in a beautiful place and work with fun people.

90% of people have jobs they hate. If you like your job it probably is not a ‘real’ job. It is not a ‘real’ job unless you commute, it is only a real job if you hate it and you are miserable. Our job is as real as any other job, and my office view rules! (he gestures to the 360 degree view of snow covered peaks and valleys, runs, and pines). —Jerry, 3rd season Patroller.

A favorite claim of patrollers is “at least I didn’t sell out, and become a stuffed shirt in some office in the city.” Many had opportunities to make much more money in the city. But, they say, they gave it up to follow their passion. “It is something I always wanted to do, and now that I am doing it, I can’t imagine just quitting and moving back to the flatland” (Mick, 4th season Patroller). Even a paramedic, who anticipates leaving the patrol for higher paying full-time paramedic work felt the pull to stay. “This is my play job. When I am hired as a full-time paramedic, I think I still might do this part-time, when I can. I love it” (John, 3rd season Patroller). Most of the patrollers think of this as their real job, perhaps a temporary real job, but a real job none the less. And although they are rarely called upon to defend their occupational choice to “flatlanders” they often use this group as a point of reference to assert the superiority of their work and lifestyle.82
Displays

One’s identity is claimed not only with assertions and comparisons, but also in the non-verbal presentation of signs as interpreted by oneself and others. Patrollers organize artifacts around themselves to convey messages in support of their claim to professionalism. While the patrol uniform can not be considered a claim, they wear it with pride. The more malleable artifacts — street clothes, equipment, and accessories — and the way they move through space serve as important claiming devices. The meanings intended by these displays center on experience, competence, rugged endurance, functionality, and technical innovation. In sum, patrollers make claims to a seasoned “mountain man” persona — self-sufficient, capable of surmounting any challenge encountered.

Clothes are the most obvious identity artifacts presented. The uniforms, while they are not claiming devices, are distinctive. They wear standard issue loose black ski pants with side zips and large red parkas with white crosses on the back. Patrollers look like poster boys (and girls) for the Red Cross. Patrollers can choose their gloves and often they wear heavy leather work gloves, claiming that they may not be as warm as ski gloves, but that they last longer and they are easier to work in (setting ribbon line, marking obstacles with bamboo, and moving equipment). Patrollers do not wear their uniforms to and from work — in the mornings and evenings they are seen in street clothes. Yet, there is something of a uniform here as well: jeans or heavy canvas work pants, fleece pullovers or front zip jackets over polypropylene undershirts, a well used ski shell with dirt and/or rips apparent, a well-worn baseball cap, hiking boots or steel-tipped work boots, leather work gloves, and a technical
mountain climbing backpack with many straps hanging loose. Almost all of their clothing can be found in the local hardware store — the fashion Mecca for the mountain man. The emphasis is on sturdy, technical street clothes (implying function over form). And ideally the outfit will have weathered years of abuse.

Of course, the kind of ski equipment used is also of great consequence to identity. Patrollers are issued a new pair of skis each year, but they are asked to return them at year end or purchase them for $100. Most choose an “all mountain ski,” designed for use on varied terrain (i.e., moguls or steeps) with varied conditions (i.e., ice or powder). Most return the skis due to wear and tear, so from year to year they own standard issue skis and whatever they have managed to collect over time. Most patrollers have the minimum of two pairs of skis they own personally: a mogul ski and a giant slalom or slalom ski. Few had powder skis at the time of my study, but one third of the patrol were branching off into telemark skiing and starting to acquire stiffer lift-service tele skis and backcountry powder tele skis.

What is important to note is not the particular types of skis owned but the systems of justification for them. It is important to be able to ski all different types of conditions with competence, and one’s equipment should reflect experience with different conditions. Additionally, it is important to know what is the best ski on the market each year for each type of condition. A patroller should own close to the top of the line equipment from a few years back in their favored categories of skiing (usually moguls and GS). The same holds for boots — top of the line equipment from last year or the year before. Poles often bend or break in the line of work and play, so, at the time, it was popular to use poles from the rental department that had been
camouflaged and altered with duct tape and added wrist straps. Finally, it is paramount that the equipment be acquired through some mechanism allowing for prices well below retail — pro deals with manufacturers, great used deals, etc. — as finding a deal is a badge of honor and paying full price is the mark of a “sucker.” Using the “right” tools — in this case, skis — and knowing how to get “hooked up” with the “right” tools signals an insider status that reinforces competency claims.

The accessories they display also reinforce a notion that they are “in the know” and competent. The ideal car is an older model, four wheel drive pick-up truck, with or without a shell, but definitely with a tool box. The stickers they display on their lockers are carefully chosen ski equipment companies and resorts that build a macho, technical expert-only image. In addition, they find innovative uses for duct tape that are readily displayed, such as, to patch holes in their pants near season’s end or to attach a water bottle to their backpack with a climbing carabiner and a cord taped to the bottle.

Patrollers make claims to professionalism just by the way they move through space. The men (and women) in red are rarely seen sauntering along — they are usually striding with appearance of purpose. While they let their guard down with each other, in public they can rarely be seen slouching or lounging. They are not allowed to dine in the general facilities customers use to keep up this impression of purposeful use of time. But it really is the movement — the walking — that is striking in comparison with the customers and other resort employees. Patrollers always look as if they have someplace to get to in a hurry.
Behaviors

The discussion of talk, assertions in particular, provides a sense of what is meant by professional behavior as it pertains to the performance of work. But actions not oriented to specific work tasks are also a part of patrol life and some of these actions also support their claim to professionalism. In this section, I round out my account of identity claims by exploring non-work behaviors at work, as well as deviances from accepted practices, and their general socializing patterns.

To this point, my characterization of the patrol has fostered an image of a masculine group of by-the-rules workers. And while there is strong evidence for this impression in their talk and displays, some of their actions do not exactly exemplify the claimed professional model-employee characterizations. Yet even when there are deviations from accepted practices, the patrollers do make attempts to ensure that the work does not suffer. On powder days patrollers will ski in the trees after their morning "jobs" are done only when they know enough people are staffed in the lift shack to run wrecks. On slow resort traffic days after department parties one patroller in the shack will be responsible for monitoring the radio while the other patrollers nap to work off their hangovers. If it is slow, the conditions have been observed, the equipment checks out, and there are no wrecks it is not uncommon for a patroller to take a book into the trees and read for a little while (but he will keep his radio on for calls). It is not surprising that patrollers claim to handle these little deviations responsibly, but I did observe this code of conduct on numerous occasions. They take liberties at work, but they also try to make sure that the work is covered.
Finally, consider the off stage life of the ski patroller. Patrol life behind the scenes is very congenial. They admit to being a “tight knit group.” “I have a home here” (Gray, 3rd season Patroller). The use of the family metaphor reflects the camaraderie I observed in their extensive on-the-clock and after-hours socializing with each other.

The Patrol Director sees her main task as that of fostering this groupiness, ensuring that “personality conflicts” do not diminish the well being of the group. She tells me that when she screens for recruits she is looking for team players:

I’m sure they can ski, and are medically competent, but I want to know if they can be a part of our team. They need to be willing and interested in doing the work. They need to be able to get along with everyone. — Sheri, Ski Patrol Director.

And it is rather telling that the first section of the Patrol Manual puts forth “guidelines for a successful season” that are all about how to work together as a team (“respect personality differences, put the feelings of others ahead of your own, avoid being critical of others, help new patrollers, etc.”).

Their off-the-clock socializing is almost exclusively with other patrollers and their significant others, as revealed in this description of a party:

The wives and girlfriends know each other, and sure, it gets huge, out of hand we all get quite drunk, but its not like the lift op kids’ parties, those huge open keggers.
— Mick, 4th season Patroller

There are four to five organized parties each season and numerous poker parties or nights out at one of the local Mexican restaurants. It is probably significant that there were only three single people not dating anyone on the patrol in ‘95-’96. Nine of the patrollers were seasonally monogamous and nine were married. Patrollers were
rarely seen at the general resort happy hours in local bars — they were off socializing with each other.

Identity Summary

Hughes (1984, [1962]) provides a nice description of professionalism which resonates with the talk, displays and behaviors of patrollers:

Professionalism, in its valued sense, indicates a strong solidarity of those in an occupation combined with a high sense of duty to their clients and a well-developed code of conduct. (p. 352)

The above section on behavior details the solidarity enjoyed by the patrol. The section on assertions argues that patroller’s most central identity claim is the seriousness and responsibility they feel about their work. All the sections provide a sense that the patrol has well articulated and closely observed codes of conduct applying to both work behaviors and non-work behaviors. And importantly, they draw their identity claims from the organizational context. While patrolling might not qualify as a profession in the definition used in the literature on occupations, patrollers have no difficulty calling their work conduct professional.

Order, Authority, and Identity in the Ski Patrol

The story of order and identity in the Ski Patrol department tells a familiar tale. The employees identify with their occupation, and, with only a few minor deviations, exhibit properly socialized behaviors to enact departmental objectives. The identity claims patrollers bring to their work setting, summarized here as “professionals” and
manifest in their talk, displays and behaviors, are drawn from the same
organizational context that informs the authority used in this setting. As
professionals, they perform their work conscientiously, drawing on the resource of
organizational authority to define work situations and enact sanctioned practices.

The forms of authority created by managers are readily taken up by patrollers;
they are a control-oriented manager’s dream team. Patrollers willingly use
organizational authority, in part, because they identify with work, but also because
their peers take this context of authority seriously. With stories and “owes,” peers
reinforce the organizationally ordained routines and sanction each other when
deviations are observed. In this department, the configuration of order-authority-
identity is a tight, self-reinforcing feedback loop. Patrollers make identity claims
which bespeak a desired affiliation with the work context. Themes circulating in this
context — work competence, innovation, efficiency — give rise to a personified theme
of “professionalism.” These themes are fostered by management, and reinforced,
enacted, and perpetuated by patrollers. Work gets done with reference to
straightforward, traditional, organizational control strategies.

Not all patrollers are keen to claim professionalism. These few “black sheep”
are usually the “slackers,” are uniformly assigned the “rehire with interview” status
at the end of the season, and are rarely invited to ski out-of-bounds by the Assistant
Director. While they might exhibit some desired identity features of the model
patroller (most often with their skiing skills), they do not live up to, and rarely assert,
claims as “professionals.” They have an uneasy status in the patrol due to their free-
changer approach to work and because they serve as a reminder that there are
alternatives (often less taxing alternatives) to the departmental way of things. Patrollers rarely reach out to these less eager members and the result is they are often, if politely, ostracized.

This configuration of order-authority-identity is the managerialist "ideal" in that commitment has been fostered through identification with work. But this is not the only possible configuration that can hang together well in a work context. In the next chapter, an alternative to the traditional managerial vision is explored.
Notes

49 There is usually no prior notice that a day will be considered a storm day. Patrollers are meant to monitor weather conditions themselves and show up early if there is enough accumulated snow to warrant the designation as a “storm day” or “snow day.” Patrollers can call in to the office to confirm if they are needed early, but this is considered a “rookie move,” as the Director or Assistant Director will uniformly tell the caller to come in early with the response “there is always work to be done.”

50 Only the patrollers and Ski Instructors show up at the resort each morning in street clothes, using their locker rooms to change into their distinct uniforms. All other employees habitually arrive in uniform.

51 In a “butt pack,” each patroller carries the essentials for minor wrecks and immediate attention: gauze, tape, scissors, gloves, antiseptic, a mouthpiece (for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation), short forms, a pen, printed directions to the ambulance pick-up, etc.

52 For each complex there is a “zone” assignment responsible for maintaining adequate stocks of equipment throughout the day. This position is referred to as the patroller “on equipment,” but more often is referred to by the zone number (i.e., 44 for Polaris or 51 for Lakeview). The zone number is one’s title for the day when communicating over the radio: “Patrol dispatch, this is 44 responding.” This patroller’s job starts with the task of bringing up the 40 pound sleds left at the Base the day before. This position is also the lead patrol position for that particular complex. This person is to ensure that there are enough patrollers, either in the shack waiting for calls or out on runs in the complex, to maintain “coverage” for that complex should a number of patrollers need to be dispatched at the same time.

