THE
POPULAR
CULTURE
STUDIES JOURNAL

SPECIAL EDITION

PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

SPECIAL SECTION FOR

SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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Editorial: Grappling with Boundaries of Legitimacy

NORMA JONES

In the previous editorial, I wrote about how and why popular culture scholars are different. It is no surprise that we cross disciplinary silos and examine issues that may be traditionally outside of the boundaries set by the ivory tower. This, then, begs the following questions: what the boundaries around which we should study and how we should study those issues?

For me, it is in these uncertain spaces that we, as popular culture scholars, should have the most impact. These, perhaps, uncomfortable spaces are our wheelhouses and our playgrounds. In them, we can help to break down some traditional silos that divide us, artificially. It is up to us to help use the tools of popular culture to not only understand elements of humanity, but also potentially help address issues that plague us. It is up to us to break the walls that silence. In other words, it is up to us to grapple with the boundaries of legitimacy.

About this Issue

You might notice that we have changed our format this year. Instead of a double issue presented during at the annual conference Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference, we will be releasing issues twice a year.

In this issue, Alanna R. Miller addresses cultural understandings of gender through two films. From there, Peter B. Gregg discusses LEGOs and brick-olage. Then, Melissa Sartori considers history and its relationship with popular culture.

About the Special Edition - Professional Wrestling

The concept of grappling with legitimacy is especially important when considering our special edition. When Garret Castleberry approached me about creating a special edition on professional wrestling, as a field of interdisciplinary study, I had these very thoughts of the boundaries of legitimacy and appropriateness in mind. Just like our previous, award-winning, special issue regarding popular culture and autoethnography, we have an opportunity *run to* (as Bob Batchelor put it) a new space in popular culture studies. We cannot *run away* from the boundaries of legitimacy. We should keep pushing against them.

In the special edition, editors, CarrieLynn D. Reinhard, Garret Castleberry, and Christopher J. Olson, have assembled an impressive collection of works discussing professional wrestling from diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. They also collected essays that are a part of our reviews section, including discussions of works on and off the page (including video games and films).

About the Special Section - Sexual Assault Awareness Month

As part of breaking silos, we venture outside of the ivory tower walls of academia to address issues of sexual assault. We focus on experiences and advice from survivors, investigators, and law enforcement. I would like to thank Jenna Quinn, Sarah Green, Bernadette Markowski, and our

anonymous survivors for helping us frame the discussions we should be having about sexual assault.

A Few Final Words of Thanks

Before I sign off, I would like to think Julia Largent for her instrumental contributions and assistance as our managing editor. Once again, the reviews section would not be possible without our reviews editor Malynnda Johnson, and her assistant Jessica Benham. I would also like to welcome Kevin Calcamp as our new eagle-eyed copy editor. *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* could not exist without their valuable time and contributions. As always, I want to think my husband/partner, Brent Jones, for making another unique cover for us. His work continues to make *PCSJ* stand out among the sea of academic journals.

Dance with the Devil: Representations of Femininity, Masculinity, and the Boss-from-Hell in Two Parallel Films

ALANNA R. MILLER

Whether it is Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg telling us to "lean in" or comedian Amy Schumer satirizing women's tendency towards apology and conciliation, we are surrounded by advice and debate about how women should behave in the workplace (Brooks; Crosley). And this ongoing gender self-reflection has a parallel in cultural representations in film. Working women, especially married women with children, "hardly exist as film protagonists" until the 1980s, when representation started to increase to mirror 62 percent of women then working (Boozer 52-53). Although the increased visibility of women in films about the workplace can be praised, changing the number of women does not necessarily create a corresponding change in the perception nor the status of women, as the past year and the #MeToo moment, with many women coming forward with countless stories of sexual harassment, has shown (Gilbert; Johnson and Hawbaker; Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards). Changing the perception or status of women depends on changing our cultural understanding of gender.

Our cultural understanding of gender and how women should behave in the workplace is highly influenced by our cultural products. It is through mass media that we reinforce who we are as a culture (Carey 23). Carey discusses communication as a way in which culture is constructed and reinforced. Representations from cultural products, especially widely-circulated popular cultural products, are central to this construction of reality. "We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through the construction of various symbol systems: art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology" (30). Films should therefore be closely scrutinized for the messages they circulate to ascertain how specifically gender is constructed through culture.

I use poststructural feminism and masculinity studies to analyze the gender messages in two parallel films about the workplace: David Frankel's beloved chick flick about a young woman trying to survive the fashion industry, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), based on Lauren Weisberger's novel of the same name, and George Huang's biting black comedy about a young man trying to survive the movie industry, *Swimming with Sharks* (1994) (Frankel; Huang). The two films parallel each other in plot and details of production with the main difference lying in the gender of the protagonist. No other films about the workplace parallel each other in quite this way. While other films do deal with both bad working conditions, such as *9 to 5* (1980), or bad bosses, such as *Horrible Bosses* (2011), or workers that hate their jobs, such as *Office Space* (1999), often these films show revenge against the bosses or rebellion against the job, which neither of the selected films portray. The films selected here show the same protagonist journey of entering an industry, encountering challenges with work-life balance as well as a strong, overbearing boss, learning to thrive, before ultimately deciding a new path in life. It is also important that both films were based on the actual experiences of the writers in those industries. These films then expose the different messages men and women receive about their place in the workplace, given similar sets of circumstances. Through examination of two cultural products, we can uncover the myths and assumptions of gender that are further influencing the ongoing debate about gender in the workplace.

These messages, I argue, involve a different sacrifice of identity to gender roles for men and women. For men, identity is intrinsically tied to work, requiring a Faustian deal of identity-sacrifice for economic success through hyper-masculinity. For women, identity is reduced to the external of appearances, appearing, masquerade, and performing. These messages reinforce the workplace as a male space, potentially contributing to real world harassment and hostile work environments. Both messages demand conformity to gender roles in support of capitalism, which makes these messages similar to the Protestant religious messages Weber contended supported the capitalist system.

Poststructuralist Feminist Theory, Masculinity Studies, and Film

This study uses several of the underlying assumptions of poststructuralist feminism to examine representations of women in film. Specifically, this study is

built on the non-essentialist assumptions that gender is socially constructed and perpetuated through structures and cultural representations (Beauvoir 185-248). Fictional representations are central to the construction of gender. Film representations of femininity matter for two reasons: First, these portrayals reflect the underlying assumptions of the culture in which they were created (Allen 22). And second, these images, through the power of mass media, define reality. If gender is constructed through social agreement and interaction, mass media, through repeated affirmation of patterns for gender and pervasive presence in our social lives, take on the aura of reality. Lauretis noted that film, itself, presents the spectator with an array of meanings with which the spectator must reconcile with a constantly constructed notion of self. "As social beings, women are constructed through effects of language and representation. Just as the spectator, the term of the moving series of filmic images, is taken up and moved along successive positions of meaning, a woman (or man) is not an undivided identity, a stable unity of 'consciousness,' but the term of a shifting series of ideological positions" (Lauretis 14). Both in film and reality, men and women are presented with gendered ideologies which interpellate and demand response. This study seeks to examine what gender construction looks like within film because the spectator's experience is concurrently paralleling that process of construction. The representations of women in film circulate discourses through which we learn gender and perpetuate certain patterns of gender in real life. This analysis connects the process of gender construction in cultural representations to the ways existing poststructural feminist thought, such as that of Butler and Beauvoir, conceive gender constructions in real life. These films specifically are filmic representations of gender construction through Lacan's mirror stage and gender as performance and masquerade, all resulting in the creation of the gendered worker. Film constructs gender on screen, which interpellates women, contributing to the construction of gender off screen.

This study seeks to examine representations of both femininity and masculinity in film, and so it is important to note that men are also presented with socially constructed images of themselves through the media. Masculinity theorists generally agree on several assumptions: masculinity is not monolithic, there are no essential differences between men and women, and that both genders have an interest in studying and exposing gender as a construction (Gardiner 11-12).

Studies examining masculinity in film are frequently organized around a "crisis" in masculinity. However, theorists do not agree on the nature of this crisis. For some, it is the undermining of the traditional power inherent in masculinity (Gardiner 5). The problem with this interpretation of the crisis is both the assumption of a "golden age" of masculinity and equating masculinity with power (Gardiner 14; Seidler 210).

For other theorists, the crisis is men's inability to adhere to an oppressive sex role (Pleck, "The Myth of Masculinity," 4). Much work in masculinity studies involves defining these roles and their restrictive social effect. Many theorists propose different typologies of the male sex role (for a more complete analysis of typologies and influences of these roles see Pleck, "The Male Sex Role" and "The Myth of Masculinity," 139-42), but these typologies can be summarized as a more traditional and a more modern role. The more traditional role is concerned with strength, aggression, and lack of emotion, while the more modern role is more tied to economic achievement and organizational power (Pleck, "The Myth of Masculinity," 140). These types are implicit in our ideas about what a man in the media.

Men in the Workplace in Film

More attention has been paid to representations of women than men in the workplace for obvious reasons. It is still considered unusual to see workplace films primarily featuring women, and thus it is an interesting subject of inquiry. An analysis by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media found that women were still vastly outnumbered as professionals by men in film and television. For example, only 3.4% of characters that are top-level business executives are women in top-grossing films and popular television shows from 2006 to 2011 (Smith, et al. 4). Often, in analyses of films about the workplace, the gender of characters is taken-for-granted as male. This, in itself, reflects the invisibility of masculinity; being masculine in the workplace is normal, reflecting a larger culture treating women in the workplace as marginal.

Films also reflect our cultural economic values. American culture tends to equate morality with economics, specifically in ideas such as the Protestant ethic (Weber 115-121) and the American Dream (Winn). Films such as *Working Girl* (1988) and *Wall Street* (1987) are moral tales, which impart the positive value of

work and capitalism (Winn). But *Wall Street* reflects the conflicting perception of morality in American business, where working class values are praised, but the upper class, despite their immorality, are still glamorized (Boozer 2; Winn 132-38). The most compelling character in *Wall Street* is its villain Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas). His quote, "Greed is good," is the most recognized line of the film (Stone). Despite, the condemnation of Gekko in the film, he is still the charismatic center of it. In a less ambivalent portrayal of Wall Street, Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) glamorizes not just American business and acquisition of wealth, but an overt, graphic misogyny as an inherent part of that acquisition. And while the Gekko-esque main character Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio) proclaims "There is no nobility in poverty," the movie builds in his working-class roots to make even his illegal and exploitative acquisition of wealth palatable to the audience (Scorsese). Salek noted the ambivalence under this glamorization of wealth in his rhetorical analysis of the film, which also connects these messages to real world de-regulation of Wall Street and Donald Trump's ascendency to the White House:

> Even though *The Wolf of Wall Street* may not be directly about the 2008 financial crisis and was written well before Trump ran for the presidency, the film and rhetoric from Belfort act as a homology for an ambivalent culture willing to look past unethical and amoral acts. Although Belfort may have been punished, his story has been glorified and retold by himself in two books, on his blog, and by a Hollywood filmmaker. (14)

In these films, it is money, not might, that makes right. Salek shows the cultural ambivalence towards the acquisition of wealth at the expense of morality and connects that ambivalence to real world glamorization of a lifestyle that places money above all. Considering the extreme misogyny of the Belfort character, it follows that misogyny then becomes a part of this glamorization.

Panayoitou noted men's identity were tied to their job in films about the workplace (661). In her study of films about the workplace, she found two competing narratives: the macho manager and the organizational hero. The macho manager was constructed with an emphasis on financial success being linked to sexuality, the acquisition of "things" (including women as a thing), the importance of hard work, and the de-emphasis of the domestic sphere in a lack of a home-life (667-68). The organizational hero conversely attempts to maintain

authenticity within the organization (673-74). Panayoitou noted that there is a reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity because even in the resistance of the organization, women are largely absent (678). What Panayoitou does not note however is that in many of the films she examined, this resulted in an outright rejection of the organization altogether, such as in the main character becoming a construction worker in *Office Space* (1999) or the main character in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) being turned into the authorities (Judge; Mamet). Although the organizational hero is frequently the protagonist in these films, they are also frequently ejected from the system or punished.

In general, films about the workplace portray the corporation as good for America, individual Americans, and the American family (Boozer 22). In particular, films about the workplace have reinforced the modern male sex type, presenting economic success as central to what it is to be a man. "In sum, through the corporate executive film, the Hollywood studio industry enlarged the myth of masculine accomplishment to include a form of career success marked by both professionalism and bureaucratic conformity" (Boozer 48). As Boozer noted, these films tie men's identity to their profession and their sense of worth to economic success. These films also encourage a loyalty to men's job, creating cultural value in blind allegiance to an organization driven by profit. All this ideological work supports a capitalist system, while also separating men from their home and personal life.

In another kind of film about the workplace, masculinity-in-crisis films typically reflect the idea that as a result of the changing world, men have lost their status and are struggling with their identity. The classic example is the film *Falling Down* (1993), where a middle class, white man who has lost his job and family goes on a violent rampage through Los Angeles simply to "get home" (Schumacher). This film, as with other masculinity-in-crisis films, is tied to men's economic power, therefore reinforcing the modern male sex type. In this instance, the result is a return to a violent, traditional male role. *The Full Monty* (1997) shows a group of unemployed factory workers who can only get their masculinity back through the display of the source of it-- the phallus (Tincknell and Chambers 148-52). Implicit in these films is also the threat by women and the women's movement (Baker 65; Tincknell and Chambers 154). The masculinity-in-crisis films imply the presence of women in the workplace threatens men's well-being and sense of identity because their sense of self is tied to their job.

Women in the Workplace in Film

Women in the workplace were rare in film until the 1980s. When women did appear working they tended to be either "shamed mothers" or highly sexualized (Boozer 61-63). Unlike what Friedan found in women's magazines, so-called women's films in wartime were more likely to feature waiting wives, than businesswomen (Haskell 192). Working women in early film tended to be historical figures, whose limited gains posed no real threat to the enduring male dominance (Haskell 181). The earliest career women in films were ambitious women that at some point in the film broke down, declaring that all they really wanted was to be a housewife (Walsh 138). *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *Adam's Rib* (1949) provide interesting insight into the portrayal of businesswomen in earlier film. *Adam's Rib,* while posing questions about justice and gender (Lucia 1), still reinforces the stereotype of the "emotional" female lawyer against the "rational" male prosecutor and ends with the female lawyer chastised and ready for domesticity (Walsh 151). The protagonist in *Mildred Pierce* is most glamorized and sympathetic when she is most domestic (Lloyd and Johnson 15; Walsh 125). Walsh noted that when women succeed in business there is a price they must pay, according to these films. "A darkness shrouds female success; economic gain is paralleled by maternal failure" (Walsh 131). The main character eventually pays for her economic success with a corresponding failure in her role as a mother. Economic success and characters' roles as women are treated as mutually exclusive; happiness then only exists outside the workplace. Both films, though considered progressive, reinforce domesticity and female stereotypes.

Following feminism's second wave, portrayals of women in the workplace increased, but there was a tendency toward creating villains of those women (Boozer 67-70). *Working Girl* (1988) features the prototypical female executive villain, who schemes, lies, and manipulates people, frequently using her sexuality to do so (Nichols). It is important to point out, however, that the protagonist and the antagonist both scheme, lie, and manipulate people (Boozer 71-72). The key difference between the characters then is that the protagonist, who is more feminine than her boss and without the boss's power, is less threatening to the audience and therefore more sympathetic.

Women executive characters in the 1980s tended to learn the value of domestic life, making these films similar to the films that came before in advocating a return to domesticity. In *Baby Boom* (1987), the main character

chooses motherhood over career (Boozer 75), returning home where "she belongs." This reflects what Devereaux calls the "recuperative strategy" of film: "This [character's] return operates both within the narrative and externally, in the narrative's effect on its female audience. Internally, the Hollywood narrative typically charts the course by which a woman in a non-normative role cedes her control to a man" (Devereaux 341). Thus, these films though seeming to provide new representations of women in the workplace, still retained a message of exclusion and non-belonging. These new career women of the 1980s left us with the conclusion that work and domestic spheres must be separated and that dangerous sexuality was something that still needed to be tamed by men (Kaplan 413).

These films about the workplace reinforce both men and women's sex roles. Furthermore, they show the importance of economics to men and domesticity to women. Men's identity is seen as derived from occupation. Alternatively, women are frequently encouraged out of the workplace. Work is seen as a threat to feminine identity. And women's sexuality is frequently used in these films to undercut their economic success.

The Devil Wears Prada and *Swimming with Sharks*

In order to investigate some of the messages that men and women receive about gender in the workplace, I analyzed two films that parallel each other in many respects but differ in the gender of both the protagonist and antagonist. *The Devil Wears Prada*, based on a novel by the same name, features a newly graduated journalism student, Andrea "Andy" Sachs (Anne Hathaway), who gets a job working for the editor of a premiere fashion magazine in New York City, *Runway*. The only problem is her boss, Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), who is demanding, cold and cruel (Frankel). *Swimming with Sharks* features a newly graduated film student, Guy (Frank Whaley), who gets a job working for a senior vice president of a premiere movie studio in Los Angeles, Keystone Pictures. The only problem is his boss, Buddy Ackerman (Kevin Spacey), who is demanding, abusive, and cruel (Huang). (A role that Spacey seemed to reprise in 2011's *Horrible Bosses* and the more recent sequel.) The similarities between these premises are striking, but the paths the protagonists take are strikingly different. While Andy, eventually disillusioned with the sacrifices required to be successful

in a highly competitive industry, decides to leave and pursue something else, Guy kidnaps and tortures Buddy before finally allying with him and being rewarded for doing so (Frankel; Huang).

Both of these stories take place in the media world, which are also institutions that create representations of reality, telling us who we are. Workplace conflict is a central feature of both films. In both films, the protagonists struggle to place their personal lives and professional lives in harmony. Another important similarity in these texts is that both stories were based on real world experiences. Lauren Weisberger, the author of the novel *The Devil Wears Prada*, famously based the novel on her experience working for Anna Wintour, editor of *Vogue*. And although Weisberger denies the worst parts of the Miranda Priestly character came from Wintour (Didcock 12), many in the fashion industry and documentaries since indicate there may be more truth to the fiction (Gordon 21; Le Marie 56). Also, some scholars see the movie as able to tap into particularly young female audiences' way of viewing the business world. York, in her analysis, argues that the film is uniquely suited to millennial women and is a "screen version of women's lives" (11). York's statement indicates audiences may respond to the film as a guide for surviving the workplace (Frankel).

George Huang, the screenwriter for *Swimming with Sharks*, based his script on his experience working for various producers in Hollywood. Although it is generally agreed upon by those in Hollywood on whom the Buddy Ackerman character is based, Huang has never indicated it was any one producer in particular (Carr 53; Creed 10; Kemp 19). These films were chosen because of these close similarities. No other workplace films, before or since, parallel these films as closely as they parallel each other. Additionally, the fact that the major difference in plot is the gender of the protagonist and antagonist allows me to focus specifically on gender messages.

There are limitations to my choices, however. The movies do not completely parallel each other in terms of production. The movies were released ten years apart. There could be a difference in the culture of the times. Considering how long differences in treatment and perception of men and women have existed, however, ten years is not a substantial period of time. It has been ten years since *The Devil Wears Prada* and issues of gender and work/life balance are still very much publicly discussed and debated (Gilbert; Slaughter). The bigger limitation is the difference between mainstream and independent film. *The Devil Wears Prada* was produced and distributed by a large studio, whereas *Swimming with Sharks*

was produced independently. This production difference could denote differences in aesthetics and message. However, the blurring of the line between independent film content and studio film content that has happened over the last two decades indicates this distinction is less and less important to analysis (Whitelaw 16; Roman 15). For the purposes of this study, however, the similarities between the plots of the films outweigh any difference related to differences in production or genre. Another limitation of this study is the use of only two films. An examination of two films is not a survey of all the possible messages on the subject. However, it is unusual to have two films so similar with the main differences being the gender of the main characters. Further examination of gender messages in other films about the workplace are outside the scope of this study but would be a useful subject of inquiry for future studies, along with audience reception of such messages.

The Birth of a Worker

Both films characterize the boss as a surrogate parent of the worker, which is similar to other findings in other studies examining films about the workplace (Cady; Lucia 69-74). Thus, the cultural representation of gender construction in the films begins at the same place gender construction begins in real life, as children. It is only through the social construction of the parents that we become a gender (Beauvoir 249-306). Beauvoir discussed the gendering of children through the behavior of the parents, through the forced independence of boy-children, glorification of the phallus, encouragement towards doll-play and narcissism for girl-children, and instilling passivity in girls and action in boys (252-53; 260-61). Children through the preferences and actions of parents assume gender roles, which become social norms, but are built on top of a neutral base.

Similarly, the child-characters begin the film as gender-neutral and become "gendered" through their work parents. Andy prefers the use of a male name to her female name, Andrea. The film opens with a montage of contrasts between feminine women and Andy. We see that what is portrayed as normal for women is to wear black lacy underwear, obsess about the clothes they wear, put on make-up and high-heels, and measure their food out carefully as to not gain weight. Women, according to the film, are therefore mostly sexuality and external appearance. Andy, on the other hand, does none of these things and is concerned

with none of those things exposing her as a non-feminine female. York in her analysis interprets this sequence as constructing Andy as an "everygirl," but clearly the filmmakers are establishing a contrast here between normative and non-normative through setting her apart from the multiple examples shown (Frankel; York 14). This reduction of women to the appearance of femininity is also the reason Hollinger's analysis of the film as a rejection of second-wave feminism doesn't seem consistent. Hollinger interprets Miranda as the representation of second-wave feminism in her portrayal of the "hard-edged professional woman," which Andy, as the representation of post-feminism, ultimately rejects (56). However, most of what Miranda enacts, and what Andy becomes compelled to do, is a performance of femininity. Thus, the emptiness of female performance is what is rejected, not second-wave feminism.

Guy, similarly, is gender-neutral. Guy's interaction with his love interest, Dawn (Michelle Forbes), a more masculine female, emphasizes this. While Dawn aggressively protects her parking space and territory from him, he simpers and apologizes for his ignorance. When they have drinks, Dawn swills her scotch on the rocks, while Guy sips his white wine. Guy is not portrayed as feminine per se but does not have the typical masculine traits implicit in gender roles.

As parents, Miranda and Buddy instill gender in their children. Shortly after the speech where Miranda tells Andy that she was disappointed in her, Andy decides she needs a make-over to keep her job. It is through Miranda's approving looks afterwards we know this is what Miranda wanted. Miranda's influence is nearly always indirect, or passive aggressive, an aggression style popularly associated with women. She only needs to pointedly look at Andy's comfortable work shoes to indicate Andy must change to high-heels.

Buddy more directly teaches Guy his gender and the central part of that gender is economic. In one tirade, Buddy tells Guy to "show a little back bone," and "you gotta be a man to do this job" (Huang). Later, when discussing Dawn, Buddy gives him the following advice: "Shut up and listen. Women, they respond to one thing and one thing only: success. Now, this isn't just me talking; this is scientific-- sit down. This is scientific fact. It is primitive instinct for a woman like Dawn to choose a mate who can best provide for her needs, for her wants" (Huang). We see here that Buddy is clearly advocating essential differences between men and women, and these differences are reflected in their ability to work. Most importantly, he is reinforcing the modern male sex type of a man's value being tied to his job. It is through this speech Buddy convinces him that

Guy needs to be promoted to keep his girlfriend and the only way to do that is to follow Buddy.

It is through this parental influence that the bosses both manipulate and influence the identity of the main characters. One of the key developmental phases, according to Lacan, is the mirror stage, where a child begins to recognize their independence from their parent through visual recognition in the mirror (75-78). The mirror stage is the child's entrance into the symbolic order, producing a repression of otherness. The recognition is also a misrecognition producing a unified identity through identification with something outside self. This mirror recognition/misrecognition is one reproduced in cinema, creating the illusion of a unified subject covering the complexity of difference (Gledhill 167). The film-mirror as discussed here represses the difference of the spectator. In this instance, that same difference-repressed spectator then watches as the character becomes gendered and absorbed by the boss-parent's identity. As the spectator becomes a unified conforming subject, they then watch the protagonist do so, as well.

The entry into the workplace is portrayed in these films as a reverse mirror phase where the worker is integrated into the identity of the boss, particularly in terms of gender performance, in order to survive in the extremely competitive environment. Thus, a new misrecognition from identification is formed from an outside source, motivated by capitalist necessity. Hollinger calls Miranda the "all-powerful phallic mother" in her analysis (56). Andy's name becomes a central part of the struggle between her own identity and Miranda's. At the beginning of the film, Miranda refers to Andy as "the new Emily" or Emily, who is the other assistant (Emily Blunt) to imply she should be more like Emily, a glamorous, but selfish and stuck-up, young woman. She also is called "Miranda-girl" by others in the fashion world, showing her identity as dependent on Miranda. Guy, similarly, is known as "Buddy Ackerman's boy." Buddy strips him of that personality so he can replace it with another. One year into Guy's time with Buddy, he is the exact visage of Buddy. This is illustrated in a scene where Guy is sitting in Buddy's office chair, using Buddy's head-set and parroting Buddy's earlier tirade in order to berate a delivery man. Guy's loss of identity caused his hyper-masculine violence and the eventual alliance with Buddy at the end of the film. Andy, on the other hand, never completely loses her identity. In order to discover why, we must both examine the boss/parent character and their source of power.

Performing the Devil's Dance with the Devil's Pitchfork

Both boss characters enact gendered performances to exert their power over the protagonists. Feminist poststructuralist theory examines gender as a performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 183-95). Through performance, gender is not a category, but a continuous production (10). Butler noted that the anticipation of authority is what causes performance (*Gender Trouble* xv), meaning that the performance is in anticipation of future imagined sanctions. Buddy and Miranda's gendered performances create actual sanctions for Guy and Andy, exposing the audience to a concrete requirement for gender performance. According to Butler, most important to this performance is the heterosexual imperative (*Gender Trouble* 23-4). Thus, the performances are oriented towards traditional notions of heterosexual femininity and masculinity, specifically an emphasis on Andy's appearance and encouragement towards control and violence for Guy. This reduction of women to bodies is something Butler writes about: "The association of the body with the female works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (*Gender Trouble* 16). And the equating of woman with appearing and male with doing is an old pattern in film noted by Mulvey.

Non-normative expressions, such as Guy and Andy's initial appearance in the film, problematize gender or create "gender trouble" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xii) and thus must be taught to conform or driven from the workplace. In other words, performances that do not fit what is considered normal cause crises of identity in the inability to comprehend self for both the non-normative subject and those around the subject. Thus, it becomes a societal imperative to enforce normative performance.

This conceptualization of gender as performance is omnipresent in both films through the characters of Miranda and Buddy, consistent with Butler's repetitive embodied notion of performativity: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender Trouble* 45). It is, in fact, the repetition of these messages that makes audiences susceptible to the gender performance as well. Miranda and Buddy perform the devil, it is a role they enact to get a desired effect from those over which they have power. But the characters perform the devil in very gender-specific ways.

The performances become most apparent when the performance is broken. Buddy puts on emotion, but a masculine, violent emotion. He will scream and throw things at Guy at one moment and, as soon as Guy is gone, calmly sit down and smile. As this performance is obviously a construction, the revealing of the unnaturalness to the audience could be a subversion of the naturalness of violence in masculinity. Something Butler calls for herself in her work (*Gender Trouble* 45-6). But such a subversion requires also an ability to understand the subject outside the very gendered system that constructed the subject. The audience cannot then benefit from this insight because they are presented with these messages within the gendered system of film. And the fact that Guy does not see this constructedness also makes the reality of that performance incomprehensible to him, causing him to internalize the violence, which he then enacts on Buddy. Buddy's performance of hypermasculinity and violence cripples Guy's identity, increasing his dependence on the stronger Buddy. The cycle the audience witnesses, however, shows how gender performance is learned.

Miranda is the opposite extreme. She wears masks to hide her emotions. Her masks evoke the notion of gendered performance as masquerade. Masquerade is a key part of female performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 62). The masquerade is always a "process of meaning construction requir[ing] that women reflect masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy" (61). For Butler, this means that women put on the masquerade or performance of what men are not. However, Doane, in looking specifically at film and female spectatorship, theorizes the mask as hiding any masculinity through a mask of femininity. "Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. …the woman uses her own body as a disguise" (138-39). The masquerade simultaneously affirms femininity through enactment and is a threat to masculinity in its artifice.

Miranda's masquerade does not produce a version of femininity that is a challenge to masculinity, but rather an enactment of male-gendered performance and rejection of female performance to fit into a male space. Miranda's disguise is a reaction to the perceived emotional nature of women and male dominance of the workplace. Women in the business world are seen as having to "be like a man," and this is a version of that. But if we look more at her performance as a co-opting of male power, we can then again see parallels with Butler's discussion of female relationship to the phallus. "For women to 'be' the Phallus, means, then to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to 'embody' the phallus, to supply

the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through 'being' its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 59). Thus, Miranda's enactment of masculine power becomes a confirmation of masculine power by reflecting it while at the same time re-affirming that power through the empty masquerade of that power, exposing the lack underneath.

The idea of wearing masks becomes very important in teaching Andy her gender. Make-up and clothes are portrayed as a key part of being a woman. Much of Andy's transformation is purely physical. This form of masking exposes both the heterosexual imperative within the performance by attempting to attract a male mate, as well as the emptiness of the performance. Performing female is performing a lack or absence of self. A nuanced example of this is a photo shoot Andy attends where the models wear animal masks meant to express: "the modern woman unleash[ing] the animal within to take on the big city" (Frankel). The implication here is that these women need to put on masks to take on the business world, which is represented by the city. The masks represent something that is supposed to be essential to them, but, in reality, it is just a mask. There is no animal within, but there is a necessary performance to survive. This shallow representation echoes Butler's ultimate point about the masquerade: that it brings an emphasis on appearance and appearing (*Gender Trouble* 63).

For Miranda's world, the high-heeled shoe is a tool of power. High-heeled shoes establish women as part of the system, which Miranda runs. Andy's shoes are the first, and really only, thing Miranda insists Andy change right away. Andy identifies the girls at the magazine as "clackers" because of the sound their heels made on the marble. The advertising for the film even features a high-heel with a pitchfork as a stiletto. High-heels are citizenship. From this stand-point, it would appear that women's power is derived from sisterhood and solidarity. But a closer examination of the function of the high-heel exposes the lie in this logic. High-heels physically raise women higher off the ground and accentuate the most female parts through their positioning of the body. This illustrates a concentration on women's sexuality and appearance, a theme throughout the film. But most importantly, high-heels are unnatural and uncomfortable, yet women choose to put them on. Other scholars have noted high-heels' symbolism of sexuality with a combination of a pocket (vagina) with spike (phallus) (Dundes 1516-7; Evans and Thornton 53). Here, again, we see that women's power and performance is linked to appearance and sexuality and specifically heterosexuality. High-heels are a

symbol of the subservience of women, who choose to harm themselves in order to be a part of a man's world.

A Faustian Choice

Faust in German legend famously sold his soul to the devil to receive knowledge and treasure. Both characters in these films face a similar pact with their boss-from-hell. The Faustian choice both Andy and Guy face is not really selling their soul to the devil but selling their identity to a capitalist system and the gender roles dictated by it. Both Andy and Guy have love interests trying to pull them away from the system. On their first date, Dawn tries to convince Guy: "Look, if this time can be spent convincing you to do anything else with your life, to getting out while you are still whole. Then it is time well spent. Let me ask you a question. Why do you want this?" (Huang). Characters ask Guy what he wants no less than six times throughout the film. The entire film is built around this question. But it also is a deceptive question because, in the end, he really has no choice. After Guy kidnaps Buddy, Buddy reminds him that fairness has no place, not just in the business world, but in the world.

> I don't make the rules, I play by them. What? Your job is unfair to you? Grow up.   Way it goes. People use you? Life's unfair? Grow up. Way it goes. Your girlfriend doesn't love you? Tough [expletive]. Way it goes. Your wife gets raped and shot and they leave their unfinished beers..." (gets choked up) "...their stinkin' longnecks just lying there on the ground..." (recovers himself) "...So be it. Way it goes. (Huang)

The implication of this speech is that the system is not socially constructed but exists. It is life that made Buddy the way he is, not some boss that hazed him into it. Buddy's wife is many times alluded to throughout the film as the reason for his inhumanity and by extension hyper-masculinity. Buddy's house is introduced by showing, not the house itself, but a broken female figure, under which the key to Buddy's house lies, symbolizing that Buddy's hyper-masculinity is, in fact, derived from broken femininity.