53 Drills are used to create holes in the hardpack snow or ice for bamboo placement to mark obstacles. Jason, a second season Patroller, showed me how he checks a run in the morning to ensure safe conditions. When we came to a few bamboo sticks marking a snowmaking hydrant he lifted the “boo” and jiggled it around in the snow a few times. “Look, someone didn’t check these yesterday and ice balls have already started to form around the bottom. It is important that we shake the boo everyday because otherwise it can freeze up and get stuck. We end up with tons of broken boo by the end of the season, and we have to replace it which gets expensive, so [the Director] wants us to jiggle the boo each day.”


55 The patrollers know the common places where tracks will lead out of bounds (near famed terrain features just outside boundary lines), but often the tracks will lead right back in a bit further down the run. If the tracks back into the resort area can’t be found, or if a patroller actually sees a customers duck under the ribbon, he will radio in to dispatch and follow the tracks. If the patroller believes that the customer is knowingly in violation of company policy (which is most often the case due to ample signage) he will revoke the lift ticket and the customer will be escorted off the mountain. The seriousness of this policy reflects a concern with safety, liability, and the costs associated with search and rescue attempts. One well circulated story of a costly search and rescue involved a boarder found at 10 p.m. 1.5 miles away from the resort in a blizzard. The rescue effort cost at least $10,000 in extra personnel, overtime, free meals for the search and rescue team, and accommodations made for the family of the missing boarder. Almost all of the employees I spoke with were outraged at the company’s uncompensated generosity. The story of a similar case occurring at a local resort the week prior was circulated to back up this interpretation of the organization’s response. This other resort incurred rescue-related expenses totaling near $25,000, and they immediately slapped the bill on the rescued party.

56 The patrol can be alerted to a “potential incident” in a number of ways: a customer report to a patroller, an incident encountered on a run, or, most commonly a lift operator report by telephone to Patrol Dispatch. Patrol Dispatch is “manned” by a fellow patroller, it is a position each patroller gets
rotated into at some point during the season. Even so, patrollers know that dispatch is often working with limited, even mis-information.

57 Courtesy transport is a transport of a non-injured person. Usually, a courtesy transport is provided for someone who is stranded on terrain beyond their ability, or someone with broken equipment.

58 The Patrol Director keeps a tally of four types of responses. In the 1995-1996 season (121 operating days) there were approximately 1,850 responses, of those; 54% were Positive responses (care given to injured person), 21% were Negative responses (no injury, no care given), 5% were First Aid Refusals (injury, but no care given), and 20% were Others (often a courtesy transport). On an average weekend day (skier count 4,800), the patrol makes 26 responses, 14 of which are Positive. On an average weekday (skier count 2,400), the patrols make 13 responses, seven of which are Positive.

59 See Metz’s (1982) ethnography of ambulance paramedics for more detailed description of a similar kind of work.

60 I use the masculine pronoun more often than the female pronoun in this account to reflect a proportional representation of the group (of the 23 full-time patrollers, 2 are female).

61 The resort can be ruled negligent in certain accidents, particularly if accidents involve “unnatural obstacles” — infrastructure placed on the mountain by Mt. Polaris. These accidents are labeled “opportunities” and receive a particular reference code. Attention is paid to how the customer handles the situation to determine if the incident warrants the label “opportunity.” Aside from looking for the obvious rage, the patroller listens for such statements “That should have been marked,” or “You know, I AM a lawyer.” 101 is used for a lift related injury, for example, falling off the lift or getting hit by a chair. Legislation was just changed such that if a skier’s skis are planted on the ground when loading or unloading, then they are legally considered off the chair. In previous years, the loading and unloading ramps were still considered “on the chair” and as such, the resort was potentially liable for accidents occurring in these zones. Code 103 refers to a collision with a stable object — a tree or a lift tower — and it is only in the case of the infrastructure built by the resort that the resort is potentially liable. Both cases, as with a code 102 (a skier-to-skier collision), are flagged for the attention of the Ski Patrol Director and the Risk Manager. In cases where it is a clear “opportunity” for liability, an investigation will be called over the radio as a 10-100 in progress. The Patrol Lead will go out with the responding patroller to survey the site; taking measurement from stable objects to pinpoint the exact location, taking photos of the accident scene and collecting accounts of witnesses, if available. The paperwork for the accident is elaborated beyond the norm to ensure that the resort’s backside is covered.

62 If the skier is unconscious, he performs an ABC (airway, breathing and circulation) check. If the skier is conscious, the protocol is a four-way “primary exam” of awareness and orientation (“A&O times four”). This involves asking the injured person his name, the date, his location and what happened. Often wrecks are not life threatening and patrollers will arrive to greet the injured with a simple, “Hi, what happened?” eschewing the socially awkward A & O protocol. Rarely is a “secondary exam” conducted; the patroller is meant to search from head to toe for point tenderness, but usually assesses only the areas causing pain.

63 If the incident warrants it, patients are transported for more comprehensive evaluation or additional care. Most often, injured parties are taken to the First Aid room for the nurse’s care or, less frequently, to the ambulance pick up at the base. On rare occasion, once or twice a year, the patient will be taken to one of the two heli-pads for air-evacuation.

64 Veterans and managers stress the importance of filling out these forms immediately, but occasionally the patrollers get distracted and fill them out later in the day. An exhaustive amount of information is collected — everything from the time, location and date of incident, the skier’s history, the equipment worn, the DIN settings on the bindings, the specifics of the injury, the skiing conditions, to the transportation to and away from the first aid station. There is a separate form if Mt. Polaris rental equipment was worn. If so, the skis are transferred to the rental shop directly and checked to determine if the bindings released properly. Should the bindings be found faulty, Mt. Polaris would be considered negligent and responsible for the costs associated with the care of the injured. An additional form is used to keep track of Mt. Polaris medical equipment (quick splints, backboards, c-spine collars) leaving with an injured party. Mt. Polaris has developed a used equipment exchange agreement with the local ambulance companies to ensure a constant supply of essentials.
For this reason skiing in the trees is definitely off-limits, to the great chagrin of many patrollers. Another safety related task is the evacuation of broken lifts. Since this happens, on average, once a season, I have not covered it as part of the everyday work.

As in other cases I have tried to use pseudonyms that capture the spirit of the local labels. The Picnic Peak patrol shack does not see much action, has only two patrollers staffed at this complex, and is used mid-week in the spring as a place to host drop-by on-the-clock patrol barbecues on a small hibachi.

Patrollers say they are “banned” from the Main Lodge due to customers’ complaints. Apparently, customers felt that the patrollers should be out on the mountain, not in the cafeteria.

The insurance company representative encouraged Mt. Polaris to change their terminology from “sweep” to “trail closure.” Apparently the term “sweep” has the potential for greater exposure to liability if someone was left on the mountain.

The responding patroller is responsible for all paperwork related to the incident, and these documents are double checked by the Patrol Administrator-Lead on his “weekly quality-control cleaning-house day.” The records are kept in storage indefinitely, primarily because lawsuits have been brought against the resort 5, even 7, years after an accident has occurred. “We are the CYA department for the company. We get thousands of complaints, but we’ve only ever seen 3 lawsuits go to court and we haven’t ever lost a case” (Sheri, Patrol Director).

A case was in court during my 95-96 fieldwork stint. This was not common knowledge at the resort, and only a handful in management knew the details of the case. An employee slipped on some ice build-up on the stairs to the gondola one morning when she was heading up for a day of skiing on a day off. She broke her pelvis and did damage to her spine. First, she tried to sue Mt. Polaris directly for medical expenses and pain and suffering, then later changed her case, and tried to sue Mt. Polaris as a part of worker’s compensation. Her claim was that Mt. Polaris provided the ski pass as a benefit, and thus, her accident should be covered through worker’s compensation. The case was important for the industry, as it would set precedent and require a change in industry policies regarding free ski passes for employees. As such, representatives from a number of Californian resorts came to court to rally for the defense. The claimant did not win the case. The resort managers rejoiced.

The patrollers are supposed to pay half price for tunes, but the techs like the beer economy they have established for themselves. The patrollers also have access to a tuning room shared with ski school, but it is rarely used for anything other than a quick layer of wax. Because of the beating patrollers put their Mt. Polaris issued skis through, a good tune (edges sharpened, base grind if needed, p-tex filler for holes, and wax) can be necessary as often as once a week.

After hours socializing is actually somewhat limited to organized events, congregations in the bar after work, occasional poker parties and some limited small group (2 or 3 people) backcountry or local resort adventures.

In both of the winter seasons of my participant observation study, only 2, then 3 were rookies. The following year was an unusual year with 5 new rookies.

Customers are surveyed at random by Courtesy Guides, usually while riding the lift. There are a battery of questions, and the service experienced in each department is rated on a scale of 1 to 5 relative to the customer’s expectations (1 is below expectations, 5 is exceeded expectations).

While all parties — management, the Director, and patrollers alike — acknowledge that the measures for departmental performance are crude, incomplete, generally just bad indicators of anything important, most support the importance of some form of measurement. “We would like to be able to measure accidents that are prevented by having patrollers out on the mountain slowing people down, but you can’t measure that. How do you convince management that we need one more person on staff to be out there to prevent accidents? The other departments have good measures to point to in budget discussions. We do what we can, measure whatever we can, and try to make our case when we think we really need more staff” (Dave, Assistant Director).

An award is given at the end of the season to the patroller that has run the most wrecks. Great sport is made of the person receiving this award, as historically, this person is not the most skilled or conscientious patroller. Operationally, to run the most wrecks, one must be in the right place most of the time. This means standing above danger zones waiting for accidents to happen and ignoring the less sexy jobs of moving equipment around, running courtesy transports, assisting with marking obstacles,
etc. Each year there is a charismatic patroller that “gets away” with “chasing ambulances” and “poaching wrecks,” largely because he can tell a great wreck story in the locker room at the end of the day. This person is usually the biggest “character” on the patrol, and his entertainment value, as well as his efficiency, wins him a bit of latitude to skirt the jobs considered peripheral to real patrol work. Patrollers hold that a true “professional” would not seek the excitement of running after more wrecks than his share, nor would he “slack off” and fail to do his share of the work.

As mentioned earlier, these protocols, procedures, and forms of paperwork are stressed during orientation. But they are also reinforced throughout the season in morning meetings and when forms are submitted. The managers take these protocols very seriously, they can often be heard reprimanding patrollers for “getting sloppy” with minor omissions on forms or through interrupting wreck stories in the locker room. The small office is just around the corner from the locker area, and managers processing paperwork can hear these conversations.

Later I learned that he came to the mountain when the lifts were closed, cleaned out his locker, left a note requesting that his last paycheck be mailed to him, and was not seen again that season on the mountain.

Some of the storytelling, particularly the boastful stories, help reinforce a subcultural authority on patrol as well. Subcultural authority on patrol is closely tied to work competence. It is a derivative of and in support of organizational authority.

This is a point of view on professionalism shared by the police (Van Maanen, ), EMS ambulance paramedics (Metz, 1982), and other “quasi-professions” (Etzioni, ). Although patrollers are paid to ski, their job should not be considered professional leisure, and thus, patrollers differ somewhat from the professional sports players considered by Stebbins (1992). Their job, and their claim to professionalism, is tied to their provision of medical assistance, and their skiing skills are seen as a prerequisite for the proper job.

As reflected in the way they talk about their work, patrollers believe there is “one right way” of doing work, and it is important to represent this way with great certainty. To execute one’s work according to the “right way” earns one the status of a “pro.”