Guy's final decision to cede his identity is symbolized in the decision of whether to shoot Buddy. The tipping point for Guy is the discovery that Dawn is going to sleep with Buddy to save Guy's job. Dawn appears at the end of the film

and tries to talk Guy out of shooting Buddy. Shooting Buddy would seem to be an annihilation of the identity he imposed on Guy, but Buddy realizes that the violence of such an act marks, in fact, an increase in his influence over Guy. The seeming choice is actually no choice at all. In shooting Buddy, he frees himself of Buddy, but has given into the violence; and in not shooting Buddy, Buddy will continue his influence over Guy. Either way it is an annihilation of Buddy's identity, similar to the non-choice of identity Butler describes as happening in the process of interpellation (*The Psychic Life of Power* 106-31): a choice between accepting oppression or annihilation of self. Buddy urges Guy to shoot: "And I'm trying to give Guy his [life]. ... All right, Guy. Let's finish this. Give it to me. Show me what you're made of. Show me what you've learned. Don't let me down, son. Everything I've taught you comes down to this" (Huang). This speech clearly shows that Buddy is trying to give birth to a son-figure who shares his hyper-masculine identity. In the end, it works. Guy doesn't shoot Buddy, but shoots Dawn instead. He not only fulfills his initiation through violence, but he annihilates his old identity by literally killing his last link to it. Throughout the film, Dawn symbolizes the last remnants of the Guy with whom she fell in love: the sincere, child-like Guy who works for the love of film-making and for the love of her. After shooting her and having proved himself to Buddy, however, the transformation is complete. Guy gets promoted and is successful, but the cost was ceding his identity completely to Buddy's hyper-masculinity and capitalist drive, acquisition of power for acquisition's sake, mirroring films such as *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Andy has a similar conflict with her love interest, Nate (Adrian Grenier). But Andy's situation is complicated by the fact that she did not really change. Because in much of the film femininity is defined by external appearance, Andy is not required to change anything truly substantial. Instead, it is the act of conformity itself that is important. The first images of Andy show us everything we need to know. The film begins with a fogged mirror. Andy takes her hand and wipes away the fog to display an image of her brushing her teeth. The sequence says it all: she has power over her identity. She knows who she is. At the end of the film, she still knows who she is, but has a better haircut. This emphasis on physical transformation is one which is common in the chick flick genre of films, such as *Funny Face* (1957), *Moonstruck* (1987) or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), but while those transformations were based in a heterosexual imperative to please a man (Hollinger 57), this transformation was a capitalistic imperative to conform

to workplace standards of femininity. We can already see Andy's position is vastly different from Guy's. Andy never needs Miranda to fill the void of identity that Buddy creates in Guy.

In any case, the film attempts to set up a choice between professional and personal life. The two are proposed as incompatible. Women cannot have it all and are reminded of that throughout the film. Miranda's husband leaves her presumably because she spends too much time at work, which makes her similar to the career women in films that came before (Boozer 75; Devereaux 341; Walsh 138). And so, women must make a choice, which is something both Nate and Miranda remind Andy. But when Miranda reminds Andy it is her mother-figure reminding her and therefore it carries more weight: "No, you chose. You chose to get ahead. You want this life? Those choices are necessary" (Frankel). At this point, Andy chooses to leave.

The key material point between these two endings is that Andy's "choice" is different than Guy's non-choice. Guy's identity is intrinsically linked to his job, whereas Andy's is not. The illusion of choice may be similar in that Andy, as she is, is barred from the workplace. Thus, her "choice" is to enact and embrace a foreign gender performance or retreat from public life. Both films, however, portray the "iron cage" of capitalism (Weber 121). This iron cage is the morality attached to work such that people's identity become tied to it. The films portray a gendered double standard in which the iron cage traps men into a gendered identity and bars women from participation. This double standard is expressed even within the same text. Dawn, the only woman in *Swimming with Sharks*, uses her sexuality or gender performance to get ahead, but then, as soon as she gains power, she takes a place outside the studio system and advocates against it. Nigel (Stanley Tucci), Miranda's male art director, is passed over for a job because of Miranda. Rather than getting mad, he keeps the faith:

NIGEL. When the time is right she'll pay me back.

ANDY. You sure about that?

NIGEL. No. But I hope for the best. I have to. (Frankel)

Nigel knows he has no choice, and has to work in the system. So the messages from the films is that men must sell their identity to survive, while women should leave.

Conclusion

These films pose answers to those in society that openly question our commitment to work weeks that stretch beyond sixty hours and failures of work/life balance (Slaughter). But those answers are just as troubling as the problem. The films show the workplace as a capitalist trap that annihilates identity. In both cases, the child-like protagonist was presented with the dilemma that conformity to gender norms and surrender of one's own identity is necessary for success. But the female protagonist was encouraged to leave, whereas the male protagonist couldn't leave. This portrayal is just another "recuperative strategy," (Devereaux 341) to steer the non-normative women away from the workplace. This further establishes a separate sphere of competition for men and women, as noted in most films about women in the workplace (Rothman, Powers, & Rothman 67-68), and also reinforces the sex segregation of work in the real world by normalizing the connection between the workplace and male identity through strong repeated mass media messages.

The performance of gender in these films supports existing poststructuralist feminist thought. But it is especially disturbing in the way the performance was portrayed as required. The messages of these films reinforce not the reality of gender roles, but the requirement that we enact them for success. For women, the roles were purely external, which dehumanizes women. Unlike other studies of the workplace, women's gender role is not portrayed as incompatible with work, but the conformity to gender performance is actually the true asset. This requirement to enact gender performance as part of a heterosexual imperative is particularly troubling at a time where we, as a society, are rediscovering the sexual harassment epidemic in our workplaces.

For men, the reliance on violence shown in the film is self-evidently damaging to society and male identity. The linking of male identity to economics, found in previous studies was also reflected here, which also is a dehumanization of men. Weber, in discussing the iron cage of capitalism, argues that it is the moral system of Protestantism that provides the motivation for supporting capitalism through hard work. I argue the moral gender system, supported by films such as these, does similar work.

These differences in messages could be a reflection of the intended audiences for the films. These films, although inspired by two writers' experience, are not a mere reflection of reality. They are part of a cultural system that gives men and

women gendered messages about how to behave in the workplace. *The Devil Wears Prada* is a chick lit film, marketed primarily to women, that tells women the workplace is not their sphere. As a chick flick, *The Devil Wears Prada* is part of a pattern that other scholars have found are "superficial sketches of female subjectivity that hype empowerment for women but have a 'hollow quality' because they take female equality as a given and associate women's career achievement with loss and unhappiness" (Hollinger 56). Andy becomes the representation of women in the workplace and appears on the surface as the glamorized role model for women, but really reinforces the message that women do not belong in the workplace. And the message it is promoting with its protagonist's actions is to privilege personal over professional because, according to the film, that is the more fulfilling life.

 Swimming with Sharks could be interpreted as a masculinity-in-crisis film as it deals very plainly with an identity crisis. But we must ask ourselves, is it really masculinity that we should be worried about here? As evident in the film, masculinity is alive and well. In both films, it is humanity that is in crisis. The message of the films is the system cannot be fought; the films tell us we must change to adapt to it or we must give up our identities.

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Brick-olage and the LEGO/Brand Axis

PETER B. GREGG

On February 7, 2014, Warner Bros. Pictures and Village Roadshow Pictures released *The LEGO Movie* to significant acclaim, and it would gross almost $500 million in its theatrical run. The animated film features a hapless LEGO Land citizen named Emmet, who teams up with a rebellious band of misfits from franchises like *The Lord of the Rings*, the *DC Universe*, and *Star Wars*. The group hopes to stop Lord Business from completing the Piece of Resistance, a device that would kill creativity in the world by gluing LEGO sets together.

The film explored tensions between civic life and consumer culture and the valuing of material wealth over things like family and friendship. The film also inspired spinoffs and products like toys, video games, clothing, and even additional movies. While the film's visual style and themes merit critical exploration, the noteworthy focus for this research project is that it merges multiple brands owned by different vertically integrated conglomerates, an aspect facilitated by properties of LEGOs I call "brick-olage."

I use two examples of modern LEGO media products, *The LEGO Movie* and the video game *LEGO Dimensions*, to unpack three unique qualities of brick-olage and their effect on branding in this era of vertical integration and transmedia storytelling. I then discuss a few possible directions future research may go.

Background

LEGOs are small plastic bricks and other interlocking modular construction toys manufactured by The LEGO Group, a privately held, family-owned Danish company. Unlike most other toys, these small plastic components are interchangeable and interlockable with each other. Instead of a single genre and artistic design, LEGOs are a collection of components and reducible to the individual brick, with LEGO model sets traditionally organized around a generic location (like a city) or archetype (like pirates) creatable out of the individual

elements. Thus, the LEGO brand's core can be understood not as a style like with Barbie and the Barbie World but as individual shapes whose combinability creates utility among the discrete pieces.

The proportions of the pieces, the size of the studs (the LEGO bumps on the top of the brick), and the thickness of the plates (the skinny LEGOs that stack three high to make a classic brick) are uniform and independent of the model or brand translated to LEGO. This means different sets of LEGO toys are completely compatible, allowing the owner to create practical, experimental, avant-garde, or bizarre assemblages from sports cars or cyborg badgers to hair salons complete with day spa and lava monsters.

In 2015, *Brand Finance* magazine named LEGO "the World's Most Powerful Brand," (Tovey). Starting in the 1970s and accelerating in the late 1990s and early 2000s, LEGO shifted its emphasis from building with bricks to playing with bricks once assembled into playsets (Landay 56). Instead of only the "generic" LEGO universe of cities, pirates, and castles, in recent years LEGO has contracted to produce toys based on brands like the *Marvel* and *DC* universes, *Minecraft* video game, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Star Wars*, and *The Simpsons* among many others.

The company's move away from LEGO-exclusive branding to become heavily associated with comic book, video game, film, and television franchises forms a key component in this rise of brand power. LEGO leveraged the synergies afforded by vertically integrated media conglomerates like Time Warner and the Sony Group to convert their franchises to LEGO and that cross-demographic appeal has accounted for much of The LEGO Group's recent financial and brand success. LEGO builds its brand by having other media brands use the aesthetic form of their bricks.

As Wolf notes, the development of the themed LEGO playset has been crucial to its success as a toy brand (16). As a recent iteration, *The LEGO Movie* has not only kept the toys on the minds of consumers, but it epitomized LEGO's multi-franchise formula with iterations of nearly all associated toy universes (toddler toy Duplos, *Lord of the Rings*, *Batman*, *Star Wars*) that make appearances or play key roles in the film. The *LEGO Dimensions* video game is an extension of the brand-universe derived from *The LEGO Movie*; both are structured around what players can do with the assembled pieces.

Since brands function as cultural goods, they "yield a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means to appropriate them, and a profit in

legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be" (Bourdieu 228). That is, brands become legitimate once they are understood as distinguishable from other brands. This legitimization arises in the economic and psychological realms, with currency in both. The conversion of other brands to LEGO benefits both the "parent" conglomerate and the LEGO Group by emphasizing the status of each as a "premiere" brand.

Academic Work on LEGO

Landay describes LEGO as a "multiplatform 'supersystem' of transmedia intertextuality" (56). Much scholarship on LEGO focuses on its status as a brand and its relationships with other brands coded through intellectual properties and play, often through the lens of adaptation or transmedia studies. In one of the most comprehensive looks at LEGO and brand, Hills explores *Doctor Who* as transformed into the video game *LEGO Dimensions*. Hills argues that this example of transbranding co-opts transgressive play and channels it into branded play, following the logic of the parent brands and aligning it with intellectual property and brand licensing and play socialization. Hjarvard argues that LEGO has been infused with media branding to the point where the representations and extensions of it in different brand/story worlds and narratives have gained primacy over its physical presence ("Bricks to Bytes" 43). Wolf uses adaptation studies to examine the transformation of *Star Wars*'s Death Star from a movie set to a LEGO set, noting that part of LEGOs recent success as a brand results from the combining of building sets and playsets into a single product ("Adapting the Death Star" 16). Baker argues in creating the *Lord of the Rings* toy-line that "LEGO's lack of realism… differentiates it from other 3-D, licensed products" and this lack of realism allows for LEGO to facilitate world-building (52). Ultimately, much LEGO research argues for a coherent vision of LEGO as a branded product.

    Analysis of LEGO benefits from addressing the qualities of the bricks themselves. Hills's noting of transbranding and *LEGO Dimensions* does not explore deeply what it is about LEGO toys that allows for the analysis to hold. The mashup in the analysis derives more from the LEGO brand and less from properties of the toy. For Wolf the critical approach considers LEGO to have the

unique properties of combining building sets and play sets, but it does not engage what it is about the toys themselves that capture both qualities ("Adapting the Death Star"). Landay's take on transmedia intertextuality assumes the modularity of the LEGO bricks. For this project, what makes LEGO distinctive as a brand are physical properties of the individual LEGO brick; LEGO toys themselves contain properties that distinguish them from other types of product capable of incorporation into transmedia storytelling. This inherent modularity of the toy represents an important opportunity for further exploration in the critical research on LEGO.

Brick-olage

For this project, I argue the properties of the brick form the fundamental or atomic unit of the toy and by extension the brand, which means that the functional success of the transmedia logic of LEGO is an extension of the implicitly understood modularity of the toy. I suggest seeing LEGO as containing unique properties answers a question of what allows them to be protean within the media landscape. For instance, the activity in *LEGO Dimensions* is more than an authorized set of skin mods, meshes, and audio files for a video game; it is a locus of otherwise distinct brands transformed into a play world made up of LEGO atoms.

These unique properties of LEGO and the resulting LEGO brand conversion allow the user to create a "brick-olage" of models, shapes, and worlds like de Certeau's notion of bricolage, a "making do" with raw materials and castoffs at hand to give meaning and sense to the world or of experience within it (29). The LEGO bricks themselves combine the play set and the building set in a traditional play experience. A person using pieces from the various sets she owns can create a racecar from those other components without ever having bought a racecar set. The user plays with the toys to create a new toy from already existing materials, made do with the use of imagination. The finished product therefore can be a mosaic or mélange of pieces originating in other sets, reconstituted by the play-labor of the user.

Brick-olage has three primary aspects. First, the LEGO pieces and sets have cross-brand compatibility. Because all LEGOs are compatible, all brands become compatible. Second, the pieces and sets permit or encourage creative flexibility.

Like a scale model, a given set comes unassembled. The constituent elements (bricks, plates, etc.) must be put together to finish the model, but no rule says the set on the box is the only allowable configuration. Third and most important for this paper, traditional lines between sets and brands become blurred or even break down through creative assembly in the process of translating a brand's intellectual property to LEGO. Almost all non-LEGO toy franchises have proportions, dimensions, and styles unique to their own line. Because all LEGOs are compatible, these franchises literally are compatible through brick-olage, with brands con-fused with other brands' signifiers. A player who wishes to disregard brands' traditional boundaries may choose to do so.

Although LEGO has always retained the first two components of brick-olage (compatibility and creativity), what makes modern LEGO unique is the addition of non-LEGO branded sets blurring brand lines, a recent change in LEGO's intellectual property. With the expiration of the last of The LEGO Group's patents in the early 2000s, the company began to protect its intellectual property through lawsuits involving trademarks and copyrights, pursuing lawsuits alleging trademark or patent infringement in the United States, Canada, the European Union, and China, and losing nearly all suits on various grounds ("LEGO loses patent suit"). For the most part The LEGO Group's suits failed because the shape of the bricks serves a functional purpose and are therefore not a trademark or copyright. Consequently, numerous similar-to-LEGO products flooded the toy market.

The LEGO Group has been more successful in protecting the shapes of the minifigures and their associated franchises, because the shape itself is not a part of the function of the toy. As a result, while other pseudo-LEGO brands may incorporate the shapes and proportions of the bricks, LEGO's minifigures and their branding have become integral in brick-olage. By translating established intellectual property into the LEGO universe, LEGO as a corporation has an added layer of legal protection and recourse and made the brick-olage a key part of its arsenal, rolling creative play into that brand world.

This franchising to LEGO "converts" different media brands to LEGO-style toys and dissociates them from their origins. The smallest unit becomes the individual atomic brick, not the gestalt of the playset or model. When rendered to LEGO, the brand signifiers (e.g. Batman, the *Millennium Falcon*, Shaquille O'Neal) both retain and lose aspects of their distinctiveness through pastiche and a mixture of styles. The LEGO Marty McFly figure has qualities that resemble the

Michael J. Fox character such as the jeans, the orange vest, and button-up shirt, but they also lose aspects of Michael J. Fox's body, like relative height and eye-color. Significantly, in modern brand conversions the color palette of the parent brand persists (replacing the bright primary colors of the traditional LEGO bricks), including branded LEGO figurines that retain the skin color of the actors, unlike the traditional generic yellow skin of non-branded LEGO sets.

The process reduces the converted-to-LEGO brands' legitimacy as brands to a few key elements, much like a caricature which retains only key elements of the subject, with others warped or exaggerated in a specific style. A series of brand signifiers converted to LEGO results, reduced to key distinctive components but fully compatible with other toys within the LEGO-style universe, LEGO-ness par excellence.

Breaking Down Brick-olage in *The LEGO Movie*

The LEGO Movie epitomizes the freedom one gets from using LEGO bricks in a freewheeling, brand-independent way: a LEGO character crosses brand-worlds with a team of renegades to stop the evil Lord Business from gluing branded sets together. In the mid-act two crisis we discover that the entire film is the imaginary play-world of a little boy named Finn who is playing with his father's LEGO sets, creating an overt parallel event.

The film offers a script for playing with and using LEGOs that corresponds strongly to brick-olage. First, the premise of the film requires cross-brand compatibility. The pieces from one world work with another, and as we learn in a getaway scene, even pieces of the characters' bodies can be removed and are compatible with the world, with Emmet using part of his body as a wagon wheel's axle. As they continue their quest to put the Piece of Resistance on the Kragle and stop Lord Business, Emmet encounters individuals from other genre-worlds like Gandalf from *Lord of the Rings* and Batman from the *DC Universe*, and he finds that the key component of a LEGO-lifestyle is transcending the instructions and becoming a "Master Builder" in which sets, style, and brands mix. Key turning points in the film require LEGO compatibility, including escaping from Bad Cop in the Wild West, the destruction of Cloud Cuckoo Land, and infiltrating Lord Business's tower. The LEGOs from the Wild West World fit perfectly with the ones from the Pirate World. The Batman set LEGOs work with bricks from

Emmet's home. Metalbeard is a cybernetic pirate built from pieces of LEGO pirate ships, and the team built a smuggling craft out of the Cloud Cuckoo Land's detritus.

As per the second quality of brick-olage, the film shows that in exploring this cross-brand compatibility creative expression and new discoveries can be found. Seen through the eyes of Finn and as experienced by the main characters, the most complex and rich worlds are ones where genres and brands are broken down. The idea of LEGO play is not only to follow the instructions but also to follow your muse.

Emmet's character development pivots on the discovery that the most fun derives from creative assembly breaking down barriers between brand worlds and traditional rules, exemplifying the third aspect of brick-olage. The villain in the film seeks the Kragle (a misreading of "Krazy Glue"), a liquid that will make it impossible to separate the bricks and force them to stay on-brand. As Mittell notes, the Kragle is the villain of the movie, since it brings stasis to the toy, a world-ending weapon (272). The film's dramatic tension is resolved when the father figure realizes that the brand-set matters less than the brick-olage. To glue the LEGOs into static models runs counter to the toys' purpose and violates the rules of brick-olage. The greatest crime in *The LEGO Movie* is not that users are unfaithful to brand-worlds, but that the power of brick-olage is taken away from LEGO itself, locking play in to a specific brand's intellectual property and limiting creativity. The film proposes that LEGOs must retain the properties of brick-olage to make playing with LEGOs fun. To glue pieces together and to limit models to their original brands and design is to defeat the creative energy or even the purpose of LEGOs.

Seeing LEGOs and LEGO-play in this brand-unfaithful way dissociates elements of each brand. In getting converted to LEGOs, the brands take on an aspect that surmounts key elements of the parent brand. The film relies on ironic humor and ironic play. The brands retain their distinctiveness, and the humor derives in part from a recognition of the contrast of surfaces: these brands don't normally go together. When Bad Cop goes into the Old West and when Emmet and team are saved there by Batman, the incongruity is ironic and humorous. Vitruvius, Gandalf, and Dumbledore all know of each other and in a self-reflexive moment the other characters confuse them for each other. Importantly, they all are aware of those stories and recognize the similarities. Batman self-reflexively refers to specific aspects of his character as if they exist outside himself,

something that will be developed in a later film. *The LEGO Movie*'s themes emphasize that an essential part of LEGO-ness is the breaking of genre boundaries and the diversity of the LEGO experience.

In a uniquely synergistic way, The LEGO Group produced toy sets, video games, and other content from *The LEGO Movie*, pulled together and realized via brick-olage. LEGO toys derived or inspired by *The LEGO Movie* reflected and reiterated the inter-brand compatibility of the toys. Instead of releasing sets unique to brands (e.g. *LEGO Movie* Batman sets, *LEGO Movie Lord of the Rings* sets), toy sets from the film exemplified the brick-olage of the film. The Batman set comes with Super Angry Kitty; Emmet, Wyldstyle, and Executron are all a part of the Cloud Cuckoo Land Palace set. As with all LEGO toys, these sets are compatible, meaning players can blur the brands even further, putting brand elements together that were not in scenes in the film. Couple this with the compatibility of all LEGOs, and any LEGO-styled brand can be incorporated into the film brand or vice-versa.

Breaking Down Brick-olage in *LEGO Dimensions*

A key synergistic off-shoot of the film was the toys-to-life (or TTL) video game *LEGO Dimensions*. The toys-to-life video game genre blurs the typical lines of distinction between virtual world and "real world." Instead of a video game played exclusively with a controller and screen as the interface and a toy being something that you can hold and play in space, the TTL video game genre requires physical possession of components that are generally purchased separately from the game and used to unlock virtual content in-game. They require specialized hardware (chips in the toys and chip-reader expansions connected to the console) and specific software (in the form of the games) to "play" with the toy. This playability factor with the toy is often limited in "real life" because the toy is usually an unmovable miniature figurine like an ornate board game piece.

LEGO Dimensions is one of the most popular video games in the toys-to-life genre. TTL video games constitute the world's most profitable video game category, with over 100 new toys released in the fourth quarter of 2015 alone ("*LEGO Dimensions* is the latest"). The genre experienced a 19 percent increase

in spending from 2014 to 2015, and new franchises entered the market, including *Star Wars*, LEGO, and TOMY toys.

The game starts with the evil Lord Vortech in search of the basic components of the LEGO universe, the Foundation Elements. Portals from Foundation Prime connect to the worlds that contain the Foundation Elements. Vortech recruits villains in each of those worlds to search for them and imprison heroes transported to that world. Batman, Gandalf, and Wyldstyle are pulled into the same vortex as they pursue Robin, Frodo, and Metalbeard, who have been captured. The game consists of entering various worlds, seeking missing elements, freeing new heroes, and recruiting them to join the player on their quest. New side-worlds, equipment, and heroes can be unlocked and downloaded with additional, separately purchased *LEGO Dimensions* expansion packs.

LEGO Dimensions retains the properties of LEGO brick-olage as a video game. Meeting the first criterion, the "real life" components of the game are literally LEGO toys, fully compatible with each other and independently usable apart from the game, a key function and brand difference from other toys-to-life video games. The game pieces come unassembled and without an instruction manual. The player must load the game and unlock the instructions to be able to build the set, and the virtual manual looks exactly like all LEGO instruction manuals' layout and art design, complete with pages and animated page turns. Styled in the same manner as previous LEGO games and on-brand with the movie, the video game combines aspects of multiple brand franchises with a highly ironic and self-reflexive approach to its storyline. The game-world is constructed out of LEGOs, but the cross-brand compatibility means that the player may manipulate characters, engage villains, and use devices from the various licensed franchises simultaneously. Moreover, the different franchises' characters interact in a way that suggests they are aware of the other brands. For example, when the Doctor from *Doctor Who* meets Homer Simpson, he says he would offer Homer a Jelly Baby, but Homer would eat the whole bag. The game's irony and self-consciousness derive largely from a play of surfaces (i.e. "See how it looks when Gimli shuts down Homer's nuclear power plant") and ahistoricity (i.e. "See how characters from today's *LEGO Movie* interact with the original space-set LEGO character from the 1970s").

As Consalvo and Miller note "games' construction and circulation within the media industries" make it essential to define games as media: "Games are different from other forms of media, and different platforms can create different

experiences and limitations. Yet online games are increasingly part of cross-media empires. Large-scale branded productions that create universes for individuals to live in through films, books, television shows, interactive Web sites, online games, and other forms of participation" (181). TT Games, a subsidiary of Warner Bros., produced *LEGO Dimensions*, with many of the story worlds of the video game a part of Warner's vertically integrated universe. The main set includes figures from *The LEGO Movie*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *DC* franchises immediately playable. Expansion packs include further toys and figures from *The LEGO Movie*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *DC Universe*, as well as *Doctor Who*, *Ghostbusters*, *Back to the Future*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Jurassic World*, and many other franchises owned by or licensed to LEGO by Warner Bros. Each set unlocks additional content in-game, from characters to entire brand-worlds. In this sense, the *LEGO Dimensions* video game and toys continue the cross-franchise mélange introduced in *The LEGO Movie*.

 LEGO Dimensions maximizes the brand synergies empowered by brick-olage. Gibson and Kong point out that digital convergence unlocks components of political economy in important ways: "Convergence upon the digital medium has been mirrored by a political economy of creative production, as corporate interests in the arts, popular culture, telecommunications and broadcasting have merged, amalgamated, or entered into joint ventures" (545). In the toys-to-life video game, LEGO-style post-modern irony fuses with the immediately recognizable brands of various television, film, and video game franchise-brands. "Such manoeuvres create links between cultural producers of 'content' (the music or film), and manufacturers and suppliers of information technologies, the 'hardware'" (545). The hardware in this case includes the LEGOs parts of the TTL interface, the essential bridge between toy and video game.

 While one may recognize intellectual properties from the *Batman* franchise in the game, the fusion of Batman and LEGO packs a stronger, distinctive one-two punch. Each expansion pack for *LEGO Dimensions* focuses not on what it can do for players in the game, but on which franchise inspires the toys, and the in-game content reflects the themes, tone, and circumstances epitomized by the original or parent intellectual properties, albeit with brick-olage derived lenses. The game is rife with pastiche, a stylistic technique that "cites references from other texts solely as style or as surface image" (Mason 30). A consumer can buy a *Ghostbusters* set and a *Doctor Who* set and in-game have Venkman and the Doctor try to help Marty McFly get back to the future, but the franchises

themselves are not mixed with the toy set in-box. In fact, the only cross-branded toys are in the original, required starter pack, which as mentioned earlier comes with Wyldstyle, Batman, and Gandalf. In this case, all three were characters in *The LEGO Movie* and as such are already branded together; moreover, all three are owned by Time Warner and financially maximized because of that conglomerate's brand synergy. These brand boundaries are also extra-textual; for example, there are no *Star Wars LEGO Dimensions* sets despite the existence of LEGO <u>Star Wars</u> sets and the franchise's appearance in *The LEGO Movie*, in part because *Star Wars* is a part of the *Disney Infinity* line of toys-to-life video games.

Like the film, the video game negatively portrays the locking-in of the bricks and brands with glue or some sort of permanent solution. LEGO's brick-olage drives the player to overcome obstacles in-game. To succeed at a mission or story world, the players break up complete objects to collect their pieces and later use these pieces to unlock aspects of the game, building new "sets" as they go. Unlike the film which positively portrays creative problem solving, the game tends to treat puzzles as solvable only using a specific move or strategy, a narrower view of LEGO's possibilities for play.

Putting Brick-olage Together

Both the game and the film act as scripts for optimal LEGO use, and that ideal behavior puts the emphasis on brick-olage. Consequently, LEGO players, users, and audiences are situated by the toys to epitomize *flaneurs*, individuals who play "with and celebrate the artificiality, randomness and superficiality of the fantastic mélange of fictions and strange values" (de Certeau 98; Featherstone 16). Contrasting and collapsing branded words or simply turning a LEGO set ostensibly purchased as a toy police car into a model Dalmatian puppy may not just be enjoyable but the purpose or logical outcome of LEGO's brick-olage. Emmet's willingness to create absurd LEGO inventions like a double-decker couch show the fruits of that labor when he becomes a "Master Builder." *LEGO Dimensions* players are rewarded by breaking apart LEGO obstacles or finding LEGO pieces laying around the game zones that they can assemble to free or unlock in-game content, in the same way real LEGO pieces can be pulled from a toybox and assembled to an airplane.

In these two story-worlds, older or pre-branded LEGO toys are shown as primitive. In *The LEGO Movie*, the 1980s style Benny the Space Man character moves more simply and obsesses about what he can make with his (more limited) palette of bricks, perpetually trying to build a spaceship. 1990s-style NBA LEGOs are introduced with 2 Unlimited's "Get Ready for This" from the *Space Jam* soundtrack. Even though older LEGOs work with newer sets, LEGO media treats them as if they are out of date.

Older intellectual properties can be rehabilitated, however. Newly converted-to-LEGO brands benefit from brick-olage, portrayed as fresh and interesting. While LEGO no longer sells generic space sets and the NBA branded characters, the *Wizard of Oz* expansion pack for *LEGO Dimensions* has a hipness and ironic tone when converted via brick-olage and portrayed in the game. The cycle of releasing expansion packs and their levels in *LEGO Dimensions* keeps it from getting stale or repetitive. Unlike other TTL franchises which release new versions of the game with older components incompatible, all expansions in *LEGO Dimensions* are compatible with the main set and game, much like old LEGO toy sets remaining compatible with new LEGOs, including the recent multi-set *LEGO Batman* movie line.

The LEGO Movie and *LEGO Dimensions* celebrate this superficiality of the parent brands, but importantly they take the LEGO brand seriously. Each new set expands the territory of the LEGO universe and reduces the possibilities for off-brand imitators. The worlds shown and "created" in these media are LEGO, through and through. No off-brand LEGO-compatible toys like Brictek, Tyco Super Blocks, or Mega Block exist in LEGO media. All computer-rendered LEGOs in *The LEGO Movie* correspond to actual LEGO shapes and proportions. Each world seen in the film literally could be made from plastic LEGOs. Although it has yet to happen, The LEGO Group could release *LEGO Dimensions* toy sets using scenes or possible scenes from the video game.

The film and video game align to prompt the player-flaneur with preferred scripts or usage of the LEGO bricks, and that preferred way encompasses brick-olage. Both the film and video game present deconstructing brands favorably and refashioning pieces as the best way to have fun. Through the course of the film, Emmet transforms from a person who simply wants to follow the instructions to a person freed to use his creativity. The father in the film threatens the very existence of LEGOs with Crazy Glue. His realization of this problematic changes the entire direction of the story, with him becoming a liberating force. Instead of

cordoning off brands, the film and video game show the irony and fun of brands intruding on other brands and breaking barriers between them. The game rewards this intrusion by unlocking content through additional purchases, furthering the blending of brands and opening new brand-worlds to explore. With the addition of ever-expanding intellectual properties' conversion to LEGO, creative play becomes transformed into a set of consumption practices involving new intellectual properties: add these new LEGOs to your already existing LEGO toys if you wish to see these surfaces at play, the new "creativity" of transmedia, intertextual branding.

Ultimately, the brands transformed in these media gain distinctiveness from presence in a popular toy brand. Brands monetize their distinctive iconography and get the cultural cache of being a part of the LEGO universe. In that sense, what players do with the pieces afterward is irrelevant to them. That said, the brands' presence at all is at minimum a form of rich and deep product placement, with the specific worlds normalized through ironic humor. As epitomized by the ever-increasing set of *LEGO Dimensions* expansion sets, the trend may be to develop entire LEGO worlds, with less emphasis on modularity and creativity, removing some of the brick from brick-olage as The LEGO Group seeks to preserve as much of its intellectual property as possible, and that property involves the transformation of other identifiable brands and likenesses.

Conclusion

I explored how form can transcend brand identities by examining a different model for brand interaction. Qualities of the brand allow it to integrate with or incorporate (that is, literally forming the body of) with other brands. Through brick-olage, the rules of play include compatibility with the discrete toy elements. Properties of brick-olage allow LEGOs to shape and be shaped by other brand styles, and so the toys epitomize a kind of postmodern play: a mosaic of brands and styles that, when converted to LEGOs, become subordinate to the rules of the toy.

This discussion of LEGO brick-olage suggests brands and their intellectual properties are malleable or able to be atomized. Additional research in transmedia storytelling using a lens of brick-olage may identify other brand-worlds that have basic, atomic units. The brand form affects content, but the container shapes the

brand identity. Seen in this way, brands can cooperate or work together, contained by other brands. What distinguishes LEGO from other examples is that the form of the LEGO is also a part of the LEGO brand itself. Brick-olage is LEGO's brand.

Further research could move in many different directions. For example, the fact that LEGO is a toy with a target market that includes children seems important. How might LEGO brick-olage influence children's understanding of brand? Research could explore how brand loyalties and brick-olage are connected; they may be reinforced or fractured. What does brick-olage say about brand distinctiveness, and how do the qualities of the original brand that are retained in conversion reveal qualities of the parent brand?