Patrollers use extended seasonal time trajectories to organize the way they talk about their activities. An older and more stable group than other seasonal workers on the mountain, their average age in the patrol is 30 and the average tenure is 3 years. Five of the patrollers have been at the resort on patrol for more than 10 years. For the majority of the patrollers, work and life planning revolves around patrol work, doing the “seasonal thing.” A number of summer occupations are seen as complementary to patrol work as they draw on the same kinds of skills — fire/forest service — or they align with similar lifestyle interests — river guiding. When the 23 patrollers are not working at the resort 6 work in fire/forest service, 3 work in construction, 3 are river guides, 2 are summer paramedics, 2 patrol in New Zealand and the remaining work in miscellaneous occupations (teacher, temp in a city job, restaurant work) or travel in the summer. There is more cultural cachet associated with fire/forest service work than any other occupation as it draws both on similar skills and lifestyle preferences. Patrollers say that the least desirable summer job is restaurant work because one would be forced to deal with the public and stuck inside. The rookie is encouraged to settle into the “seasonal thing” for a few years, and then make a decision if he or she wants to try something off the mountain, back in the flatland.
4 Lift Operations: Order, Authority & Identity

Lifties are meant to show up for work at 8 a.m. to be prepared when the lifts open at 8:30 a.m., but as long as they are ready to go before the crowds get there, the specific time is flexible. Most arrive in uniform, punch in on the time clock, and head directly out to their assigned lift for the day. Whoever picks up the drill in the locker room will make holes in the hard packed snow for the lane maze poles (the lane maze corrals customer traffic into queues with blue plastic mesh fabric connected to gray metal or plastic rod supports). The other lifties assist in setting up the maze; put out garbage bins, trail maps, and tissue boxes; clean snow and ice accumulation from the previous night off the chairs, and shovel snow to create a smooth ride through the maze to the loading zone.

Once the lift maintenance employees check the lifts, the mountain is opened to customers. When customers arrive, lifties are meant to take their positions. At least one of the two to four lifties stationed at the base of the lift is always supposed to be watching and greeting the customers at the bottom loading zone, directing the traffic, and assisting those having problems getting on the chair. The others are usually shoveling snow in the maze or sitting in the lift shack. There is an emergency stop button within lunging distance of the loading zone to be used if it looks like someone might get hurt by the chair. The lift operator occupying this position is responsible for keeping the chair running to reduce machinery wear and keep the flow of customer traffic steady, but must make decisions on when to protect a skier (and thus, the liability of the resort) by stopping or slowing the lift. Likewise, the top of the lift is staffed with one lifty responsible for the safety of passengers unloading. Here, the lifty, sitting inside the lift shack, stops the lift to protect passengers and keeps a record detailing the time and reason for all stops. Lifties are also responsible for maintaining a safe unloading snow ramp. When a stop occurs (and they are more often initiated at the bottom than the top) the lifties operating the machinery are meant to communicate with one another to explain the stop, clear the lift computer, and give the go-ahead to restart.

The job for the rest of the day is to “ensure that customers load and unload the lift safely,” maintain the lift area, and greet customers. Lifties keep an eye out for “trouble” in the form of “flailers” (people having difficulty staying upright in their skis), kids, skiers on rental equipment, and those that are “out to lunch.” They stop the lift if it looks like someone will be hit
by the chair, sucked under the chair, or if someone is hanging from the chair due to a botched loading. To maintain the lane maze area and loading zone, lifties watch for icy spots, holes, rocks, and extra slush or puddles — they are always shoveling to keep the snow-road in good operating condition. They are also responsible for keeping the tissue boxes and maps stocked, putting names on the First Aid announcement whiteboard and communicating any accidents to the ski patrol by phone. Finally, the lift operators are reminded by management that they are the "face of Mt. Polaris" and as such, they should always appear neat and friendly. This translates into strict codes for clothing and hats (company issued only, laundered regularly), facial hair (no new growth or beards — clean shaven or mustache), hair length (above the shoulder for men) and piercings (no facial piercings, and only females can wear earrings, with a maximum of two holes per ear). Management tries to encourage an attitude akin to the Disneyesque, giddy greeting of customers. Some lifties take up this charge, particularly early in the day, while others just move snow around to avoid "the public."

A "relief" lifty will rotate through so each person gets a lunch break. They get a half hour paid lunch by law. They can take as much time as they want as long as the jobs are covered, they have cleared the break with the other lifties on their lift, and the time is deducted from their timecard at the end of the day. For most of the day lifties just "hang" at the chair, either standing near the loading zone, shoveling, or sitting in a shack. Occasionally, they get a chance to "make runs" (go snowboarding) or go to the bathroom. At the end of the day, lifties break down the maze, erase the whiteboards, take in the trash, drop off the lift logs and the drill in the locker room, check out, and head home. With an average age of 20, most are too young for a post-work beer in the base area bars, so usually they head to a fellow snowboarding employee’s house or the employee dorms to pre-party before the "big open keggers" referred to in the last chapter.

Order, Authority, and Identity

The above account of a day in the life of a lift operator suggests a sense of the work order in this department. The lift operators’ primary task is to ensure that customers load and unload the lift safely, but they are also responsible for monitoring the lift machinery, recording stops, greeting customers, and maintaining the lift maze area. Additionally, lifties help report accidents to ski patrol, maintain a First Aid customer notification whiteboard and are prepared to assist in lift evacuations. The patterned means for accomplishing these tasks are achieved with reference to forms of both organizational authority, and, more importantly, subcultural authority. In
particular, lifties act in the context of manager’s rules, surveillance, modeling, the “cherry picking” of “stars,” and “chess playing” with employees. Peers also reinforce a subcultural authority through task allocation, the definition of dirty work, and the setting of work standards. And as the primary context for authority is their subculture, so is the context from which they draw their identity claims. Lift operators put on a cool pose of ironic detachment: they avoid talk and comparisons with others, and they manage their local displays and performances in accordance with this identity. Although the context for identity and authority is extra-organizational, the configuration of order, authority, and identity in lift operations is complimentary. This is the case particularly because managers leave room for, and work with, the subcultural authority brought into the enactment of work order.

**Authority**

At orientation, the Lift Operations Manager tells his new crew that the job “is not brain surgery. Your job is to stop the lift so people don’t get hurt.” Of course, there is a bit more to it than that. To ensure that lifties know their jobs and perform the work adequately, management uses forms of organizational authority early in the season, but the effectiveness of these strategies diminishes quickly. Within a month, forms of subcultural authority evolve which are then used both by peers on each other, and are also co-opted by management to ensure that work gets done.

This section will explore the forms of both organizational authority and subcultural authority manifest in lift operators’ work order. The account is organized
chronologically, as the lift operators would bring these two authorities into their work accomplishment through the season. First, I discuss the forms of organizational authority — rules, surveillance, and modeling — present in hiring, orientation, and the first few weeks of operations. In the remainder of the section I consider how forms of subcultural authority are used to get the work done. First, I will explore how management works with this context of authority through, what they call, “cherry picking” “star” employees and “playing chess” with employees to produce the desired work outcomes. I then turn to how peers reinforce the use subcultural authority for each other to allocate tasks, define dirty work, and set work standards. Unlike those in the patrol, peers do not use organizational authority on each other to get the work done. And, as a further point of differentiation, those with positional hierarchal authority bring in this extra-organizational context for authority to ensure work is accomplished. Subcultural authority is effective in getting the work done in Lift Operations because the managers both give it a chance to operate and use it to their advantage.

**Hiring**

A supervisor told me, tongue-in-cheek, that “the only requirement for lift operators is that they are over 18 and have not committed a felony — misdemeanors are not a problem.” Typically, two thirds of the staff of 70 (ideally) are hired during the job fair in October. The selection process is not extensive; Human Resources sends over candidates that have cleared the above two screening criteria and have a preference for working outside. “I can tell in six seconds if someone will last on our
crew” (Kim, Lift Supervisor). Interviews rarely last longer than five minutes. One of the lift supervisors said they do, however, reject candidates who would not present a clean cut, friendly face of Mt. Polaris to “the public,” or who seem unwilling to cope with some of the difficult work conditions (for example, standing in the rain all day, or heavy shoveling on snow days). Usually the department is understaffed, although during high season (approx. Dec. 15-Jan. 5) the resort employs a number of college students during their winter breaks, and the department can swell to up to 90 employees.

**Orientation**

As staff retention is very low in lift operations, with only 5-6 of 70 employees returning each year, orientation and training are of the utmost importance to managers. During the two-day orientation that occurs one week before the resort opens, the department manager covers, in his words, “all of it,” — the organization structure, department goals and objectives, the lift machinery, communications, safety, daily routines, special emergencies, and paperwork. The manager says he tries to stress the basics of the routines because when the resort opens there tends to be chaos and he can’t be everywhere at once. Most importantly, he encourages his new crew to stop the lift if they are ever in doubt.

If they need to stop the lift once every ten seconds, then we want them to do it. I would rather see them hold up the line than have someone get hurt. — John, Lift Operations Manager

As the staff objective, he stresses safety, but he also uses this time to try to instill other rules to be carried out through the season. In particular, he stresses punctuality,
appearance and smoking rules, the recording of stops when they occur, and clear communication protocols for breaks and scheduling.

First Few Weeks: Establishing Organizational Authority

The lift operators' responsibilities are initially set out by the manager and area supervisors, either during the formal orientation or through on-the-job instructions. In the first week or two, the area supervisors are often on site, reinforcing and correcting work behavior and just hanging out, getting to know their staff. The newcomers are encouraged to rely on the experience of the few seasoned lifties and are expected to learn the set of tasks required of them within the first few days. In the first month or so of operations, managers and peers use organizational authority on each other to get the work done. The managers and supervisors try to emphasize rules, but more often they just watch to see if work is getting done to their liking, and, if it is not, they model the desired behaviors. Peers will invoke rules, observations of their managers' behaviors, and the seasoned lifties' experience to explicitly negotiate what the work is and how it should be done.

Rules

As mentioned above, the manager tries to establish the rule of rules early on. This is only partially effective in practice as lifties negotiate amongst themselves to determine which rules are really important to observe for continued employment.

The rules that garner compliance beyond the first few days are those that apply to all seasonal workers — those that are organizationally determined. Rules regarding appearance and attendance are the most effective. Employees must wear
clean uniforms with name tags, including only standard-issue hats, jackets, turtlenecks, and pants. Smoking in uniform is not allowed. There should be no facial piercings, no unusual hair colors, and no long hair or facial hair for men. A few of the seasonal employees, particularly first year employees who participate in the snowboarding subculture, push the boundaries on these rules. My experience with this rule, recorded in my fieldnotes from my first winter season, is illustrative of the tension.

I forgot my black Mt. Polaris wool beanie at home today and happened to have a solid black fleece hat of a slightly different design in my car. Since it was cold, I decided to wear it. John, the manager came by and told me, in front of the other ticket checkers, that I couldn’t wear it because it didn’t have the Mt. Polaris logo on it. So, on my break, I went down to the sportshop and bought a Mt. Polaris patch for $1 and taped it to the front of the hat. My fellow ticket checkers quite liked my innovation and I honestly thought I had solved the problem. John came by later that day and was annoyed that I was still wearing the hat. “Nice try, but that cap is clearly not standard issue. Why can’t you people just wear your uniforms?” I told him I forgot mine, I was cold and I did the best I could. “Look, don’t push me on this. I just had to fire a guy yesterday about this cap issue — he was a punk anyway, but the stocking cap is now a big deal for lift ops. I can’t let you wear that.” — Fieldnotes, 1/5/95

The uniform, facial hair, hair length, and facial piercings rules are constantly challenged by a handful of lifties, but challenges are limited by the punitive use of organizational authority. The other rule violation used as grounds for dismissal is the failure to show up for work without notice. Most seasonal employees are expected to provide two weeks notice if certain days off are desired. Once scheduled, an employee is responsible for finding someone to work that day or, at least, calling in sick that morning if he or she is not planning to show up for work. Not showing and not calling is constructed as unacceptable and each year at least one person is fired from lift operations ostensibly for this reason. Managers and supervisors hold fast to the appearance and attendance rules throughout the season.
In contrast, the rules regarding punctuality, recording stops in the log, remaining at one’s post, and communicating about breaks are observed flexibly and are rarely enforced as articulated early in the season. Indeed, lifties will assist each other in their efforts to get around the already flexible rules. If a supervisor or manager catches a lifty away from his or her post, usually an excuse is forthcoming. Jeff knew all the tricks...When one of the supervisors comes up to the lift and one of the people working there isn’t there you’d get an ‘uuhhhh, he’s in the bathroom.’ When the hemming and hawing begins you just know they’re out takin’ laps. It’s always somethin’ -he had to go get trail maps, garbage bags, whatever. They are always trying to find ways to take another lap. — John, Lift Operations Manager.