The notion of brick-olage may not be unique to LEGO. Surely the other modular brick toys come close, with tensions over minifigures suggesting a new area to explore regarding intellectual properties and modular toy systems. Research could also aim at identifying other brands or products that have qualities of brick-olage. What do they reveal that this exploration does not show? Further research could also compare how brick-olage is affected by or portrayed in *The LEGO Batman* film and *LEGO Dimensions* Batman accessories following their release. Additional explorations of LEGO's use of brick-olage could look at other LEGO content, including other video game lines, direct-to-video content, and books. To what extent do they show brick-olage, and how does that align with what is argued here? It seems possible that we can see what really constitutes a brand by the qualities that are retained by brick-olage

Since the LEGO Group is a private, family-owned business, it is possible that the company acts more liberally with whom it partners and in its ability to draw in multiple, competing brands. However, its relationship with Warner's TT Games suggests the "freedom" allowed a brand like LEGO has its limits. If the LEGO Group is bought by a conglomerate with toy and media holdings, the scope of brick-olage may become another technique used by that conglomerate to leverage its own brands at the expense of others. While that future would not be covered by Kragle glue, it might be a bit more focused and less diverse, with LEGO just another brick in the conglomerate's wall.

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Drunk and Diverse: Reframing the Founding Fathers

MELISSA SARTORE

New forms of history foster understanding, relatability, and identity as they shape and reshape collective historical experience. As it finds a new inebriated voice in *Drunk History*, a dynamic musical outlet in *Hamilton*, and a talk-show format in *Join or Die*, history achieves new appeal. This "new" history is the latest iteration in the relationship between popular culture and history, a comic remediation, and represents the ever-changing accessibility of historical knowledge through a variety of mediums, often to unsuspecting audiences.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation* builds upon the traditional contention that mediums always develop from one another. The authors identify and define the two logics of remediation, immediacy and hypermediacy, which present information in a constantly reformed or newly shaped form (Bolter and Grusin 5-6; 11; 17). The two logics of remediation cooperate to provide a "transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves" as well as identify an endless enthusiasm and expectation for new media (Bolter and Grusin 19; 45; 76-78). Remediation allows audiences access information with the assumption that it will continue to be presented in new and exciting ways, often supplementing or even supplanting previous iterations.

History necessarily remediates. Historical storytelling draws up on previous mediums, including oral tradition, books, primary and secondary sources, and later film, television, and the Internet. Ancient and medieval chroniclers used the works of their predecessors; bards, elders, and troubadours told their tales over and over again to new generations; and legal custom transitioned to formal written legislation. With the advent of radio, film, television, and the Internet, historical storytelling moved into even more accessible and popular media available to the masses.

The portrayal of historical information, particularly in the increasingly digital age, has led to supporters and critics alike debating issues of accuracy, revisionism, and relevancy of history in popular media. Critics of the relationship

between history and popular culture need not look further than movies such as Oliver Stone's *Alexander* or the Netflix series *Marco Polo* to see how fact and fiction can blend to form historically inaccurate and misleading media (Borza; Larsen). In contrast, however, Raphael Samuel and Jerome de Groot argue that the pervasiveness of history leads to the infusion of the past and contemporary culture, as history is essential to how people understand and identify themselves. Popular culture raises historical consciousness rather than poses a threat to history and raises questions as to where historical . falls into larger cultural traditions and beliefs (Samuel 8; De Groot 310-12).

Recently, in *Prosthetic Memory*, Alison Landsberg contended that "modernity makes possible and necessary a new form of public cultural memory" (2). According to Landsberg, the historical narrative of movies and other visual media makes history more personal, deeply felt, and a person can put him or herself into the history that he or she did not experience (9). Similarly, Robert Rosenstone argues that media, specifically film, "gives us a new sort of history, what we might call history as vision" (181). Through these processes, the immediacy and hypermediacy of history-in-media creates a historical memory that is subjective and personal to the viewer while offering information, piquing interest, and building historical . . This remediation of history is dependent upon time, space, and context and while "the logic of transparent immediacy does not necessarily commit the viewer to an utterly naïve or magical conviction that representation is the same thing as what it represents" it creates an opaque "contact point between the medium and what it represents" (Bolter and Grusin 30).

In spite of what Landsberg identified as an "overall academic contempt for television," she finds value in shows such as *Deadwood* and *Mad Men*, as they provide the viewer with insights into social history by blending day-to-day life with de-idealized notions of the past (*Engaging the Past* 61). She largely focused on the use of television drama to provide historical communication and information, but her ideas can be extrapolated to comedy and even to the theatrical stage. Recently, new media has blended history and popular culture in comic television shows such as *Drunk History* and *Join or Die*, to say nothing of the smash Broadway show *Hamilton*. These forms of remediated history offer viewers new stories as well as a retelling of traditional historical information.

The remediation of history through drunkenness and diversity aligns with Kenneth's Burke's comic frame of acceptance. Comedy, to Burke, offers an analytical tool by which critics and audiences can process given circumstances

and facts and "from its vantage point, sees the operation of errors that the characters of the play cannot see" (41). Comedy is Aristophanes' tool in the political play *Lysistrata*, Shakespeare uses it throughout his literary works, and it pervades social commentaries such as Oscar Wilde's *The Important of Being Earnest* and John Kennedy Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces*. These comic, and often satirical, presentations, among countless others, provide perspectives that allow audiences to cope and function within a given framework. Television and film presentations the likes of *The Office*, *The Simpsons*, and *Modern Times* offer the same sense of familiarity and expression to more modern audiences (Bonnstetter). Comedy is also the essence of *Drunk History*, *Join or Die*, and in a less obvious but no less important way, *Hamilton*.

Originally a web series, *Drunk History* was created by Derek Waters and Jeremy Konner in 2007 and was introduced as a television series on Comedy Central in 2013 ("Drunk History," *Internet Movie Database).* The format features a celebrity, comedian, or other chosen individual who gets drunk and tells a story about a historical event or person. As the drunk story-teller recounts his or her tale, there is a re-enactment of events on the screen. During the re-enactment, performed by well-known actors and actresses, the characters lip-sync the drunken voice-over version of the story.

All of the stories on *Drunk History* are true, all of the depictions are as accurate as possible, and nothing is scripted or rehearsed, with the exception of dates and the pronunciation of names. Waters told *Time Magazine* in 2015, before the start of the third season of the show, "a huge amount of research goes into producing those drunken antics: a team of History PhD students at UCLA work with the *Drunk History* team for a couple of months" (Rothman). According to Waters, the show was created to humanize people and, while he self-identifies as having not been a great student in school, the show is how he has chosen to learn about history (Kim). In a 2015 interview with *The Observer*, Waters expanded upon the purpose and goal of the show:

> I really believe the only way that the show can stay fresh every season is that the stories have to remain the heart, not the drunk person telling it…drunk people are funny and fun to watch, but I want to say, as humbly as I can, that our show has a specific voice and using that I hope to make you laugh and learn at the same time and not make you think this is all about learning. It's a lot easier to learn when you don't know you're

learning…history is really important because the only way we can
improve our future is to not repeat mistakes or be inspired by something
that's happened in the past to make change or create something new
(Easton).

Waters and *Drunk History* take this on, and from the earliest *Drunk History* clips,
the show explains and retells both well- and lesser-known stories from American
history.

In a 2008 *Drunk History* episode, comedian Jen Kirkman retells the story of
Martha and George Washington's relationship with their slave Oney "Ona" Judge
("Drunk History," Vol.3). When the Washingtons decided that they would give
Judge to a relative as a wedding gift in 1796, she fled to Virginia, then to
Pennsylvania, and later to New Hampshire where she took refuge ("Oney
Judge"). The Washingtons were convinced that Judge had been persuaded to
leave by a seductive Frenchman and sent customs officials to retrieve her. Judge
told the customs officer that she would rather live in freedom in exile rather than
go back to a life of servitude.

Judge soon married a man by the surname Staines, had three children, and
built a life in exile, all the while living in fear of being tricked or taken back into
servitude. She feared that her children would be taken away as well, a well-
founded concern after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 stipulated that children of
slaves were the property of that slave's former owner. According to the episode,
Judge offered to return to the Washingtons' possession as long as her children
would remain free, but they declined this offer and Oney remained on the run
("Drunk History" Vol. 3).

From interviews with Oney, there is no indication that the Washingtons ever
gave up their quest to take her back to Mount Vernon and it was only with George
Washington's death that she finally felt safe. In 1828, Oney voiced no regret
about her flight and time as a fugitive, but rather expressed how she cherished her
freedom, her chance to learn to read, and her opportunities to dedicate herself to
Christian teachings. For Oney, none of this would have been possible if she had
stayed with the Washingtons (Adams; Chase).

Oney Judge is relatively unknown to the general public. As Jen Kirkman
pointed out at the end of her account, George Washington's reputation and the
mistaken ideals associated with it remain the prevailing perception of the man. By
introducing a new audience to Oney Judge through a drunken comic

interpretation, *Drunk History* contributes to the historical and moral conversations about slavery during the late eighteenth century and how they involved the founding of the United States.

During its second season, *Drunk History* once again took up the history of the Founding Fathers. The eighth episode, "Philadelphia," includes three stand-alone segments linked by the named city and the actions of Founding Fathers. The first segment is about Baron von Steuben (played by David Cross) and how he assisted George Washington (played by Stephen Merchant) in training his troops at Valley Forge. The second segment features Thomas Jefferson (played by Jerry O'Connell) and John Adams (played by Joe Lo Truglio) in their constant feud, focusing on the election of 1800. The third segment shows Benedict Arnold (played by Chris Parnell) and his acts of treason, with attention paid to George Washington and his role in the events (played by John Lithgow) ("Philadelphia").

In the second segment, writer and producer Patrick Walsh recounts the election of 1800 for *Drunk History* audiences. According to Walsh, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were friends, associates, and avid letter righters through the late eighteenth century. Adams, a Federalist, and Jefferson, an Anti-Federalist or Republican, held different views on freedom of speech and the ability to criticize a sitting president. The former, President at the time, saw it as sedition while Jefferson, vice-president and formal rival candidate, saw it as a fundamental right, one that he found useful as he increasingly vocalized his disagreements with the President (Ellis 169-75; "Philadelphia").

In 1800, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson again ran against each other for president actively engaged in the first negative political campaign in the country's history (Ellis 175-84; 200-5; 208-11). Walsh and *Drunk History* informs the viewer that Jefferson financially backed journalist James Callender while he wrote articles about Adams in which he called him a hermaphrodite and a war-monger ("Philadelphia"; Ellis 208-11; McCullough 536-7; "Thomas Jefferson"). For his part, Adams responded with less personal fervor, but Federalists attacked Jefferson as a greedy, "mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father" (Hazzard).

Jefferson went on to win the election of 1800 but the damage was done. Before he left office, John Adams appointed numerous Federalists to political office to undermine his successor's efficacy and authority (Ellis 208). The two men do not speak or write to one another for years, despite attempts by the Adams' wife to reconnect them. Walsh calls the Founding Fathers "immature"

and accuses them of acting like "eighth graders" ("Philadelphia"). It is not until 1812 that they renewed their letter writing relationship. Jefferson and Adams continue to write to one another until the end of their lives, famously dying within hours of one another on July 4th, 1826 (Burleigh 393; McCullough 622-39; Meacham 488-94).

Drunk History highlights new perspectives, new information, and new conversations about not only the Founding Fathers of the United States, but also about historical topics in general. In conjunction with the clip about George Washington and the other segment in the "Philadelphia" episode, *Drunk History* exposes audiences to the more controversial and less glorious aspects of the first three Presidents of the United States. Through intoxicated storytelling with a comic flair, audiences learn about which they may have been unaware, misinformed, or only partially cognizant.

Join or Die with Craig Ferguson, which aired on the History Channel in 2016, also discusses historical topics with a popular and comical presentation. The talk show format debates issues such as "History's Biggest Political Blunder," and "History's Dumbest Mistake." Ferguson admits that the purpose of the show is not assert historical certitudes, but rather the goal is to exchange information. He also seeks to change aspects of late night television, and states that he sees "a lot of people in television that are frightened of looking stupid. I'm not. I've looked stupid plenty of times, I'll look stupid again" (Lloyd). Ferguson, much like Waters, wishes he would have had more of an inclination for school as a youth, and, as a result, admits to a "encyclopedic knowledge about some things, but I miss sources, I miss connections. I'm not foolish enough to think that being self-taught is better: I think it may allow for a certain freedom of expression and a certain vitality, but there's plenty of academics that don't lack that either" (Lloyd).

Episode nineteen, "Best Founding Father" of *Join or Die*, aired in May 2016. The panel, made up *Time* Magazine journalist Joel Stein, comedian Jo Koy, and actor Fred Willard, were given six choices to discuss: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin ("Best Founding Father"). The conversation about the choices is preceded by discussion of general, preconceived notions about each man based upon the *John Adams* miniseries on HBO, general knowledge of Benjamin Franklin as an author, scientist, and inventor, and awareness of Alexander Hamilton as the first Secretary of Treasury.

Ferguson and the guests immediately remove two out of the six men from contention. They eliminate James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, decisions made based upon personal perceptions of each man's influence upon the country. After discussion of the remaining four men, two additional Fathers are removed, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. These decisions are based upon how the two Founding Fathers have been viewed by the public, events in their personal and professional lives, and how their actions affect our lives today. In the last round, the panelists discuss the careers and minds of the two remaining contenders, Adams and Washington. Craig Ferguson points out over and over again that John Adams did not own slaves, making him unique among the Founding Fathers. Through jovial and humorous conversation, the group determines that George Washington is the "Best Founding Father."

The entire conversation about the Founding Fathers on *Join or Die* reveals historical as well as popular understanding of these men. The episode, , to say nothing of the entire series, highlights how the public views historical individuals and issues while bringing them back into modern parlance. The discussions are light-hearted and intended to entertain as well as inform. Like Waters and *Drunk History*, Ferguson and *Join or Die* have introduced history to new audiences through new forums and mediums. Much of the information is not new, rather it is remediated through a comic lens.

The hit Broadway musical *Hamilton* has created intrigue and fervor around Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury. *Hamilton* is a phenomenon that has not only changed Broadway but has reformed historical storytelling and the public reception of historical information. The products of this interaction between history and popular culture affect public opinions concerning the Founding Fathers but also inform modern political and social issues. From immigration and slavery to federalism and currency, the actions and opinions of the Founding Fathers, as told through new history, continue to factor into the current political and social climate.

Hamilton, written and originally staring Lin-Manuel Miranda, tells the story of Alexander Hamilton's orphan origins in the Caribbean to his service during the American Revolution through to his death in a duel with Aaron Burr. After reading the 2004 biography "Alexander Hamilton" written by Ron Chernow, Miranda was inspired to write a musical based on Hamilton, one that blended hip-hop, jazz, and rap with more traditional musical theater (Piepenburg). The new type of storytelling put forward by *Hamilton* – mixing music genres, the diversity

of the cast, the presentation of history in contemporary language – resulted in praise from the media and historians alike.

According to the *Washington Post*, "the reason "Hamilton" is making such a big splash is not just because it is terrific (it is) — diverse, lyrically brilliant, dense, emotional, erudite, *cool*. It's because it's earnest" (Petri). *The Economist* found lessons to be learned, as the play highlighted the pragmatism put forward by Hamilton rather than his blind obedience to ideology ("Patriotism on Broadway"). The musical is and does all of these things. *Hamilton's* remediated history uses the comic frame of acceptance by presenting Alexander Hamilton as the "comic fool" (Burke). Hamilton is not the victim, rather he is the hero of his own story through mistakes, criticism, corrections, and ultimate reconciliation with himself. To Chernow, Miranda succeeded in creating a fresh yet honest representation of Alexander Hamilton. Chernow asserts "I think he has plucked out the dramatic essence of the character — his vaulting ambition, his obsession with his legacy, his driven nature, his roving eye, his brilliant mind, his faulty judgment" (Piepenburg). Hamilton is a human being, one that is decidedly the fool surrounded by revolution and upheaval.

Hamilton teaches audiences about history through relatable portrays of men and issues alike. Diversity, as found in *Hamilton*, reflects self-awareness of matters such slavery and gender inequality by giving strong voice to actors of color and to females alike. Acceptance of history is shaped by this commentary. Hamilton and his cohorts are the comic fools that made mistakes and, through the remediated presentation of their story, reconcile and continue to recognize those errors. They are not the victims in the story any more than Hamilton is a victim in his individual tale, rather they are the founders of a nation that has the potential to create social balance.

For this reason, *Hamilton* plays a role in contemporary hot-bed political topics. Immigration – specifically "Immigrants, we get the job done" - a line from the play itself, was poignant in the 2016 election cycle ("Yorktown"). Hamilton himself was, obviously, an immigrant and his opinions about immigration changed over time but fundamentally he "saw the value and necessity of bringing in people from other places to help America develop and grow" (Stepper). Miranda, also an immigrant, addresses how Hamilton, the story he tells, and has been very vocal about immigration policies.