Lifties talk about the rules with each other in the first few weeks of work to gain clarity on just what the rules are and how exceptions to the rules might be exercised. However, this talk falls off precipitously once it is clear where one can bend the rules and where one must comply.

Rules alone, then, carry only limited authority in lift operations. The small fraction of the work order attributable to straightforward rule compliance is achieved through threat of employment termination. More importantly, the lifties’ observation of the more flexible rules relies on the support of the subcultural authority peers use on each other. How subcultural authority buttresses order is explored in the second half of this section.

Surveillance

Management tries to monitor the lifties to ensure that they are present and “on task.” Before the resort opens each morning, the three supervisors try to check out each lift in their complexes (two to four lifts, depending on expected customer volume). They look to ensure that lane mazes are taut, the snow in the maze is in
good condition, the lift is free of ice and snow, and everyone is present and presentable to customers. Throughout the day supervisors will drop by and “hang out” to see how things are going. Management makes a point of being on site often during the first few weeks. They say they are interested in getting to know the personalities of those on their crews as much as they are there to make sure the lifties are doing the work. Nevertheless, their presence serves as a form of surveillance.

Surveillance as a control strategy is about as effective as the formal rules in bringing about desired behavior. Early in the season management’s presence on site allows them to field questions, instruct, and demonstrate desired work performance. However, once lifties know the work expectations, the visits are construed as invasive monitoring, particularly if management tries to intervene. Lifties use the phones in the lift shacks to warn each other that a supervisor is on the way over.4 And while these visits ensure that lifties perform in the presence of management, they do little to maintain sustained desirable work behavior.

Modeling

One of the more effective strategies employing organizational authority is the demonstration of desired behavior by management. Outright instruction or orders are quickly resented by lifties. This is a group that not only avoids talk altogether, but finds obvious demonstrations of concern about work inappropriate when in the presence of peers. This more subtle strategy of showing the lifties how they would like the work done is acknowledged by management as being somewhat successful in highlighting important tasks, suggesting means of accomplishing these tasks, and bringing about desired behavior. In an interview with Kim, a supervisor, she
mentioned that if she sees, for example, a knot tied improperly, she tries to make sure someone is watching, and reties it herself. She does not mention this correction to the lifties, but hopes they got the message from her performance. This orientation to modeling is apparent in the way the managers talk about the work.

One of our biggest concerns is keeping the line moving. Once we feel comfortable with the employees we will try to get them to stop the lift a bit less. ... Sometimes they really don't need to stop it. We show them other ways — to use slow instead of stop and also do line control so people are ready. — John, Lift Operations Manager

Modeling efforts around this aspect of work do seem to be effective. The number of stops decreases over time as lifties learn to diagnose situations and apply a varied assortment of solutions (stop the lift, slow the lift, encourage the customer to hurry up, lift a customer on to the chair, push a customer away from the chair, etc.). But, as with the other form of organizational authority, modeling is only effective to a point. An instance I experienced as a ticket checker, quoted here from my fieldnotes, demonstrates the expired effectiveness of modeling.

Today John succeeded in driving management and lifties even further apart with his intervention. There hasn’t been much new snow for over a week and the rain, in combination with the below-freezing temperatures and the nightly grooming, had turned the snow base into a consistency resembling a granular snow cone on a base of solid ice. The poles supporting the lane maze just won’t stay up all that well, and it is hard to find a good place for a hole. Despite this, the lane maze looked pretty good this morning, with perhaps a three inch sag from end to end (50 feet total). It looked perfectly fine to all of us and the customers didn’t seem to give it a second look. It has certainly looked worse before. John came by, picked up a drill and spent over five minutes trying to re-drill two holes and re-set the maze. He didn’t stop until the sag was only one inch, but he left the ground looking like Swiss cheese in the process. The four ticket checkers on duty (myself included) just watched from a distance, but we knew he wanted us to watch, so we pretended to be occupied with other things. We shared a few comments with each other “can you believe him, the maze was fine before” and “this seals it, the guy is a wanker” in addition to our muffled laughter at his struggles with the difficult snow. No one offered to help. When he was done he brought the drill over to us looking terribly pleased with himself and he didn’t say a thing. Once John left, Bill, the ticket checker who had first set the maze, just shook his head from side to side, as in disbelief, and said “whatever.” The rest of us laughed and that was the end of it. — Fieldnotes, 1/10/95
The incident above occurred too late in the season to effectively model desired behavior. The ticket checkers already had a clear sense of what management expected and there was a sense amongst the crew that the maze looked good enough, particularly considering the condition of the snow base. The intervention was not a successful attempt to foster and reinforce internalized standards in the employees. Modeling only works when expectations are unclear; afterward its it is resented just as much as, and perhaps more than, monitoring.

Seasoned Lifties’ Experience

When lifties are unsure of what or how work is to be done, they fall back on management’s instruction, their observations of management’s modeled behavior, and the experience of seasoned lifties. Here too there is a fine line; if a second-season lifty develops a reputation as a “know it all,” the other lifties are less likely to ask him or her for advice or take up advice when offered. Additionally, there is some stigma attached to the status of seasoned lifties, as newcomers wonder why these people couldn’t land “better jobs” after being at the resort for a year.\textsuperscript{86} This stigma reduces the authority of traditional organizational routines the seasoned lifties can offer as guides to work accomplishment.

Into the Season: Waning Organizational Authority

The window for the effective use of rules, surveillance, modeling and seasoned lifties’ experience in shaping work behavior is narrow. Explicit negotiation of work standards and routines only lasts for the first few weeks before a non-verbal peer monitored system of work performance takes over. As lifties get to know each other,
the effectiveness of organizational authorities wane, while forms of subcultural authority wax. Yet management still has one last tool of organizational authority in its arsenal that has effect: the power to give rewards. The two rewards used in lift operations are assignments of “star” employees to a position with autonomy, or “cherry picking,” and assignment of employees to desired lifts, or “playing chess with employees.”

Cherry Picking

As mentioned above, when supervisors are on site, they are both making sure the work is getting done and getting to know their employees. The purpose of surveillance quickly shifts to the latter as the former becomes less effective. In their efforts to learn more about their staff, supervisors try to locate the hardest working employees and learn a little about them. The Department Manager’s espoused management philosophy reflects this shift.

I would help in orienting the new employees so they know what they are supposed to do, then I let the three supervisors take over. They are supposed to manage their flocks, but usually they just cherry pick the best employees to reward them and that’s about it. You know, they make sure people are doing their jobs, but they don’t watch over them all that closely. They let whoever is on sort it out for themselves. — John, Lift Operations Manager

Those that are “cherry picked” earn the informal title of “star” (a term used more often by managers than lifties) and are rewarded by a “promotion” to the position of “Utility,” also called “Relief Lifty.”

Who is labeled a “star?” Usually the seasoned lifties are automatically “stars” as they know more than the first season employees and would not have been hired back if they had not earned, at least, some trust from management. But approximately 10 relief lifties are needed, so a few of the “best” first year lifties must be pulled up to
this position. One earns management’s construction of “best employee” by showing up on time regularly and getting caught by supervisors doing things that would demonstrate “responsibility and initiative, such as fixing a drooping fence without being asked, starting line control before it was suggested” (in the words of Kim, a Supervisor).

And what does one get for being a “star?” In addition to a higher wage of $5.50/hour (25 cents/hour more than the regular lifty wage), relief lifties get to do more riding (snowboarding). From 9-11 a.m. they are expected to do “projects” such as fixing lane mazes or fences, shoveling snow, replacing lift binders (which hold the logs), or running the lost and found items down to the customer service office at the base of the mountain. However, if there are no projects that require their attention, which usually happens once or twice a week, the supervisors let them take laps. For the remainder of the day, they rotate through the posts at three lifts, providing breaks for the regular lifties and logging these breaks. This movement from lift to lift and top to bottom of lifts also gives the relief lifties a chance to get in a few runs.

Relief lifties are meant to assign breaks and set the tone at the lift, but in practice the first season lifties’ preferences take precedence. This is when subcultural authority first starts to shape daily operations; coolness trumps “star” status at the lift. To become a “star,” one must deviate from the code of coolness in one of two ways. First, as mentioned earlier, seasoned lifties are not necessarily respected by the crew. Most new employees quickly form the impression that after a season at the resort, most reasonable people could find a better job than working as a lift operator. Second, it is just not cool to be punctual consistently or take the work seriously enough to
convince management that one has initiative. Showing up on time every day clearly indicates to the crew that one hasn’t been partying enough, and taking the work too seriously either means that one is a “geek” (uncool in a number of ways) or a “brown noser” (too eager to win management’s favor). Management is aware of the potential schism between coolness and “star” status. “It is really neat if everyone on the crew thinks a lifty is cool and he is one of the stars” (John, Lift Operations Manager). But sadly, for management’s purposes, this is not often the case. Only three of the ten relief lifties seemed to be considered cool by their fellow employees in my first year of fieldwork, in the second year of my field work three of the six relief lifties were probably considered cool (the Lift Operations Department was understaffed after the major layoff in the ‘95-’96 season).  

“Playing Chess” with Employees

By “playing chess” with their employees, managers use coolness to their advantage rather than working against it. The time spent on site that allowed supervisors to “cherry pick” their “stars” also gave them some sense of the personalities of their staff. The supervisors then try to match the personalities of the crew to the kind of feel they want at each lift. For example, the cool ironically detached attitude is the feel the supervisors want at the more remote lifts servicing advanced terrain. The assumption is that these customers know what they are doing and do not necessarily want to be greeted each time they come through a lift line. Your “cool dude” usually wants to avoid the public and just hang, save for the occasional chat with cool customers of the opposite sex and the opportunity to take laps through the trees on the steepest terrain. The “boarder chicks” are often assigned
to “feeder lifts” to keep the full range of customers entertained as they make their way up to their desired lifts further up the mountain. “Todd puts his brightest, peppiest folks at the bottom of Lift 2” (Kim, Supervisor). The “stars” that like kids and loathe boredom are assigned to the beginner lifts.

In addition to personality matching, supervisors will try to influence how work gets done at a lift by strategically placing one of their “stars” that has cool status among a lift crew that is having trouble.

Gumby usually just floated around until the Kiwi (New Zealander) boarder chicks got a bit moody on Lift 2. Kirsty, who works on Lift 3, told me that last week at Todd’s party, she saw Natalie and Brooke “getting pissy” at each other. And for the past few days they’ve been avoiding each other and snapping at customers. Everybody likes Gumby, he puts everyone at ease – he’s one of these “stars” that is also cool, so I guess Todd decided to station him on the bottom of Lift 2 until Natalie and Brooke’s relationship is repaired and they are greeting customers cheerfully again. – Fieldnotes, 2/5/96.

Instead of working against subcultural authority, management either directs it to their desired ends or just lets it set up its own dynamic as monitored by the lifties themselves.

**Into the Season: Waxing Subcultural Authority**

The three main manifestations of subcultural authority that peers use on peers concern allocating tasks, defining dirty work, and setting work standards. Each is discussed in turn.