In a year when politicians traffic in anti-immigrant rhetoric, there is also a
Broadway musical reminding us that a broke, orphan immigrant from the
West Indies built our financial system," Miranda said. "A story that
reminds us that since the beginning of the great, unfinished symphony that
is our American experiment, time and time again, immigrants get the job
done ("'Hamilton' Creator").

Hamilton provides a way to highlight the origins of the United States populous,
and even with the challenges immigration has faced in the history of the country
as a whole, reminds millions about where we all came from and that "immigrants
get the job done" ("Yorktown"). Thus, the song and the play create acceptance of
the history of immigration in the United States, albeit in the most general of terms
(Smith and Voth).

Similarly, during the 2016 election cycle, there were numerous editorials and
articles about what the various political parties (albeit, mostly the Republicans)
could learn from *Hamilton*. This is not exclusively about historical fact but rather
about how politicians should behave, the rhetoric they could use to be more
successful. Rebecca Mead assert that both Donald Trump and Jeb Bush should
see the musical while David Smith reminds his readers that Miranda first
performed works from what would become *Hamilton* at the Obama White House
(Mead; Smith). Miranda's Hamilton is always a man of the people, even when
he's striving to establish the nation's first bank and neglects to follow Aaron
Burr's advice to "talk less. Smile more," and aspects of his life and actions are
applicable to modern political events. *Hamilton* repeatedly shows the political
risks of speaking one's mind, as Hamilton's own political career came to an end
as a result of his criticism of his opponents. The message resonates with modern
politicians as it reminds them to seek inclusion and cooperation in the face of
differing opinions, while simultaneously reminds the audience about the diversity
and complexity of the United States.

Not surprisingly, matters of economic interest have been connected to
Hamilton and its social and political influence. In 2013, the US Treasury
announced that it would redesign the $10, indicating that it would be the first bill
to have a female on its face. This new bill, as much part of currency redesigns that
are common due to counterfeiting concerns, was slated to be revealed in 2020
after public forums and an online vote. According to the US Treasury website, the

redesign was also intended to institutionalize "our American history by using images that reflect the past and represent our current era" ("Modern Money").

There were immediate questions about what the public actually knew about Alexander Hamilton and why he was on the bill, as well as concerns about how taking him off of the $10 would affect his legacy. These questions and concerns only escalated with the rise of *Hamilton*, and soon, there was outright backlash against Hamilton's removal. Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury and essential creator of the economic structure of the United States, it was argued, deserved a place on the currency of the United States more than anyone. There were indications that the Treasury would alter their plan and have Hamilton share the $10 with the female choice, determined to be Harriet Tubman, and the debate over what the new bill continued through mid-2016. Lin Manuel Miranda himself advocated for Hamilton to remain on the bill, and, ultimately, it was decided that Hamilton would stay on the $10 bill with five women featured on the back (Calmes; Trudo). It would be an overstatement to indicate that the Broadway musical *Hamilton* saved its namesake's position on US currency, but there is no denying that it played a role and increased historical awareness of who Alexander Hamilton was and what his contribution were (Montgomery).

As a result of *Hamilton's* historicity and relatability, educators, too, have found great value in and use for *Hamilton*. Politics, government, ethics, music, and drama all incorporate *Hamilton* into curricula across the country. As part of an initiative by the Rockefeller Foundation, in 2015 thousands of students were able to see *Hamilton* for $10 (*Rockefeller Foundation News and Media*). In conjunction with funding that program, the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History developed lesson plans, materials, and other resources about government, civics, history, and economics for instructors to use in their classrooms ("Hamilton," Gilder Lehrman).

This is not to say that *Hamilton* does not have critics. "It's still white history. And no amount of casting people of color disguises the fact that they're erasing people of color from the actual narrative" and, according to historian Lyra Monteriro, it is guilty of "Founders Chic" (Monteriro; Onion). "Founders Chic," as it is known, became part of the academic conversation after the release of several overly glossy biographies and works about the Founding Fathers at the start of the 21st century. Largely associated with popular history, it is a phenomenon for which academics are also guilty, as it is appealing, understandable, and almost preferable to neglect some of the less pleasant facts

about the Founders. "Founders Chic" idealizes the "Founding Fathers," removing their failures, challenges, and mistakes from the historical conversation, creating an unrealistic mythical representation of these men. The Founders owned slaves, fought wars, killed people, and, as the backlash against "Founders Chic" began to assert, were "no smarter than the best their country can offer now; they weren't wiser or more altruistic…they were, however, far bolder than we are…they embarked on an audacious and unprecedented challenge to custom and authority. For their courage they certainly deserve our admiration. But even more they deserve our emulation" (Brands; Waldstreicher).

Monteiro is not alone in accusing *Hamilton* of "Founders Chic," as other historians have criticized *Hamilton* for being part of the phenomenon. To Ken Owen, "*Hamilton* represents the apotheosis of Founders Chic" because it neglects to point out his elitism, dislike by the masses, cronyism and misses an opportunity to increase understanding of the American Revolution ("Historians and *Hamilton*"). John Fea, in his April 2016 *Way of Improvement* post "Wait a Minute! Is 'Founders Chic' Okay Now?" agrees with Owen, but credits *Hamilton* with reinvigorating "interest in early American history at a time when politicians and pundits are telling us that history and other humanities are not useful" ("Wait a Minute!"). Historians certainly have mixed opinions of the musical, also challenging the presentation of Aaron Burr as the villain, the Schuyler sisters as feminists, the plight of the immigrant, and the ease of establishing a democracy (Monteriro; Onion, Owen). To many, *Hamilton* is dangerous in its over-simplification and misrepresentation of historical facts. As "'Late Show' host Stephen Colbert joked: "I didn't have to read the Bible, because I saw *Jesus Christ Superstar*." That pretty much says it all" (Isenburg).

These criticisms not only miss the point on how *Hamilton* speaks to matters like "Founder's Chic," they also highlight how recent changes in historical storytelling are currently misunderstood and underappreciated. *Drunk History*, *Join or Die*, and *Hamilton* all reframe the Founding Fathers and address issues like the "founders chic" phenomenon through comic acceptance.

Drunk History counters "Founders Chic" directly when Jen Kirkman references the idealistic legacy of George Washington. Similarly, Patrick Walsh equates John Adams and Thomas Jefferson with teenagers. When Walsh describes the bickering and character assassination that took place in 1800, viewers are offered a very different perspective on the oft-praised second and third Presidents of the United States. *Drunk History* teaches viewers that these

two men founded more than just the country, as they essentially ushered in the era of negative political campaigns in the United States. They are comic fools. *Join or Die* explicitly discusses the role of slavery in the lives of the Founders, particularly Thomas Jefferson. Slave ownership, discussed with tongue-in-cheek humor, is a very large part of what gets Jefferson disqualified from contention as the "best" Founding Father.

Hamilton directly and indirectly takes on aspects of "Founders Chic" with a resurgence of interest in the relationship between the Founding Fathers and the institution of slavery. Critics of the show argue that *Hamilton* never explicitly states that George Washington, the Schuyler Family, and others owned slaves and criticize the use of African Americans to portray actual slave owners. The show indicates Thomas Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemmings, as he was a slave owner as well, but on the whole, to critics, the show praises men that were champion freedom while actually owning other human beings *Hamilton*'s use of African Americans to portray the major characters is meant to keep them in the conversation, to make them part of the founding of the United States in a very public way, and to help audience members accept their collective past. With this approach, *Hamilton* not only addresses slavery and "Founders Chic" but redefines responses to and perceptions of the role of African Americans in the history of the United States.

In a recent Alexander Hamilton-themed episode of *Drunk History*, remediated worlds collide when an inebriated Lin Manual Miranda offers a truncated version of the life of Alexander Hamilton and his rivalry with Aaron Burr (Melas). Again, the portrayal on screen matches Miranda's words, with comic presentations by actresses Alia Shawkat (as Hamilton) and Aubrey Plaza (as Burr) ("Hamilton"). The drunken remediation of Hamilton's story on *Drunk History* is merely the more explicit comic frame found in the play itself. Issues of diversity and choice found in the play highlight Hamilton as representative of his time, his surroundings, and his upbringing. *Drunk History* merely emphasizes these matters, adding another layer of comic frame to *Hamilton* itself.

There are no attempts to hide some of the controversial aspects of these men's lives and actions. Rather, *Drunk History*, *Join or Die*, and *Hamilton*, embrace controversial or taboo topics readily incorporate them into the storytelling and the historical discourse. Remediated history pushes the boundaries of historical memory and knowledge into exciting new directions. The comic framework challenges our common perceptions and assumed knowledge, making history

more palatable. Learning about uncomfortable topics with a laugh or a drink builds upon earlier historical presentations, ideas, and media to retell stories. Through this, history stays alive, stays relevant, and is put to use. Comic remediation of history maintains the integrity of history itself while providing access, appeal, enthusiasm to new audiences.

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Introduction: Why Professional Wrestling Studies Now? Legitimizing a Field of Interdisciplinary Study

GARRET L. CASTLEBERRY AND CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD, WITH MATT FOY AND CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

Often the purpose of popular culture is to entertain the masses. The word "entertainment," not unlike popular culture or even communication, is ubiquitous in that it contains many meanings for many people. This is, of course, indicative of all language, but certain terms carry more weight, value, or alternative definitions. Thus, in a sense, fans and critics, audiences and consumers, students and scholars all repeat, ritualize, and re-negotiate pop culture to not only enjoy but also to decipher or contextualize it. In other words, people *wrestle* with popular culture to understand cultural systems as well as co-create or share new interpretations of human expression.

Professional wrestling is popular culture. Popular culture gains distinct texture and momentum with professional wrestling and its specific pleasures and delights. In a world of increasing infotainment, fake news, digital identity crises, and social media pandemics, professional wrestling becomes a site in which to observe these mainstream sociocultural issues in microcosm. Fake news is kayfabe, online performativity is a work, and social media campaigns can be top-down manipulated or bottom-up inspirational. The genre of pro wrestling is more than a physical story form. It articulates class struggle and personifies the negotiation of power—sometimes fair but oftentimes stacked against the just, the

virtuous, the universal underdog. Pro wrestling grapples with real-world issues but recognizes the advantage of funhouse inversion so that social anxieties might be cathartically addressed through routinely athletic performance art.

We identify professional wrestling as an arena of entertainment unique in convention and form yet reflective of many aspects of other forms of popular culture. These differences and similarities make professional wrestling a particularly interesting subset of popular culture to study. Is professional wrestling "real" or is it "fake?" Is it sport, or spectacle? Do audiences prefer mainstream or independent talents? Is there equality between male and female pro wrestlers? Is wrestling better viewed live and in person or through a televisual screen? Should wrestlers train like professional athletes or persuasive orators? Does the industry struggle with racial division or political correctness? Should scholars investigate this phenomenon from objective or subjective sets of methodological perspectives? The answer to these questions, we collectively argue, is *Yes! Yes! Yes!*

As with pop culture studies, which navigates ridicule from the larger humanities, from the social sciences, and from within academe at large, pro wrestling studies faces marginalization. This essay explores the reasons for such positioning, as well as the argument for taking this "fake" sport seriously. To accomplish this task beyond this essay, the contributors of this special issue each approach professional wrestling from varied perspectives of consumption, assessment, and theoretical evaluation. Our collective effort is to shine a light on existing wrestling-related scholarship and extend the notion that pro wrestling remains an under-represented division of scholarly interest within the umbrella of popular culture studies. Interdisciplinarity lies at the heart of our intent, and we extend an olive branch to relevant fields and interests just as we welcome the existing, and constructive, criticism that will strengthen a Professional Wrestling Studies Association.

This effort is collective, communal, and embraces the spirit shared by audiences and fans. Our contributors range from esteemed faculty to graduate students to independent digital media journalists to impassioned and expressive fans. This initial essay offers to those pop culture scholars and students unfamiliar with professional wrestling an overview of the phenomenon and the typical approaches to criticizing and studying it. We then present our conceptualization of the Professional Wrestling Studies Association, with the understanding that this special issue represents the first major publication associated with it; thus, the essays within illustrate our interdisciplinary approach to professional wrestling studies, as we seek to legitimize the field.

Defining Professional Wrestling

Professional wrestling has a history of being maligned given how it exists between sports and fiction. Non-fans ridicule it for its lack of purity, being neither sport nor performance but both simultaneously; while people rarely degrade other performative arts and entertainment like theater and film for being fake, no such qualms exist when viewing professional wrestling (Ball 144). While professional wrestlers are athletes, professional wrestling itself is not a sport. In sports the teams' owners do not control the outcome and the players do not know it in advance. At the same time, professional wrestling is more than just a fictional performance as seen on the stage or screen because of the athletic training the performers undergo and the potential for fans to impact what happens in any match. Rather than distance ourselves from this bastard hybridity, we argue this fictional-yet-realistic nature makes professional wrestling such a fertile field for analysis.

One of the first to write on professional wrestling, Roland Barthes in 1957 helped set the foundation for how to negotiate and embrace its hybridity as a fan and a scholar. His analysis in *Mythologies* provided a

perspective that fans, scholars, and fan-scholars use to argue for professional wrestling's worth: "Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque" (15). Barthes argued that the constructive nature of professional wrestling as a spectacle could reflect, represent, and reinforce moral, social, and cultural beliefs and practices. Viewing "sports entertainment" from this perspective illuminated, concretized, and normalized how to think about it. With Barthes' work, professional wrestling could be seen by scholars as akin to any other performative art and entertainment

Professional wrestling exists as many things, and can be any one thing to any given person. It relies on its audiences to interact, and sometimes takes their lead for how to handle a wrestler, match, storyline, or entire promotion. Professional wrestling changes, evolves, and morphs because of the interactions between promoters, wrestlers, and fans. Professional wrestling's polysemic nature exists because of its metaphoric nature as it comments, reflects, and even perpetuates sociocultural structures and meanings. "The squared circle, like the medieval stage, comes to represent the world itself. Its oppositions, hierarchies, conventions, and transgressions become at once more and less than what might actually be perceived in the ring itself" (Mazer 7). This metaphoric nature allows it to be read in a variety of ways.

Professional wrestling is the industry, the text, the culture, the society, and the hobby. Academics have described it as "classical theater, Kabuki, Middle English drama, and ritual drama, melodrama, moral order, and morality plays, and these are just the scholars interested in its performance aspects" (Leverette 103). To Mark Leverette, "I see Greek tragedy; I see Roman gladiatorial games; I see a corporate empire that would make an excellent model for market control; I see tales of socio-political strife played out in elaborate metaphor; I see economic matters of the day come to life in the form of matches; I see a television experience that has no

equal" (79). Because professional wrestling is so many things, we have multiple texts, practices, and processes to analyze: wrestlers, fans, promoters, texts, promotions, business practices, storylines, characters, matches, moves, and more. We can also consider the contexts surrounding professional wrestling: the political, economic, cultural, and social implications. The text and context can occur at any different level. These texts and contexts change over time and from space to space. With so many things to look at, we need more than one perspective to look at them, and the history of research done in this field demonstrates this interdisciplinarity—but a field lacking an interdisciplinary community.

History of Professional Wrestling Studies

While it can be many different things to different people, professional wrestling still struggles for acceptance in academic circles. Perhaps because it can be so many different things, the field has lacked coherence. "Unlike other areas of study such as film or, to a lesser extent, television, professional wrestling does not have a body of already-analyzed and broadly-accepted 'canon' texts to provide some kind of guiding context; the work of academic cultural analysis has essentially preceded a body of mainstream literary analysis and canonic elevation" (MacFarlane 138). With so many different academic perspectives used to study professional wrestling from different disciplines and methodological approaches, collectively these different perspectives coalesce under one academic aegis solidified as "professional wrestling studies."

Of course, research has been done on professional wrestling for decades. Historically, professional wrestling studies have been interested in understanding the fictional nature of "sports entertainment" and critiquing the matches, wrestlers, and promotions for being misogynist, racist, jingoist, etc. Historically, without any relationships to specific countries, towns, or other entities, wrestlers were "free to take on identities

of persons or groups both within and outside their immediate society. The identities assumed by wrestlers and the alliances formed by them offer a rare opportunity to observe, on the one hand, the nature of stereotypes held by the organizers, the wrestlers, and the public, and, on the other hand, the interests of the public revealed in the need for explicit stereotypes" (Ball 4). Thus, identity issues have been primary to professional wrestling studies given the spectacle's propensity to reflect, represent, and reinforce sociocultural and historical norms and values.