**Allocating Tasks**

Early in the season task allocation follows the logic “if you see it, do it.” Lifties show up at the lift and do whatever needs to be done: set up the maze, knock ice off the chairs with the broom, shovel snow, etc. Instead of maintaining clear positions
with narrow duties and rotating through them throughout the day, this logic holds. Rather quickly, however, lifties develop preferences for different kinds of work. For example, some people like to use the drill to set up the lane mazes, “someone usually gravitates to the drill” (Todd, Supervisor). Likewise, lifties often settle into a type of task performed throughout the day. Some lifties would rather shovel snow unnecessarily than greet customers. “Today, I moved this wall of snow back three feet. It was that or deal with the public” (Jed, 1st season Lift Operator). Others, usually females, would rather interact with people during the day.

I like to talk to the customers, that way I don’t get bored. Some people hate it, but I like it. My day goes by a lot faster and a happy customer can just make my day. — Julie, 1st season Lift Operator.

And some make a clear distinction between the public and fellow employees.

My job is awesome. I get to hang out up here and talk on the phone to all of my friends on the mountain. Then I get the occasional spin on my board. Sure, sometimes I have to stop the lift for flailers and help ‘em out, or fix the ramp, but sitting up here with this view and talking on the phone is totally fine with me. As long as they don’t send me down to the bottom to deal with the public I am cool with this job. — Kirsty, 2nd season Lift Operator.

These patterns of preferences are the “personalities” the supervisors observe and play chess with.

The cooler employees are the ones who get to “settle” into task preferences that reflect and reinforce coolness. Lifties develop early indicators of their coolness off the job with party participation, riding skills, the use of lingo, and their aesthetics. The cool stance of “ironic detachment” (considered in-depth in the Identity section) is then reinforced by tasks that allow one to gain distance from “Joe Public,” the customer, either through shoveling or sitting in a lift shack. And the “chick cool” option that
females can occasionally exercise (also considered in the *Identity* section) then favors the task of greeting customers.

But coolness is also about how one handles oneself on the job. If two lifties just wanted to shovel instead of deal with the public, it would not be discussed and the cooler one would get his preference. This is borne out again and again and patterns form quickly. There is no verbal negotiation about who will do what; again, the logic is “if you see it, do it.” Initiating a conversation about who gets to do what almost guarantees status deflation due to the demonstration of concern about work and is counterproductive to the intent. This double bind only reinforces how subcultural authority determines task allocation.

*Defining Dirty Work*

Once the task preferences of the cool person on site is clear, a task hierarchy quickly forms. Whatever the cool person at that lift does not want to do becomes the dirty work. This is by definition and is no surprise, but it is surprising that the dirty work varies from lift to lift. This is what allows management to play chess to get their desired outcomes. If the cool person is male, and trying to display a pose of cool ironic detachment, chances are that he wants either to shovel or to sit in the shack. Others on site will be influenced by his cool status and want the same things, but they will pick up the slack to ensure that the other tasks are at least covered. Management tries to make sure that the cool person favors the kind of work that is important for that lift, otherwise the work will not get done to their satisfaction: for the remote, advanced lifts they want the “cool dudes” who just want to shovel (there are few incidents as these lifts), for the “feeder” lifts they need the “chick cool” boarder chicks
to cheerfully greet customers, and for the beginner lifts, they need to use their “stars” to stay on top of “trouble” customers — and these lifts are generally not as cool to work at. The dirty work at each lift is that which the coolest person on site prefers to avoid. At the advanced lifts, it is greeting customers, at the “feeder” lifts, it is shoveling and attending to the lane maze, at the beginner lifts, it is the boredom of sitting in the shack at the top of the lift. Across lift operations, the crew does not agree on what the dirty work is, but at each lift, these definitions are rather clear and determined through subcultural authority.

Setting Work Standards

As in the case of task allocation, subcultural authority, in large part, sets work standards. Not only do the cool lifties get their task preferences, but they also set the tone of work for all the lifties on site. If the cool person is a hard working shoveller, others will follow suit and responsibly greet customers, attend to the lane maze, maintain trail maps, log stops, etc. However, if the cool person slacks off, one of two things happens — either the staff pick up all of the slack and suffer even more status deflation, or the work system breaks down. Most often the cool person will slack off somewhat and the least cool on staff will pick up a few of his or her tasks. For example, the cool employee often takes an extra lap now and then and the rest of the crew will cover for him or her. But if there is not some reciprocation, the system can break down. If the less cool lifties take to complaining about the situation, it is a clear warning that things are not going well. This story from my fieldnotes illustrates the near breakdown of order at a lift.

Today was an overcast spring day; I skied up to the loading zone at Lift 2 and saw Nikki in her usual spot, only she is sitting, holding her arm in an awkward position as if
it was hurting her and staring blankly at the customers coming through the line. "Hey Muffin, you're not smiling today? Wha' sup with that?" I asked. "Oh, yesterday I took a good digger and wrenched my shoulder, the real pisser is that we are short staffed and I have to work... The thing that gets me is that I am always covering for everybody else, nobody wants to deal with the public, so I am out here smilin' away, the ramp needs work and they just don't 'see' it. You know, that kind of thing. I am like mom around here, making sure everything gets taken care of. They just sit on their asses in the shack all warm and cozy, talking to each other on the phone. Whatever. It's too late to change things now. So here I am, out here again." — Fieldnotes, 4/3/95

Nikki was, initially, one of the cooler "boarder chicks" on staff, but as the season wore on she stopped participating in the parties and slowly lost status. Her complaints to her peers about their slacking only exacerbated the situation and while she was still doing the cool work of greeting customers at the feeder lift, she was also doing most of the work up to the day she was injured. The next day Nikki was given four days off and the supervisor worked the lift in her place after shifting his crew around in an attempt to create a different dynamic. Management is aware of how subcultural authority can set work standards and they try to monitor the situation to make sure situations such as this one do not occur.

**Authority Summary**

Early in the season managers can use forms of organizational authority effectively to bring about work order. Lifties will observe rules, respond to modeling and surveillance, and rely on the experience of seasoned lifties. Management will also "cherry pick stars" and reward them by assigning them to a post that allows them more time to ride. These stars are then placed strategically at lift sites to influence behavior.
But rather quickly, lift operators get to know each other and a second context of authority develops that is connected to their leisure subculture and brought into the work setting. This subcultural authority renders ineffective all but the most unobtrusive forms of organizational authority. Only some basic rules and the "stars" influence remain. Managers are aware of the power of coolness and they use it strategically by placing cool people in particular locations to bring about desired effects.  

However, more importantly, managers let this subcultural authority shape how work is accomplished on site as monitored by the lifties themselves. Cool lifties get to exercise their preferences for types of work and, consequently, the type of work they avoid then gets defined as dirty work at that site. Lifties will not sanction each others’ mistakes, nor will they tell a lifty with cool status that he or she is shirking. These less cool lifties just pick up the slack without complaints, as complaining only indicates too much interest in the work and deflates one’s status even further. But the less cool are also influenced by the work standards set by the cool lifties, so if the cool lifties are doing only minimal work it is unlikely that the less cool will pick up all of the slack. Management monitors the situation at each lift to ensure that the cool lifties are pulling their weight and the less cool lifties aren’t resentful and unproductive. Coolness strongly figures in how the work gets done.
Identity

The lifties’ identity claims are local expressions of coolness. For lifties, coolness is defined in reference to the snowboarding subculture they participate in, and at the time of my study, the cool pose was one of “ironic detachment.” This section will flesh out what I mean by ironic detachment through exploring the many facets of the identities the lifties bring to the work setting. As in Chapter 3, an “action claims” theory of identity serves as a framework for my narrative and the discussion will follow the same sequence of talk, displays, and behaviors.

While the patrollers’ identity claims are expressed in the content of their talk — “We are professionals” — the opposite is the case for lifties. Lifties avoid making verbal assertions about their identity and comparisons with other groups at the resort. Their emphasis on avoiding talk and their attempts to downplay certain aspects of their identity — past affiliations, future plans — such that living in the present is their identity claim. Although this anti-claiming claim is conceptually cumbersome, it is helpful in conveying what kind of pose they regard as cool. These lifties try to avoid trapping themselves in certain categories, but they seem to have no problem throwing themselves into narrow activity systems — systems with meaningful consequences. With such a transient group (90%-95% of the lift operators are new each season) drawing most of their identity claims from the present, immediate displays and behaviors acquire inflated meanings for those within and on the boundaries of this group.

The following discussion of identity claims rests on the lifties’ embrace of the occupationally diffuse snowboarding subculture. Lifties are, first and foremost,
snowboarders. Work is merely a means to pursue snowboarding. Of the 70 lifties, only three did not snowboard (and two of the non-snowboarders participated in the group’s leisure activities). Snowboarding is the lifties’ scene. The identity claims brought into the context of work, summarized here as a cool pose of ironic detachment, flow from their membership in the snowboarding subculture.

Coolness is recognized as the key identity resource among teens (Danesi, 1994) and in subcultures (Finestone, 1964). Coolness is a pose, a way of conducting oneself. Coolness refers to the capacity to execute physical acts, including conversation, in a concerted, smooth, self-controlled fashion in risky situations, or to maintain affective detachment during the course of encounters involving considerable emotion. (Lyman and Scott, [1968] 1970: p. 145)

According this definition, coolness is much like composure, in fact, Lyman and Scott start their article with the exclamation “Don’t lose your cool!” Finestone (1964) uses much the same definition for cool in reference to the “cats” using heroin in the subculture he studied:

To be able to confront such contingencies [of problematic situations] with adequacy and without resort to violence was to be “cool.” (Finestone, 1964: p. 282)

However, Danesi (1994) notes that coolness entails a host of poses and acts that vary in substance and form from generation to generation. For today’s “postmodern teenager” of his study, coolness:

... first and foremost implies a deliberately slow and lackadaisical form of bodily locomotion, accompanied by a nonchalant and unflappable countenance...The sum and substance of coolness is a self-conscious aplomb in overall behavior...Coolness also entails specific dress codes, hairstyles, and modi vivendi. (Danesi, 1994: p. 38-39)

While it can be said that there is a general pose and status consequence of coolness, local manifestations of coolness are a function of the themes circulating in the relevant
social context. For the snowboarders' social context, the theme of ironic detachment, and to a lesser extent, chick cool, give shape to the cool pose.

The snowboarding, and thus, lift operator, pose is one of ironic detachment, and not, for example, anarchy or zealous overattachment to their coolness. Snowboarding had just recently evolved from an early affiliation with anti-authority skateboard culture and in reaction to the 1980's glam/techie/elitist skiing culture. In the early 1990's the sport experienced enormous growth. At the time, several small sports with cult-like followings had "gone mainstream" (in particular, surfing and skateboarding). Generation X and Yers had seen it happen and the huge popularity boom of snowboarding was just another example of the new lifestyle, the flavor of the month. Those already in the scene took note of the growth and instead of starting the process all over again with a new pursuit, they decided to keep riding but with an ironic stance towards the whole business. Irony, as a theme, was also present in the media images connected to snowboarding at the time: in lyrics listened to, magazine articles circulated, movies watched, and TV shows viewed. Irony was the new cool for youth everywhere.

I have called their pose ironic, not in sense of word play, but more like Webster's 3rd Edition (1991) definition of irony "4a) a cool, detached attitude of mind, characterized by a recognition of the incongruities and complexities of experience."

Rorty's (1989: p. 73-74) ironist, is, of course, more epistemologically sophisticated than your average snowboarder, but some affinities are worthy of note:

I call these people 'ironists' because their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, ... and [they are] never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change.
While some of the snowboarders might don an ironic attitude as a purposeful statement about the ever shifting definition of coolness and their tenuous commitment to the sport, most just strike the pose to look cool. For the intentional ironist, there are two possible statements to be made with the attitude “I do it, but I am detached.” The first option is close to Rorty’s ironist in the recognition that snowboarding is today’s identity claim and pursuit, but tomorrow’s identity could be something different. This embraces the whimsy of shifting interests often represented as fad and fashion, and while reaping the benefits of fashion, refuses to take it seriously. The second option is a defensive response to the commercialized popularity of the sport. This ironist would claim to be untouched by fashion through maintaining a blasé attitude; the cool status of the sport is seen as irrelevant. Instead of creating a hierarchy of true, authentic snowboarders at the top and “posers,” “wanna-bes,” or outsiders at the bottom, these ironic snowboarders would try to project an accepting attitude towards all participants in the scene on the mountain. In this mode, they are too cool to be worried about who is cool and who is not. Whether the ironist embraces fashion or purports to be above it, the pose is the same.