While it is important to understand the circulation and perpetuation of stereotypes, the analytical focus also fueled the perception of professional wrestling as unworthy of academic consideration. Academics and other elites have long viewed professional wrestling as being the purview of the lower and working classes, and thus trading in the lower morals, values, norms, and stereotypes of those classes. This perception has some merit, given the preponderance of lower and working-class individuals proclaiming themselves as professional wrestling fans (Mazer 7). At the same time, viewing professional wrestling as merely reflecting such class-based values does not fully explain the phenomenon, given how, with the WWE especially, the promotions are controlled by upper class individuals who create the texts "to maximize profits and to surreptitiously promote the core values of conservative bureaucratic elites" (Ball 141). From this perspective, those lower values existed not because they reflected the working class, but because they represented how the elites viewed the working class. Such stereotypes, then, create conflict and further repress lower and working-class fans, and studies that focus only on such stereotypes further those aims.

Along with a focus on stereotypes, Dan Beard and John Heppen have catalogued other academic approaches to studying professional wrestling, including: "wrestling as performance or drama… Media criticism of wrestling studies the issues of gender, sex, ethnicity, stereotype, and politics of its storylines" (26). Similarly, academic work has drawn on

other legitimate fields to normalize this lower-class entity and phenomenon, such as dramaturgy, theatre, folklore, "often eliding the distinction between sport and theatre or sport and ritual in order both to make their points and to recuperate wrestling from its status as a less than legitimate form" (Mazer 7).

Indeed, according to Sharon Mazer, "What a survey of the literature ultimately reveals is the range of theoretical discourses that may be applied to wrestling. […] As a consequence, academic studies of professional wrestling are best defined by the writers' relative proximity to the ring" (7). In this collection, both Eero Laine and Garret Castleberry explore the interdisciplinary nature of pro-wrestling studies. Within the past decade, more research has emerged on professional wrestling from these various perspectives, perhaps validating Mazer's contention. As more pro-wrestling fans emerged in graduate school and academia, they brought their different theoretical and methodological perspectives to bear on the texts of their fandom. Such fan-scholars have thus produced a diverse body of scholarship on which to base a field of professional wrestling studies. What could help now is the development of an interdisciplinary community built around this interdisciplinarity.

Contemporary Professional Wrestling Studies

If our goal is the legitimization of professional wrestling studies, then we should consider how this can be done. Previous work focused on defining the entity and phenomenon and criticizing it along, ultimately, class boundaries. The concerns of historical professional wrestling studies remain in modern studies, but two new trends in professional wrestling indicate more possibilities. Digital communication technologies, especially social media, have impacted how wrestlers communicate with their fans, and new online technologies have changed how promoters distribute their shows. More texts, then, have been added to what defines

professional wrestling, promoting and requiring more theoretical and methodological approaches to studying these texts and practices.

First, the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies have expanded the amount of wrestling texts available to analyze, making available wrestling from various time periods and locales. Wrestling has become more widely available because of digital communication technologies that allow for the distribution of matches from different promotions as well as communiques from the wrestlers themselves. For example, the WWE Network gives fans access to decades' worth of matches from different promotions either owned or licensed by WWE, and provides a storehouse for newer programming meant to further the appeal of WWE Superstars, such as *Table for Three*, *Ride Along*, and *Swerved*. The Network also offers cartoons for the younger kids now logging in and getting to establish that fan relationship with the WWE. Meanwhile, older audiences that grew up watching shows from previous decades can go back and watch the WWE canon (along with WCW, ECW, WCCW, NWA, and more) and have a conversation with younger audiences about older matches and wrestlers and their importance to the WWE's fictional history.

In addition, both WWE and other promotions from around the world are using online resources like YouTube to distribute their matches. Promotions such as AAW, NJPW, ROH, Chikara, and many others use these platforms, and even *Lucha Underground* can be found via Sling TV and Netflix, thereby challenging traditional television. Independent wrestlers use social networks to promote themselves via platforms like Twitter and YouTube (see Olson's piece in this volume for more on this phenomenon), while fans use social media to curate and critique wrestling texts. A hardcore crowd of smarks (aka "smart marks") use social media to curate, analyze, critique, parody, and comment on wrestlers, matches, and promotions. In addition, Wrestlers and fans interact with one another via these platforms, all in a way that gives scholars easy access to their

performances. While an internet wrestling community has existed since the internet's inception, the revolution of Web 2.0 involves more people talking than ever.

Digital communication technologies also have provided for another professional wrestling text to study. Perhaps no other media industries offer this ability to study production and the interaction between professionals and fans, because wrestlers and promoters go out of their way to connect with wrestling fans. Scholars rarely have the chance to study a text from a production standpoint or to talk to the producers in the way that wrestling offers. At the same time, wrestlers and promoters are extremely reluctant to respond to questions about the means of production, except during shoot interviews. Luckily, such conversations are now accessible online. Fans and scholars alike can access these interviews via YouTube and podcasts like *The Art of Wrestling* with Colt Cabana.

The variety of texts is met with a plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches. The academic study of professional wrestling "ranges from political, to gender, to media critiques" and has been "described as both postmodern media and fetishistic scopophilia" (Souther 270). While professional wrestling has been analyzed for years, recently the field of study has seen an expansion that involves a range of disciplines, theories, methodologies, and methods, all seeking to study the various aspects of professional wrestling. Recent publications have examined professional wrestling from the perspectives of performance studies, rhetorical studies, fan studies, convergence studies, political economic studies, reception studies, sociological studies, cultural studies, communication studies, anthropological studies, health studies, and more. This expansion demonstrates the potential for professional wrestling studies, while also validating the usefulness of studying it as another popular culture text, economic system, and location of fan activity. Professional wrestling studies should welcome those interested in what

professional wrestling is, how it works, who likes it, where it happens, why it happens, when it works, and more.

Such has been, and continues to be, the nature of professional wrestling studies. Leverette discusses different approaches in popular culture studies to suggest how "these various disciplines that will help us, each in their own way, find an answer to the question: why wrestling?" (19). Professional wrestling studies has multi-method and multi-perspective opportunities. The multitude and variety of texts that constitute professional wrestling invite interdisciplinary work that welcome and invite different theories, methods, disciplines, and methodologies. Given the interactive nature of professional wrestling, studying it should also invite the perspectives from the wrestlers themselves, and invite fans to also serve as informed analysts and critics. Professional wrestling studies is interdisciplinary, and needs an interdisciplinary community to legitimize it.

Introducing the Professional Wrestling Studies Association

In March of 2017, CarrieLynn D. Reinhard, Matt Foy, Chris Medjesky, and Kathie Kallevig met during the Central States Communication Association to discuss the possibility of organizing such an interdisciplinary community to help legitimize the study of professional wrestling. Since then, and along with other scholars around the world, we have worked to develop the Professional Wrestling Studies Association. The Professional Wrestling Studies Association (henceforth PWSA) is intended to provide this organizing force, whereby it would connect international professional wrestling studies researchers together— wherever they are located, at whatever level of their academic career they are in, and even if they are more fan than scholar. Coming together in such an organization, to connect and share, should help further the cause of legitimizing professional wrestling studies.

Overall, the intention of the PWSA is to help academics, fans, and professionals organize around the study of professional wrestling to share their work and support one another, and thereby work towards the legitimization of the field. We are completing a series of steps designed to incrementally accomplish that goal. This process began with the construction of a website, blog, and Twitter account; the next step was the development of this special edition of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*, which we hope will lead to our creating an international journal dedicated to professional wrestling studies.

First, we created a website and blog for multimedia and multimodal presentations of content produced by academics, fans, and professionals. Found at prowrestlingstudies.wordpress.com, the website/blog serves the primary goal by providing a central space to collect such content and a process for legitimizing such content through peer-reviewed curation. Curated content would promote professional wrestling studies through scholarship and criticism that utilizes a variety of theories, methodologies, and methods from a range of fields and disciplines to describe, interpret, analyze, and critique the multitude of texts associated with professional wrestling (such as, but not limited to, matches, wrestlers, promoters, federations, marketing, fans, fan activities). Curated content undergoes a peer-review process on this open access website/blog to help scholars legitimize the study of professional wrestling.

Along with this curated content, we encourage content providers to engage in a new form of scholarly communication by adding a procedural publishing process to this open-access, peer-reviewed process. This publishing process involves the sharing of drafts for open-editing, constructive reviewing that demonstrates for young scholars and non-scholars the scholarship process from idea through draft to final product. Furthermore, along with the curated content and procedural publishing process, content providers are encouraged to produce creative nonfiction through embracing more multimedia and multimodal presentations; such

presentations could serve as public scholarship, working to bridge the gap between academic, fan, and professional perspectives.

Second, the PWSA will produce an online, open-access journal. Such a journal would maintain the integrity of the peer-review process, but could also bring in more fan-based or professional criticisms of professional wrestling, thereby replicating the other content options from the website/blog. The journal's publication schedule would also rely on interest and amount of content. The goal would be to produce an issue at least once a year to coincide with the world's largest pro-wrestling event, WWE's WrestleMania.

Third, to further legitimize the field of professional wrestling studies, work will be undertaken to align the PWSA with the traditional conceptualization of an association. This alignment entails the concretization of leaders, a constitution and bylaws, and a determination of annual meetings, such as symposiums or conferences. The editorial board gathered to oversee the website/blog, and any subsequent journal, will begin the process towards creating a traditional association the summer of 2018.

Finally, the PWSA will sponsor academic events related to professional wrestling studies. Currently, there is a Wrestling Studies Area at the Midwest Popular Culture/American Culture Association. Furthermore, people have organized one-day symposiums on professional wrestling, and hopefully connecting people via the PWSA would facilitate the organization of more such symposiums. Others have also expressed interest in organizing a conference in relation to WrestleMania. Another approach could be to organize a conference in relation to a pop cultural convention, such as the Comic Arts Conference that used to run in conjunction with the San Diego Comic-Con. These options should all be discussed and considered, and hopefully the PWSA can help with such organizing, and potentially even be the main organizing force should sufficient interest emerge.

Why Study Professional Wrestling?

As with any academic field of study, its utility comes in what the studies can tell us about the practices, performances, and people of the contemporary world. The metaphoric nature of professional wrestling exemplifies this possibility, as the choreography, "mini-plays or dramas of events significant to spectators," the symbolism and stereotypes all provide for fertile points of entry for comparison and criticism (Ball 4). Professional wrestling exists as "a platform for articulating the priorities of the community. Its basic morality play form, the symbolic nature of characters, all can be used as political satire or even a rallying cry for community mobilization" (Souther 271). The mythologies of professional wrestling are both larger than life and life itself.

Professional wrestling can present a microcosm of contemporary peoples, communities, cultures, and societies to highlight norms and tensions that exist in the larger reality beyond the squared circle. What follows are contemporary issues and entities that professional wrestling can help us understand:

Studying how professional wrestling utilizes digital communication technologies like social media can help build on the study of convergence culture and the importance of these technologies for businesses and people's everyday lives. For example, understanding the actions of the WWE can illuminate how multinationals and monopolies operate in the 21st century, and particularly how entertainment conglomerates maximize their control over traditional and digital mediums.

Understanding the contexts and practices of professional wrestling can illuminate our understanding of politics, such as examining Donald J. Trump's political actions through the lens of kayfabe, deconstructing the nationalism and racism in the 2017 Jinder Mahal push, or looking at the Divas Revolution as a matter of gender politics. Studying how kayfabe is

constructed, for example, can help democracies in the 21st century contend with issues of fake news and disinformation campaigns.

Professional wrestling is a transcultural and transnational text, and can thus help us understand global cultures. It is starting to make inroads in Abu Dhabi, Jordan, China, India, Germany, Brazil, and other countries around the world. The United Kingdom, Mexico, and Japan have long histories of their own unique approaches to professional wrestling. The WWE has drawn on these different nations and cultures through their tournaments, like the Mae Young Classic and the Cruiserweight Classic. Promotions such as NJPW and shows like *Lucha Underground* bring together wrestlers from around the world. Because of the internet, fans can see wrestling from around the world.

These three areas of business, politics, and globalization represent just some ideas for how professional wrestling studies and the PWSA could aid in our understanding of this pop cultural phenomenon. Studying the texts and contexts of professional wrestling, within an interdisciplinary community, could shed light on the various phenomena and practices of pop culture and beyond.

This Special Issue

For this special issue, in the interest of maximizing a diversity of voices, our editorial vision is to provide shorter essays that collectively add momentum in favor of an emerging interdisciplinary field of interest. Overall, the range of works collected in this special edition demonstrates the interdisciplinary and public engagement philosophies underlying the PWSA.

Eero Laine provides an overview of professional wrestling studies and argues for scholars embracing the concept of "kayfabe" in other disciplines. Garret Castleberry considers the different disciplinary and methodological approaches to understanding professional wrestling.

Catherine Salmon discusses how to apply various psychological theories to understand the cast of characters that comprise professional wrestling. Karen Corteen presents critical criminology as a theoretical approach for understanding the problems associated with the WWE, and perhaps professional wrestling in general. Gabriela I. Morales and Mario A. Dozal examine professional wrestling from an education-entertainment perspective to argue that audiences can learn health messages from its various texts.

Matt Foy advocates for increased scholarly attention at the micro level of individual characters and storylines by studying political storytelling. John Quinn and Carolina Silveira demonstrate how to apply multimodal discourse analysis to understand the various relations that pervade and sculpt this form of popular culture entertainment. J. H. Roberts and Dominic Sevieri utilize thing theory to unpack the importance placed on the championship belt in professional wrestling. Rasmus Bysted Møller and Thomas Klintøe Laursen draw on sociological theories to argue that professional wrestling allows both audiences and wrestlers to experience the excitement of medieval style battle, only in a more civilized manner.

Jack V. Karlis draws on uses and gratifications theory to report on a survey of WWE fans to explain why these viewers use social media as part of their fandom. John Heppen and David Beard examine how local, independent professional wrestling can challenge more traditional notions of masculinity. Timothy Bavlnka analyzes various contemporary professional wrestlers to argue that they reflect horror genre tropes and conventions. Dan Mathewson provides insight into the importance of class-based ideologies circulating around professional wrestling in the Southern United States.

Fan Joe Belfeuil offers a historical overview of New Japan Professional Wrestling and makes a case for the importance of the organization. Fan-scholar Christopher J. Olson provides interviews with indie wrestlers and promoters who discuss how social media impacts

professional wrestling. In the final section, in conjunction with PCSJ, we demonstrate the growing market of interest through a showcase of pro wrestling-focused reviews that include academic and general interest books, documentaries, video games, podcasts, and historic wrestling events.

Hopefully by the end of this volume, after considering the work of this interdisciplinary community, you will no longer be asking "why professional wrestling studies?"—instead, you will be saying "why *not* professional wrestling studies?"

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Professional Wrestling Scholarship: Legitimacy and Kayfabe

EERO LAINE

Professional wrestling sits, often awkwardly, between sports and theatre. Even after admitting to its own fictions and ending nearly a century of awkward protestations, the professional wrestling industry still faces criticism both for bad theatrics and not being a real sport. For the most part, professional wrestling has dropped the conceit and generally defensive stance, yet the largest professional wrestling promoter, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), still embraces the term "sports entertainment"—a slippery phrase that seems intentionally unclear. Indeed, it is this evasiveness that causes professional wrestling so much trouble both in popular culture and in the academy. Henry Jenkins contends: "This is why wrestling is so often figured as monstrous and perverse. The WWE is a horrifying hybrid—not sports, sports entertainment; not real, not fake, but someplace in between" (Jenkins). Whatever it calls itself, there is no longer any question that professional wrestling bouts are decided in advance, the established rules are only rarely adhered to, and many of the other markers of sport are too excessive to be taken seriously.

Even the frequent over-muscled body of the wrestler is not actually sportive but rather, as Broderick Chow argues, "a *theatrical body*, which manages to provoke the same kind of discomfort and irritation as bad theatre, more specifically, theatre that is *trying too hard*. Muscles that exceed function appear to be obviously *performing*. They seem 'gimmicky'" (150). Indeed, the notion of the "built body," for Chow, is the "body that exceeds its economic or social positioning, as a purely 'theatrical' element within wrestling that repeats and remembers queer potentiality that was first articulated in the physical culture movement" (149). Such overt and embodied theatricality cannot save professional wrestling from its failed sportiness. Sharon Mazer noted over twenty years ago: "Although pro wrestling is neither accepted as a legitimate sport, nor can it be considered legitimate theatre, it intersects, exploits, and, finally parodies both forms of entertainment" (98). However, even if this blended entertainment is

often misunderstood, the muddling of genre is not only accepted by fans and wrestlers but seems to be fully embraced and even fundamental to the professional wrestling form and event.

Considering the ways that professional wrestling has been analyzed in the past, and the ways that its very format eludes categorization, this article points toward possibilities for professional wrestling studies methodologies that embrace the hybridity of professional wrestling. Throughout, I am interested in whether professional wrestling might simply serve as a useful, and at times convenient, example for various fields of study, or if there is the possibility of considering professional wrestling as an intervention and intersection to these fields, or perhaps be considered as its own academic field or subfield of study.