There is another way to be cool if you are a female lifty, which is not particularly ironic and certainly not detached. I have labeled this mode “chick cool.” “Boarder chicks” can occasionally be more zany, unpredictable, energetic and talkative, and wear more body-hugging clothes. They can tell entertaining stories at parties, but more importantly, they can legitimately prefer customer interactions over other aspects of the work without looking somewhat uncool. But they must also know when to just hang and put on all the forms of ironic detachment.
The lifties at Mt. Polaris enact ironic detachment as their approach to life and work. It is about not talking in order to speak, displays — clothes, accessories, etc. — that are made carefully with the accompanying attitude that they are not all that important, and participation in cool pursuits in a restrained manner.

Talk

To start a consideration of lift operators’ identities with a discussion of their talk might seem a bit misdirected given the noticeable dearth of talking amongst lifties. Yet introducing both the infrequency of talk and the avoidance of certain kinds of talk suggests why questions calling for identity assertions are usually averted, challenged, or answered with reference to their leisure pursuits. It also clarifies why comparisons made with others — seasonal workers, managers, other area resort employees, flatlanders — are hedged or qualified.

Certainly there is talking taking place both at work and at play, but lifties seem to follow the rule “less is more.” A lifty wearing a wonderfully telling “Ride More, Talk Less” T-shirt is a case in point. During three hours of playing pool, he only spoke three times to his companions; twice to get beers, once to initiate a new game of pool. No announcement accompanied his bathroom break, even though it stopped the game. There is a striking lack of talking at social gatherings of all kinds. At all parties, lifties spend most of their time in groups of people (two to six people, usually not more) standing or sitting in a circle together, drinking beer, not talking to each other, just casually checking out the room and listening to music. And the favored genre of music for these parties has a steady heartbeat-like rhythm with no lyrics. On the job,
this minimalist approach to talk is apparent in the lifties' non-verbal coordination with each other, the general preference (especially among males) to avoid the task of greeting customers, and the hours lifties spend side by side speaking only when necessary to clear a stopped lift or initiate a break. It is the fashion to minimize the talk.

Certain occasions calling for talk or responses are also avoided with a number of strategies. Talk is minimized or avoided in situations calling for self-description (to be elaborated in the section on assertions), a judgment, or in-depth analysis, questions probing one's past and future plans, and solicitations of questions (by managers, in meetings or one-on-one). For example, in-depth analyses are often averted with the multipurpose response; “whatever.” Consider Jeff’s (a 1st season Lift Operator) response to a report that a colleague was fired for stealing an apple from the cafeteria: “that was so beat that Flame got fired, cause, like, he wasn’t even the worst offender, but, fuckin’, whatever.” The “whatever” response is often accompanied by shrugged shoulders, but even more likely, the shrugged shoulders stand alone for a response. And while one often hears tales of “freaky, huge, phat air launched off a sweet kicker, with landings nailed, drilled, cratered, beatered or spanked,” these accounts are usually made brief and are only retold when exceptional. When there is talk it is often in the local vernacular (such as that above), centered on concerns that are local and present — what’s happening here this week: the weather forecast, snow conditions, equipment people are wearing, work schedules (issued weekly), stories about what happened yesterday or today out on the mountain, plans for tonight’s or tomorrow’s kegger, gossip on who “hooked up” with whom at the last big party, etc. But this
focus on the present does not allow lifties to suspend their identities — to take a psychosocial moratorium in Erikson’s vernacular (1968).\textsuperscript{97} It only makes their current words and deeds more determinate of their selves.\textsuperscript{98}

**Assertions**

Among lifties, it is important to avoid initiating conversations about oneself or “spewing.”\textsuperscript{99} Some situations, however, call upon lifties to describe themselves. For example, talk might occur when someone comes through the lift line from one’s home town and a fellow lifty overhears the conversation, or late in the season, when everyone is asking each other what they plan on doing next. When social conventions dictate that a self-description be made, lifties typically try to deftly avert, challenge, or limit the scope of an appropriate response.

The ubiquitous “whatever” is one such strategy. It is used frequently as the following snippet of a conversation demonstrates:

> At a kegger I think someone looks familiar “Are you from the East Bay?” ... He responds, “whatever, hey, where are the cups?” — Fieldnotes, 1/5/95

The “whatever” conversational move usually ends any further exploration of the topic at hand. It is a perfectly legitimate conversation stopping alternative to an “I dunno,” when given in response to questions about the future. When intoned with derision, “whatever” can also be used to challenge the appropriateness of a self-descriptive response.

> At the Lakeside chair, Zack is talking with Joe. Zack to Joe “It looks like your ride (snowboard) has seen some use.” Joe pauses, “Yah.” Zack “So, you’ve been ridin’ for a while?” Joe responds “Yeah, whatever.” — Fieldnotes, 12/18/94

> At a kegger Kelley tells a group of four lifties where she went to school as an undergrad and how she wants to go to Law School. One lifty responds: “That’s cool. Whatever.” This is said sarcastically, intended to ridicule. Then she slowly turns to one of the other
lifties, closes her eyes and starts swaying side to side, nodding her head to the music.
— Fieldnotes, 3/25/95

While the appropriateness of situations that demand self-description are challenged as uncool or unnecessary, these challenges themselves are certainly discursively appropriate.

When inquires are directed to a lifties’ future, it is more than appropriate to respond with a vague answer. For example, when, at the end of the season, I asked 25 lifties where they were headed next and what job they had lined up for the summer, 20 said they would “probably stay,” and 14 said they “dunno” what their next job will be. And in more informal conversations during the last few weeks of the season, “dunno” and a shrug was, by far, the most common response to a “what next” question.

When pressed, lifties occasionally conjure up self-descriptions. When asked to explain the reason for working at the resort, or at the lifts, the standard reply is that the job is a “ticket to ride.” Important distinctions are made between use of skis, telemark equipment, a freestyle board or carving board; preferences for riding in snowboarding parks, in the trees, or in the half-pipe; and preferences for riding alone or in groups. Most lifties are quick to embrace the snowboarder identity and will tell you their preferences on riding “goofy” or “regular,” and details on equipment.

When prompted to describe their work behavior, lifties will occasionally admit to being “ slackers” or “brown-nosers,” but these labels are usually avoided, or, at least, normally used on others, instead of oneself. Being a brown-noser has a stigma amongst the lifties, but if the person can admit it, this indicates that they do not take this behavior as seriously as it might seem. It earns them some social acceptance. Only
the cool lifties can admit they are “slackers” and not meet with a response from their fellow workers. Cool lifties are allowed the leeway to slack by other lifties. And as it might aggravate the less cool lifties to make the status hierarchy obvious, bragging about being a “slacker” is counterproductive to one’s ability to continue to slack off. Work related assertions are rarely heard.

Relevant party identity types include a “fiender” (serious pot smoker), “bogart” (smokes too much of others’ pot), “clown,” “blind alkie” (heavy drinker), band member, “leech” (never contributes money for the keg), party host, “slut” (male or female), “agro dude” (someone who starts fights often), and “freak” (someone who dances with great verve or is just particularly strange). The party identities lifties might seek to claim would be the party host, band member, clown, and, possibly, slut, fiender, or freak. Being labeled an agro dude, blind alkie, leech, or bogart is never good, as important norms must be violated to earn the title. And while these identity types are rarely claimed without provocation, they are acknowledged when attributed by someone on the “inside” of the subculture.

Comparisons

Comparisons, like assertions, are also routinely avoided, downplayed, or, at least, made only with proximal others. Lifties focus on participation flows within the snowboarding group, while de-emphasizing the boundaries around who is in and who is out. Most importantly, their most relevant boundary is tied to their leisure — to snowboarding — not to their work. There are some comparisons made with those not participating in their leisure or work worlds, but lifties try to maintain that their snowboarding group is not exclusive, and boundaries aren’t all that important.
The diffuse snowboarding subculture includes individuals in lift operations, parking, ski rentals, food and beverage, ski shop, grounds, maintenance, lift ticket sales, and housecleaning. Common to this group is their youth (18-24 years old), their first season status, and party participation. The boundary is fluid in the sense that, if one participates, one is in: a group member can be older, a skier or telemarker, from a less likely occupation (ski school or a supervisor), in his/her second or third season, even just a local and not a resort employee. They would like to appear as if they are not particularly attached to boundary categories that would make their group exclusive. And while they would like to think that they are more inclusive than they really are, invitations to party and ride (make runs, if it is a skier) are made by lifties, more often than one might expect, to those with little in common, such as: supervisors, patrollers, instructors, shuttle bus drivers, groomers, and the occasional customer. At the same time, they like to appear as if they are detached from their group membership, showing that they would prefer to belong to no group at all. But since the common thread is usually snowboarding, this is the boundary that is most often claimed. The snowboarders, and thus, lifties, intentionally socialize across boundaries; they try to keep it open.

Lifties do have a number of categories for customers. These categories drive “customized” service responses — snowboarders, smilers, grumps, “failers,” and demographic groups (particularly age and race) (Guild, 1999: p. 168). Snowboarders are the most widely mentioned customer category and also account for the most variety of responses generated (greetings: wha’sup?, howzit, dude; and openers: how’s the snow, where are the jumps, how you likin’ those boots: see page 169). Lifties are
sensitive to differences between snowboarders that just wear anything and are good riders, and those that have all the gear, but can’t get down the mountain without leaving a trail of craters. Even so, they will show support for anyone on a board, and particularly the beginners, as it is recognized that learning to ride can be a humbling experience.

Occasionally a situation presents itself that requires a lifty to provide comment on the group status of someone who is clearly not a part of the snowboarding subculture. According to lifties, the worst patrollers and instructors think they are superior, but are exclusionary and lame; managers and supervisors are like annoying parents, and employees from other resorts are cool unless they “think they’re all that” because they get to ride on steeper terrain. “Flatlanders” (those from the city) who are snowboarders are okay unless they are trying too hard to be cool (have all the gear, but can’t ride), but most “flatlanders” are “lame” because they are too caught up in the “rat race.” Much of this labeling behavior is expected. For example, patrollers, instructors, and managers all construct their own status hierarchies that place lifties near the bottom. In turn, lifties create a derogatory label. They don’t take these distinctions all that seriously, particularly when it comes to applying the group stereotype to any one individual. Low status groups often attempt to deflate the importance of hierarchy and category membership over which they have little control (Goffman, 1956), but for this group it is an ethos that reverberates through their talk and actions.
Displays

The most obvious identity claim made by lifties is an interest in snowboarding best claimed in displays. The media have propagated the image of the cool snowboarder in commercials, music videos, product sponsorships, and the like. As such, any “wanna be” can look like a snowboarder. What matters to lifties, they say, is not how you look, but how you can ride. But, in practice, it also matters how you look. What’s important is to look the look — with the right clothes, accessories, and equipment — and walk the walk, but to maintain an ironic attitude about the whole business.

Lifties display an urban androgynous anonymity. The skate punk cultural influences were on their way out in 1994 when I arrived on scene at the California resort. Instead of colorful mohawks and T-shirts with anti-social iconography, snowboarders were wearing “old school” acrylic sweaters with horizontal stripes, black beanies pulled down over their eyebrows, wrap (bug eye) sunglasses rarely removed, and baggy pants and jackets in muted colors with small but recognizable snowboarding-related brand names displayed. Women’s fashion was only a slight variation on the men’s dress, with the optional addition of baby T-shirts and girls’ plastic butterfly barrettes. The uniform is fairly rigid with the stocking cap worn low above the “right” sunglasses, signaling cool. The look hides the shape of the body; the sunglasses and beanie hide the eyes and face — urban androgynous anonymity.

Facial piercings were common among snowboarders, but not allowed by Mt. Polaris, so the less obvious tongue, belly, and nipple piercings were more common than eyebrow and nose piercings. Colored hair was somewhat popular, particularly
platinum and shock green, but was also not allowed. If snowboarders dyed their hair, they didn’t get to display it all that often and usually did not maintain the look. “Chicks” and “dudes” favored straight shoulder length hair, which “chicks” occasionally wore as braided or unbraided piggy-tails. And short spiky hair was gaining in popularity in 1996. Perhaps the most recognizable snowboarding look for men were the fashionable, experimental tufts of facial hair (goatee, soul patch, retro lamb-chop sideburns, etc., anything but your traditional mustache). But, it too was not allowed by management. Lifties pushed the boundaries on the accessories, and were, on occasion, made examples of and fired for it. Over the course of two seasons, five lifties were fired for their fashion statements.

Equipment also indicates coolness. Some brands lacked coolness, particularly the larger manufacturers (with the exception of Sims). There is, however, less brand evaluation talk in snowboarding than in skiing. What is most important to snowboarders is just that fact that one has one stick instead of two. A “cool ride” (favored board) is one with unusual, somewhat retro graphics. The most talked about board in the 1994-1995 season was the Bob Marley board. The most omnipresent board was the Sims sunflower board used by female lifties, and called the “chick stick.”

Movement through space when attached or semi-attached to a snowboard makes one stick out on the hill. Snowboarders cut different lines down the mountain than skiers and their boards make a different noise on hard snow. But when not “ripping it up” on a slope, they are often limping along, with one foot attached to the board, dragging it along as they go. Snowboarders load on the lift in this semi-attached manner so they are easily recognized by lifties as such. Additionally,
snowboarders must re-attach the loose foot to the board when they get to the top of the slope. Often one will see a gaggle of snowboarders sitting at the top of runs making their adjustments. This snowboarder limp is carried over into the equipment free “pimp daddy” roll particularly popular with the “dudes.”

Behaviors

Being a snowboarder is more than what one says and how one looks. It’s about riding and partying, and it is also about a detached attitude, particularly towards work.

One can ride “goofy” or regular; on a freestyle or carving board; in snowboarding parks, in the trees, in the half-pipe, on “groomers,” in powder or even in the backcountry. One can travel in packs or go solo. One can ride with style, or “flail;” sail through the air with grace or “huck” oneself recklessly and backpaddle mid-flight to gain stability. Snowboarders distinguish themselves by equipment, terrain, and companion preferences, and riding skills or style. But one need not ride only one way. Quite the contrary, it is important for snowboarders at Mt. Polaris to be observed trying different styles of riding. The emphasis on experimentation is not a universal snowboarding phenomenon. Mt. Polaris is known for its intermediate terrain and it is a good place to experiment and “get good.” The snowboarding elite do not work and perform here. The elite work, get paid to compete, or shoot movies at resorts with “extreme,” expert-only terrain. These are the snowboarders with a stake in defending their style of riding. They are not your new-to-the-mountains, first season, Mt. Polaris lift operators.
These lifties say they are at the resort to have fun: to ride, and to party. They are at parties five to six nights a week. Whether it is at happy hours, hanging at the employee dorm, 104 hanging at a party house, seeing a band or going to a huge kegger, there is some way to party every night. Margarita Mondays at El Rancho (a pseudonym) or Mt. Polaris two-for-one Wednesday nights at the Bar and Grill in town are gathering places for lifties. Thursdays and Sundays are good nights at the bar with the pool tables. A lifty and two instructors are in a band that “doesn’t suck” and plays once a week with no cover and two-for-one drink deals for Mt. Polaris employees. And there is always someone willing to have a few beers or smoke a few bong loads at the employee dorms.

Lifties are always trying to find a way to squeeze in a few runs. While at work they are allowed two 15 minute breaks and one half hour break for lunch, but more often they will find a way to get a few more minutes here and there to “take a lap.” 105

From the almost religious observation of riding and partying opportunities, one might expect to find a few zealots in the lot. Not so. The ironic detachment keeps a “gung ho” attitude in check. Snowboarders seem to think they are on to something good, but they are not missionaries and encourage all to do their own thing. If snowboarding doesn’t work, try “whatever works for you, dude.” Those snowboarders who become too serious about it, do so at the risk of diminishing their coolness. And, much like the riding styles, when it comes to party styles, it is important to indulge in all sorts of things — pot, beer, sex, dancing, and talking — with moderation. The types mentioned earlier — fiender, bogart, alkie, slut, and freak — are all negative types assigned to those who violate the moderation rule.
The moderation rule pervades more than riding and partying. It shows up in everyday behaviors and work performance as well. One should be able to “just deal” with all kinds of situations:

Snowboarding, essentially, is a cool race. Everyone stands around trying to be cool. And coolness is a skill. Cool people aren’t lucky. It’s a skill. It’s the skill of being able to limit your actions. You limit your freedom to yell things at people. If you went off all the times you wanted to, people would not think you were cool. — Kris Jamieson, Professional Snowboarder, quoted in Howe (1998)

One should not get too riled by an annoying customer and show emotion. Additionally, one can not be caught executing tasks too responsibly for fear of being labeled a “brown-noser,” appearing to “suck up” to management. Additionally, ironic detachment is enacted at work and at play, present in lifties’ talk, or talk avoidance, displays, and behaviors.

Identity Summary

The lifties claim to be snowboarders who make few claims to identity; they would like to be seen as just doing their thing. Claiming to not claim is a bit conceptually torturous, but it is clearly a claim in itself. This not claiming is apparent in their talk avoidance, their hedged social comparisons, and the non-referential language used (“whatever” and “dude” come to mind). That which they do stake out — their displays, riding, and partying — is done with a pose of ironic detachment.

Lifties tie their identity claims to the leisure subculture largely because they came to this setting to participate in this leisure pursuit. Once there, their focus remains squarely on the present and it becomes difficult to conceptualize alternatives. Additionally, they are young, and in a stage of life in which it is socially acceptable,
even expected, to explore different lifestyle options, remain unfettered by commitments, and have fun.

Is this just a case of low status employees attempting to diminish the effects of the power hierarchies by denying their grounds? Evident in the above discussion, I believe it is much more than this. Ironic detachment is an ethos, not just a resistance strategy.

**Order, Authority, and Identity in Lift Operations**

How work gets done in lift ops clearly has much to do with the identities of those performing the work. The lifties’ identity claims, summarized as a pose of ironic detachment, allows for some forms of organizational authority to remain effectual; rules that don’t chafe are not challenged, and surveillance and modeling are tolerated if the supervisor is cool about it. More importantly, managers and peers are aware of the power of coolness and this enters into the work through the forms of subcultural authority to help create order.

Here we saw management not only try to work with the subcultural authority but also give it room to help create order. This “hands off” approach is perhaps an unlikely strategy for most managers with unmotivated, or at least, other-motivated employees. Management traditionally tries to tighten controls with these workers. And to be sure, the lift operations management would prefer this approach and has tried, but the strategy only backfires. There are not enough sanctions and the labor
pool is too limited to use threats to employment. Additionally, this "hands off" strategy seems to do the job, so they stick with what works.

This subcultural authority works because it is created by the lifties and brought into the work setting. Organizational authority helps to outline the tasks and set some routines, but as soon as the lifties get to know each other, this extra-organizational form of authority starts to take effect. Lifties stop using organizational authority with and on each other — there is little peer sanctioning — and managers ability to encourage the use of organizational authority wanes as lifties get more involved in their subculture. Due to their participation in and emphasis on the snowboarding subculture, a system of status differentiations in terms of coolness grows, and this system is brought into the work. Coolness influences who gets to do which kinds of work and even which kinds of work get done. The dominant theme in this subculture — coolness — exercised in the identity claiming pose of ironic detachment (along with "chick cool"), allows for some use of forms of organizational authority, but more importantly it shapes how work is done in Lift Operations.

Within this social context for both authority and identity, there are internal differentiations as to who can make claims and use authority: who is more or less cool. Some distinctions are made within the group based upon how well one lives up to the snowboarding pose of ironic detachment, in addition to their riding skills, frequency of riding and partying, and partying styles (see party identity types above). Additionally, females have the option of occasionally displaying a pose of "chick cool." These distinctions help construct a coolness hierarchy which plays an important role in how work gets done. It takes a few weeks for lifties to get to know each other
— to “suss out” who is cool, who is not, and who the vast majority of the in-betweeners are. To maintain a moderate level of coolness one must only participate in riding and parties, pick up some of the lingo, and just not appear too zealous about anything. To become really cool, one must exemplify all of the above and either have great riding skills, live in a party house, play in a band that “doesn’t suck,” or be on the leading edge of style or lingo. Again, the “uncool” are still invited to play along, and since the most important way to gain status is through participation, some measure of coolness is not hard to achieve.

So how does the lifties identity claiming pose of ironic detachment link back to the contexts and forms of authority that are effective on lifties in getting the work done? Organizational authority is used to some extent, for example, when some baseline rules are effective if not obnoxiously enforced. This is possible because of the identity claim that is not anti-authority but accepting of rules (they are too cool, and ironically detached, to be worried about it). And subcultural authority influences work accomplishment through task allocation — lifties are too detached to bother talking about the work. But more importantly, this pose, and the coolness hierarchy it helps create, reflects the context for both identity and authority. Thus, the order-authority-identity configuration is complementary, even though the defining context is extra-organizational.
Notes

83 The lift operators are not assigned to the same lift each day; there is some rotation. About two months into the season, the rotation is less frequent and lifties are more likely to work with a subset of a consistent, smaller group. There are three “complexes” on the mountain, each with two to three lifts and a supervisor responsible for the crews in their area. Lifties tend to work in a complex under one supervisor, and, over time, they are scheduled to work a particular lift more consistently. Friends can request to work together, but this is not always honored.

84 These visits provide a bit of entertainment for those in Lift Operations. The supervisors know that there is an “early warning system” for their visits. Lifties will make sure that work is getting done during these visits, but make jokes with the supervisor that they just happened to get caught working too hard. Lifties also know that it is unlikely that the supervisor will drop by again within the hour and they often find reasons for “taking a lap” (making a run) after the visit.

85 Over time the employees learn to balance the tension between keeping the line moving and protecting the safety of customers by stopping the lift. Early in the season, they are encouraged to err on the side of too many stops to prevent injuries. But if they do not learn other strategies for assisting customers and their lines are continually moving too slowly, managers will make efforts to encourage the learning of more strategies.

86 The seasoned lift operators do not all feel that their job is low status. The patrollers and instructors see themselves on the top of the seasonal work pyramid, but not all employees buy into this formulation. Even still, most recognize that a higher paying job that would allow more time for riding would be better than working 5 days a week and only getting a few runs in each day. An example of a job considered higher status by most is bartending. The tips are great, it is a social job, and days are free for riding. Bartender jobs at the resort are few and rarely turnover.

87 Coolness is defined locally; what is cool in lift operations is not necessarily cool on the patrol. Coolness is a system of social status differentiations based on enactments of the constantly updated local definition.

88 Coolness here is gauged by the extent to which these relief lifties were seen participating in the cool pursuits (riding, partying, dating other employees, etc.).

89 In this thesis I do not delve into frameworks for analyzing youth subcultures and scenes. However, a few key sources have shaped my thinking and influenced the way in which “subculture” is used in this thesis. For general readings on subcultures see the excellent collection of theoretical essays and empirical studies in Geider and Thornton (1997) and the classic work on subcultures by Hebdige (1979). For the development of subcultural scenes, see the study of a nude beach by Douglas, Rasmussen and Flanagan (1976), and the study of surfers and hippies by Irwin (1971). For a discussion of youth subcultures see Berger (1963), and for a cross cultural perspective, see Amit-Talai and Wulff (1995). For recent studies of youth scenes see Collin’s (1997) study of club kids, and Skelton and Valentine’s (1998) collection of studies of youth cultures.

90 Managers would not refer to this dynamic as the “power of coolness” or “subcultural authority,” but they admit to understanding how a cool person can change the dynamics at a lift.

91 The patrollers are also consumed with trying to look cool, but their pose is closely linked to work and coolness among patrollers is clearly defined differently than for lifties. Coolness on patrol is professionalism. When defined only with reference to patrolers’ leisure, coolness is a mountain-man macho ski god pose, which compliments professionalism in emphasizing technical competence and a serious attitude. The identity claims made in the context of work draw substance from their work world and less from their participation in leisure subcultures.

92 In Chapter 2, I previewed the friendship network labeled the “occupationally diffuse snowboarding group.”

93 Snowboarding had become the fashionable winter leisure pursuit for middle to upper middle class, particularly, white, urban and suburban teens and twentysomethings (perhaps slightly more for males than females) in the United States at the time of this study.
The role of talk avoidance in the performance of work is explored more fully in the section on order. My early efforts to learn lifties' backgrounds by direct questioning were thwarted. Even asking what department one worked in got me in trouble. More importantly, lift operators don't bother to ask each other these questions unless there is a clear reason to do so (someone has an accent or mentions they are going home for the next few days, for example).

Jumps attempted with success or failure. Snowboarder lingo translated: freaky = borderline out of control; huge = when referring to a jump, it means that the snowboarder was in the air for a long time and/or landed at a great distance from the jump, and/or made a skillful maneuver in the air; phat = very good; air = noun, a jump performed, verb (to get air) performing a jump; launched = a jump initiated; sweet = very good; kicker = jump; nailed = very successfully accomplished; drilled = very successfully accomplished; cratered = a jump with a landing where someone falls and leaves a hole, crater, in the snow; beatered = a jump with a landing where the fall is one in which the body is slammed repeatedly on the snow; spanked = (usually one "gets spanked") a particularly bad fall, not necessarily resulting in injury, but, at least, of good visual effect.

The general public often thinks of ski resort employees as ski bums just taking a "time out" from their real lives. As conventional wisdom has it, they are attempting to escape their pasts and put decisions about the future — career, relationships, residence — on hold (see Economist, Feb. 22, 1997, p. 96 “Full Time Pastime.”). And while this is true of a number of lift operators, a time out from identity is a logical impossibility. One must invoke some sense of self and other to guide actions (Mead, 1934). The self then shifts from affiliations with the past or orientations toward the future and are drawn from the relevant local social worlds presently available. Identity, during a “time out” is not put on hold, but it takes on new meaning in the present location.

Mitchell (1983) also notes how the pursuit of adventure creates an emphasis on the present. Additionally, Moffatt (1991), in his study Rutgers undergraduates, notes that those in this age cohort rely heavily on what they learn from their peers. Howe (1998: p. 46) quotes the Editor of Transworld Snowboarding Magazine’s description of cool Seattle area snowboarders on the topic of bragging (known as “spewing” or “spraying”): “They don’t spray [brag] about how good they are, they just go out and get good. Then they act all self-deprecating and quiet.”

At the end of my first season of fieldwork I worked in Human Resources, assisting the staff in filing “separation paperwork” and collecting uniforms. I had the opportunity to ask these questions in casual conversation.

Traditional social categories — gender, race, class, occupation, educational background, place of origin — are dismissed by lifties as largely irrelevant in this subculture. These categories are rarely used in conversation or probed by fellow employees with each other. And as my research was not covert, I was called upon to defend sociology more than once. Eighty percent of the seasonal workers have some college education, so it was not terribly surprising to hear critiques of academe deployed by the more talkative lifties. It was argued (by no less than 3 people) that sociology reifies social categories. Additionally, the everyday application of a broad social category to an individual is stereotyping and is almost always unwarranted (argued by 4 people).

Howe (1998) details the history of snowboarding in its evolution from an anti-authority punk affiliation to this more mellow ironic attitude I observed. She sees the most recent permutation of the subculture as a turn towards calm pose emphasizing spirituality and mysticism in the experience of nature.

There are a number of brands that were popular with snowboarders: Arnett’s, Black Flys, Oakleys, etc. — what was important was the wrapped, bug-eye shape.

There is a small employee dorm that most employees try to move out of rather quickly. The dorm is owned by Mt. Polaris, houses up to 80 employees, with up to four people in 25 one bedroom units. Many complain that the rent is expensive for what one is getting and find alternative housing in town with their dorm roommates.
As elaborated in the section on order, lifties have a number of strategies for taking extra laps and covering for each other (excuses include taking bathroom breaks, getting more trail maps, getting more garbage bags, and rotating posts).
5 Conclusion

In the ski patrol, we observe a synergistic configuration of order-authority-identity. Patrollers' identify with the work through their claims to professionalism, which makes them more sensitive to organizational authority in the creation of order. In lift operations, the employees identify with their snowboarding subculture, which allows for the use of some minor forms of organizational authority, but also creates a whole new subcultural authority that employees draw from to get the work done. In both departments, complementary configurations of order-authority-identity are observed, primarily because the context for authority and identity are shared. The contexts brought into the work setting — the organization and the snowboarding subculture — are different, but order is observed in both departments. The themes circulating in these contexts shape the forms of authority used, the kinds of identity claims made, and the modes of work accomplishment, but even when the primary context for authority and identity is extra-organizational, the work gets done.

The story of order and identity in the Ski Patrol department fits the familiar formula found in the literature. The employees identify with their work and, with only a few minor deviations, comply with the organizationally ordained ways of
doing things. The identity claims patrollers bring to their work setting consist of status enhancing affiliations with most of the tasks they perform summarized here as “Professionals.” As professionals, they perform their work with diligence, drawing on the resource of organizational authority to define work situations and enact sanctioned practices.

This dynamic is consistent with the large and growing literature on organizational identification (see Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). In a recent review, Pratt (1998: p. 172) defines organizational identification as “occur[ing] when an individual’s beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining.” Inquiry into identification either explicitly or implicitly posits organizational benefits in terms of behavioral compliance, reduced conflict, and higher levels of performance (Cheney, 1983; Dutton, et. al. 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Tajfel, 1981). And as Kunda (1992) describes in detail, managers are aware of the organizational benefits of identification and go to great lengths to foster this value congruence. Some theorists have even gone as far to suggest that employees should be selected based on their “fit” — norm and value congruence — with the organization (Chatman, 1989; O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Yet this line of prescriptive reasoning is problematic when we consider the dynamic observed in the lift operations department. Lifties do not make identity claims with reference to the organization, yet the work gets done.

Lift operators’ central identity claim in the work setting is drawn from their subculture and can be summarized as a pose of ironic detachment. They exhibit role distance (Goffman, 1961), particularly from their work, and draw the content of their claim (as a non-claim) from their affiliations with the occupationally diffuse
snowboarding subculture. Work gets done with some minor reference to organizational authority, but more importantly, the authority connected to the subculture is brought into the work situation to support work accomplishment. This dynamic supports organizational objectives in the Lift Operations department for four reasons: the content of the identity claim — ironic detachment — does not prevent the effectiveness of some forms of organizational authority; the lifties recognize, participate in, and construct this subculture with its own systems of authority; they bring this type of authority to the workplace to sort out how things get done; and management takes a hands off approach to the dynamic and even uses subcultural authority to shape work accomplishment.

Identification theories and associated theories of commitment and person-organization fit can not account for this dynamic. Prescriptive theories of identification would predict that order would be difficult to achieve, and, if it were achieved, that employees would experience cognitive dissonance from their behavioral compliance, but substantive identification with an extra-organizational source (Dukerich, Kramer & 1998). These theories have trouble accounting for the dynamic in lift operations because the processes underlying identification are not well understood. This study makes a contribution to this literature by elaborating the link between order and identity through introducing the concept of authority.

Order is conceptualized as action which can be recognized as patterned. When individuals encounter situations that call for action, they sort through action possibilities and draw on meaningful social contexts of authority to settle on a particular act. This act is made legitimate through the reference to that social context.
authority, present in a number of forms (i.e., organizational authority is manifest in protocols, veteran coaching, and peer sanctioning; subcultural authority is present in managers' playing chess with employees, and peers' task allocation and setting of work standards). The contexts of authority that are meaningful to the actor stem from the actors' identities, which are salient in the situation calling for action. Identity, theorized here as consisting of "action claims," is made with reference to a social context as well, thus creating the connection between identity and authority. These claims are manifest in talk -- assertions and comparisons-- displays, and behaviors, and reflect themes circulating in the target social context. Identity claims are those actions that are particularly imbued with meaning and, if they are to endure, are validated by the audience to the identity performances.

The configuration of order, authority, and identity serves as a useful framework for understanding the goings on in the Ski Patrol and in Lift Operations. It can explain both organizational identification and extra-organizational identification in support of work performance. In the case of organizational identification -- the traditional type of identification considered in the literature -- both management and peers created forms of organizational authority that were taken up by employees to perform work acts that were seen as legitimate. In the case of extra-organizational identification, a context of authority was present in the subculture the employees participated in and drew identity claims from. This subcultural authority was created and used by peers to shape work accomplishment, but was effective only because management did not try to counteract its effects and even tried to use it to their benefit.
Some kinds of order can be said to be in the organization's interests, whereas others can be disruptive. But this is an empirical question, and, in this study, the order observed in both departments was in support of organizational goals. The fact that order was directed towards organizational objectives in lift operations even though the employees did not identify with the occupation or organization is an important point. This begs questions, not as much of the identification literature, as this case would have been overlooked, but of the person-organization fit and commitment literatures.

Person-organization fit is a concept that should be seriously reconsidered in light of these findings. There need not be norm and value congruence between employees and organizations for successful work accomplishment, as my study shows. The theory of person-organization fit, if used for employee selection, is a blunt and unnecessary instrument in the service of managers' grasps for control.

Commitment may not be necessary if there are other forms of authority available for employees to draw on that also lend support to organizational objectives. The most common managerial impulse when confronted with a workforce lacking interest in the job is to impose restrictive controls to ensure a baseline level of work accomplishment. Usually this alienates employees and makes for sub-optimal work accomplishment, creating more need for controls, thus making for a vicious cycle (Gouldner, 1954). Managers should look to draw on other sources of authority, or just let these authorities operate if the actions they foster are not at odds with the work that needs to get done. I suspect that other organizations with employee populations participating in a leisure subculture which intersects with work — record
stores, coffee shops, nightclubs, and theaters — might be well instructed by this theory. And it is my hope that this theory will be used by managers in any context to expand the possibilities of achieving order that are customized to employees’ identities.

It should be clear that the organizational and managerial implications of the observed configurations are positive; the work gets done. Perhaps with less direct control than the lift managers would like, but it gets done nonetheless. And while the configurations might be less oppressive for some individuals than traditional managerial control techniques, there are still a few negative consequences for some employees. Those lifties unable to wield subcultural authority for whatever reason — those who are not constructed as “cool” — get more than their fair share of work under this arrangement. And while they are complicit in the production of order, they have fewer forms of authority to draw on and are less able to restore a more balanced workload. In the Ski Patrol, since their identities and the authorities used are wrapped up in work, the implications for fairness are less problematic, but still apparent. For example, the favored rookies get the reward of skiing out-of bounds with the Assistant Director. And the patrollers that do not buy into the gung-ho approach to work become marginalized. In other contexts, the implications of order, authority and identity configurations would depend on how they manifest locally.

In this dissertation, I have pursued a primary objective: to develop a framework for exploring the link between order, authority, and identity. The empirical story told through the vehicle of this frame shows how a complementary configuration of order, authority, and identity can exist such that individuals can draw
identity claims and authority from extra-organizational contexts, yet still get the work done. This finding should encourage managers and employees in other work settings to explore more creative ways for satisfying organizational objectives to allow for the possibility of having employees bring their identities to work.
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163