Criticizing Professional Wrestling

Professional wrestling cultivates a way of watching, reading, seeing and criticizing that places fans and scholars in a unique position among a media and political landscape that is, as many have argued, more and more like professional wrestling—with its seemingly scripted reality and over the top personalities. In professional wrestling, we find a vernacular and popular critique that stems from this unique mode of storytelling. To watch professional wrestling is to engage critically, examining and analyzing a performance that is both athletic and theatrical—or, as I have argued elsewhere with Broderick Chow and Claire Warden, as situated between performance and theatricality (Chow, Laine, and Warden). It is this unique quality of professional wrestling that is perhaps the real contribution to and possible basis for a subfield of and professional organization for professional wrestling scholarship. Professional wrestling studies is itself interdisciplinary and cuts across fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, gender and sexuality studies, theatre and performance studies, history, art, English, comparative literature, cultural studies, ethnic studies economics, and others. The question for professional wrestling studies or any association that might attempt to unify its scholars is one of methodology and commonality. In other words: what about professional wrestling can be taken up by and engaged with scholars from such a wide range of disciplines and training?

Despite the many possibilities for studying professional wrestling and established scholarly interest, there is, it seems, an assumption that to pay

attention to pro wrestling is to somehow legitimize it, and for many that is a dangerous gambit. Consider one example in Neil Genzlinger's *New York Times* review of Thomas Hackett's book *Slaphappy: Pride, Prejudice, and Professional Wrestling.* In his review, Geenzlinger appears upset by the basic idea that such a book might even be written. The critic closes his review with the following proclamation:

> So yes, read the book and congratulate yourself for being able to accept professional wrestling and its fans as legitimate culture, worthy of being analyzed and appreciated like fine literature. Just don't accidentally tune into "SmackDown!" on television or stumble onto a fan Web site, because you might encounter things like this, from the write-up of a recent match on pwinsider.com: "Riley tripped Young and tagged in Shark Boy, who worked over Young with punches and bit him on the rear end when he missed a legdrop." "Gee," you may find yourself thinking, "there really is such a thing as unredeemable garbage after all. And this may be it."

To pay attention to professional wrestling, even critically, is a step too far for many.

Yet, Hackett is rarely kind to his subjects and writes critically of his interviewees. Throughout the book he seems to go quite far in distancing himself from wrestling fans and the more extreme aspects of pro wrestling. For instance, Hackett describes a group of pro-wrestling fans he observes on a bus as "not athletic themselves, or artistic, or attractive, or consciously rebellious, or even magnificently repellent" (15). One of these young men he describes says pro-wrestling fans are "like Trekkies, but worse, they're fucking ridiculous. They're semiretarded; it embarrasses you. I go to these wrestling shows and look around at these guys, and I think, 'Do I look like them?' 'Well, yes, he did'" (16–17). Such responses to professional wrestling are at the crux of whether professional wrestling is suitable material for academic study and how to even study it; however, such critiques often get lost in the content of the genre, overshadowed by problematic storylines and troubling characters. Similar critiques also and often betray a classist position tied to certain cultural markers of taste and distinction.

Professional wrestling does not aspire to be fine literature (and only the most ardent of fans might attempt to interpret it as such) and is driven by intense

fandom. Hackett and Genzlinger perform similar functions in denigrating professional wrestling to assert their own taste and stature. While Hackett is willing to get on the tour bus with fans, only to mark clear lines of class and taste between him and his subject, Genzlinger, writing for the *New York Times*, is not willing to afford such a study of professional wrestling any traction. The aversion to "lowbrow" entertainment does not hide behind even the thinnest of veneers. While Hackett acknowledges that the fans have some level of expertise ("they talked astutely about demographics, Nielson ratings, and buy rates. They compared the relative effectiveness of different marketing strategies."), for him, their expertise only marks them further as highly skilled consumers (18).

Lawrence W. Levine's classic work, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, traces the developing hegemonic system of taste-making. He notes the first uses of highbrow and lowbrow occurring in the 1880s and early 1900s, respectively, and that the notions were "derived from the phrenological terms 'highbrowed' and lowbrowed,' which were prominently featured in the nineteenth century practice of determining racial types and intelligence by measuring cranial shapes and capacities" (221). White supremacist science provided the language for distinguishing cultural taste. The result was not simply to establish the upper classes as culturally superior to the populace through the funding, practice, and refinement of certain cultural forms, but to also make such arrangement appear natural and innate. Levine flatly states that "none of this is meant to argue that culture at the turn of the century was primarily a mechanism of social control" (206). Culture and taste are not blunt instruments and generally too complicated for such simple formulations, but Levine notes:

> It is important to recognize the degree of tension in this relationship, which led the arbiters of culture on the one hand to insulate themselves from the masses in order to promote and preserve pure culture, and on the other to reach out to the masses and sow the seeds of culture among them in order to ensure civilized order (206).

It is precisely during this period described by Levine, in these great cultural shifts of the early twentieth century, that pro wrestling emerged from carnivals and local athletic troupes of the late-1800s and became more theatrical. This shift occurred

even as theatre in Europe and especially the US became more "artistic" and less populist, ostensibly moving away commercial interests.[1] Professional wrestling seems to happily exist in the margins—even as it emerged and faded from widespread attention throughout the twentieth century, it always staged itself in opposition to anything representing proper or "mainstream." If anything, professional wrestling takes pains to disrupt such order and is decidedly and proudly "lowbrow."

It is precisely for this reason that many attempts to study professional wrestling academically seem frozen by the false choices that plague other studies of popular culture. Both those who treat wrestling like rebellious performance art or brilliant popular storytelling, and those who attack it like regressive garbage, make the same mistake of fetishizing content and, to take up Raymond Williams, the institutions that generate it, while ignoring the social and cultural formations looming over it all. Williams points us to critique the "formations; those effective movements and tendencies in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions" (117). That is, many of the arguments that condemn professional wrestling are simply the other side of the coin of those that celebrate professional wrestling. Indeed, useful in professional wrestling is not that it somehow mimics or replaces the best dramatic literature or avant-garde art or that it is somehow the pinnacle of popular storytelling or that it represents, distorts, or riffs on popular culture and politics; rather, professional wrestling presents a model of lowbrow theoretical critique. At this point, professional wrestling has already been represented formally in institutions of the academy, but it is in many ways lacking its own recognized methodology with which to critique the social and cultural formations that both condemn and celebrate it. The following sections examine this institutionality and then propose some possibilities for further methodological development.

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[1] Read alongside each other, Scott Beekman's *Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America* and David Savran's *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theatre, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* map a theatricalization of wrestling that coincides with the process of distinguishing theatre as an art rather than a popular performance form.

Professional Wrestling Studies

While neither "formal" nor "academic" are adjectives used with any frequency to describe professional wrestling, numerous formal academic studies of professional wrestling exist. Wrestling scholars will be familiar with Sharon Mazer's *Professional Wrestling: Sport and Spectacle*, Heather Levi's *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*, R. Tyson Smith's *Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity, and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling*, and the edited volumes *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling* edited by Nicholas Sammond and *Performance and Professional Wrestling* edited by Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden. However, many more formal academic studies of professional wrestling exist, including graduate theses and dissertations, online and print journal articles, and award-winning conference papers. Some of the above books started as dissertations (Levi and Smith, for instance), while many more, for whatever reason, were not published as books.

ProQuest's Thesis and Dissertation Global database lists twenty-six graduate theses and dissertations with either "professional wrestling" or "lucha libre" in the title (see Appendix). There are currently no dissertations or theses that include the term "puroresu" in the title.[2] The studies span several disciplines and nearly fifty years, indicating a long, if limited, study of professional wrestling in the academy. These theses and dissertations form an archive of scholarly work that is largely unmined in many publications on the topic of professional wrestling. I am primarily interested in a broad overview of the work, curious as to what these university-sanctioned studies of professional wrestling might tell us about the past and thus the future of professional wrestling scholarship.

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[2] The list of theses and dissertations that appear with keyword searches (meaning that the phrase appears somewhere in the body of the text, but not necessarily the title) is significantly larger than just a title search: 1127 for "professional wrestling," 338 for "lucha libre," and 6 for "puroresu." This search includes everything that is even a passing mention of the terms. I mention it here as a possible future compilation project for the study of professional wrestling. The complete dissertations and theses are readily available, the individual chapters and smaller sections might be aggregated and examined in their own right.

The oldest dissertation on professional wrestling comes from 1968 and was written by John Mack Kingsmore at the University of Maryland, College Park on the topic of "The Effect of a Professional Wrestling and Professional Basketball Contest Upon the Aggressive Tendencies of Male Spectators." Interestingly, it is work that appears to foretell quite a bit of future academic and popular studies of professional wrestling as a form that might promote or encourage violent behavior and aggressions. In the 1990s, professional wrestling came under fire from the popular news magazine TV show *20/20*, in part due to the phenomenon of backyard wrestling and professional wrestling's alleged effects on children. Wrestler Mick Foley chronicles the accusations and his own interview on *20/20* in his book *Foley is Good: And the Real World is Faker than Wrestling* (62). While many articles were published during the Attitude Era on the topic of media effects, only one other dissertation addresses the topic: Tamara S. Schnepel's 2013 "Observational Learning: The Impact of The Aggressive Actions Portrayed on WWE Professional Wrestling on Juvenile Behavior." Notably, Schnepel's and Kingsmore's dissertations are the only such studies from their respective disciplines of psychology and physical education.

Of the remaining twenty-four theses and dissertations, six were completed in the fields of communications and media studies, and six were completed in fields related to the arts, including theatre and performance studies, art, and music. The field with the third largest number is sociology with four dissertations and theses, followed by anthropology and folklore/narratology with three each, and comparative literature and languages with one each. This range of disciplines is perhaps not surprising given the ways that professional wrestling is often studied. Indeed, the second graduate study written and archived with ProQuest, in many ways, foresees many research threads in the field.

Alen Turowetz's 1974 MA thesis, "An Ethnography of Professional Wrestling: Elements of a Staged Contest," was written for the Sociology Department at McGill University. Even in the title, observable impulses exist towards interview and ethnography that are key to many of the notable books in the field, while also engaging the fact that professional wrestling is clearly a staged event. Indeed, "staged contest" might even be seen as a sort of precursor for "sports entertainment" in its play on legitimate competition and predetermined outcomes. Turowetz sets out a claim that will echo through professional wrestling scholarship and fandom for many years when he states: "the issue of whether or not wrestling is a fake is sociologically irrelevant compared to the issue of what

being a wrestler means [and] what a wrestler does" (54). How many scholarly and popular pieces of writing on wrestling begin by dismissing claims that professional wrestling is fake and that those who accuse the form of fakeness are examining the wrong things? Indeed, Turowitz' sociological questions point us towards the important considerations of how and why professional wrestling matters.[3] This intentional elision of the question of fakeness is and should be a baseline for any field or association for professional wrestling studies.

The bulk of the theses and dissertations appear after the year 2000.[4] This perhaps makes sense as professional wrestling gained widespread appeal and television viewership throughout the 1990s and WWE had rather neatly consolidated much of the industry by the early years of the new millennium. These recent theses and dissertations are also split among communications departments, the social sciences, and theatre and other arts. It is particularly worth noting that all the theses and dissertations containing the term "lucha libre" were filed after the year 2000 (Heather Levi had the first in 2001). This rapid increase in academic attention to professional wrestling in its many forms points toward a trend of institutionalizing the study of professional wrestling. Notably, it is as professional wrestling is stabilizing (and some would argue being monopolized by WWE) that it is also finding a place in the academy.

Given such stabilization and institutionalization, I am interested in the possibility of developing a methodology that could further professional wrestling research and carry the possibility for use outside of professional wrestling and pro wrestling scholarship. In looking at these early dissertations and theses, several patterns emerge, not least of which is a focus on the audience or wrestling fans (often employing ethnographic methodologies), both in the study of effects or

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[3] Indeed, these questions are central to my own work in theatre and performance studies. As I have written with the Future Advisory Board of Performance Studies international, regarding working "in confluence with Diana Taylor's 'investment' in performance studies as coming 'less from what it *is*, but what it allows us to *do*' (Taylor 16 cited in Cervera, et al, italics in original)," we might also spend less time in professional wrestling studies working on definitions of professional wrestling and its historical periodization and rather concern ourselves with what professional wrestling does and what it allows us to examine that other forms might not.

[4] Nineteen of the twenty-six theses and dissertations were finished after 2000.

what the fans know or care about, especially considering a conscious acknowledgement of the fiction of wrestling and the ways that the fiction is created and maintained. In many ways, these examinations contain a sort of embedded critique that begins from the standpoint that nothing in professional wrestling can be taken at face value.

Kayfabe Critique

This critique stems from a century of trying to see behind the curtain on professional wrestling, of trying to decipher the real from the fake, of trying to break *kayfabe*. A term that that describes the diegetic world of professional wrestling as real, kayfabe is the truth those in power tell you. It is the storylines and corporate narrative presented to the public.[5] It is also an acknowledgement that even as you try to break through the web of kayfabe, you are still probably being duped one way or another. Kayfabe has its roots in carnival slang perhaps dating as far back as the 1800s, but it might describe the contemporary concept wherein we know we're being deceived but we play along, sometimes because we must and sometimes because it is actually pleasurable (Chow and Laine 46). That is, kayfabe is a vernacular term that unveils a form of analysis that is at once deeply cynical yet can be optimistically speculative. It reads narratives onto everyday events and assumes a backstage, where those in power make decisions that affect the rest of us. Taking up kayfabe as a pervasive analytic recognizes the inherent theatricality of our political system, corporations, and our daily interactions and performances.

    The many definitions and uses of the term kayfabe point to two parallel issues: 1) the separation of an inside group of performers from an outside group of spectators and 2) the distinction between the theatrical and the performed. Kayfabe is the visible and observable theatrical presentation of a fictional or predetermined world and timeline, which, not incidentally, co-exists neatly with our own. That is, kayfabe might be seen as the theatricality that overlays

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[5] See Fiona A. E. McQuarrie's discussion of kayfabe as corporate technique in "Breaking Kayfabe: 'The History of a History' of World Wrestling Entertainment," *Management & Organizational History* 1, no. 3 (2006).

performance—the storyline surrounding the clothesline. This is not to say that kayfabe is entirely intentional or proscribed, as even mistakes in performance can be absorbed into kayfabe theatricality. This turns backstage into a privileged space where the future of the kayfabe world might be developed, decided, and negotiated.

Even if we take kayfabe at its most simple as a verbal command or performative—"Kayfabe!" meaning "Be fake!" or "Get into/stay in character!"—the declaration delineates a space and time for theatricality. Erving Goffman referred to moments where the insiders of a group were spontaneously confronted with outsiders as "inopportune intrusions" (209). The experience of the wrestler under kayfabe is strikingly similar to Goffman's description of "when an outsider accidentally enters a region in which a performance is being given, or when a member of the audience inadvertently enters backstage" (209). The audience member is struck by the strangeness of the behavior as compared to what they believe they know of the performer.

Goffman might refer to expanding the verbal warning further into an imaginary world as "dramaturgical loyalty" (212). That is, for much of pro-wrestling history, wrestlers relied on always keeping the con in play in order to earn their paychecks:

> It is apparent that if a team is to sustain the line it has taken, the teammates must act as if they accepted certain moral obligations. They must not betray the secrets of the team when between performances—whether from self-interest, principle, or lack of discretion (212).

An implication of this insider/outsider dynamic manifests in treating spectators as mindless dupes, or marks. Goffman again:

> One basic technique the team can employ to defend itself against such disloyalty is to develop high in-group solidarity within the team, while creating a backstage image of the audience which makes the audience sufficiently inhuman to allow the performers to cozen them with emotional and moral immunity (214).

The divide in professional wrestling may not strip fans of their humanity, but the difference between insiders and outsiders is clear. Because of professional wrestling's historical roots in the carnival and circus, the duplicity surrounding

the business of wrestling frequently meant getting one over on the audience. As has been mentioned, the term "mark" referred to one that was an easy target to be duped into believing a story and thus parted with one's money.

Indeed, despite a general admission of kayfabe since the mid-1990s, there continues to be resistance to openly discussing such matters. Perhaps not surprisingly then, professional wrestling remains resistant to attempts to classify and study it. For most of the past century, wrestlers and wrestling promoters vehemently disavowed the theatricality of pro wrestling while antagonizing those who might endeavor to analyze the form as anything other than legitimate sport. A 2010 letter from a reader to *PWInsider.com* (Professional Wrestling Insider) takes issue with the articles, correspondence, and "interviews where someone in the industry talks down about fans who 'use wrestling lingo.' I understand the frustration some people may have when fans try to act too 'smart' but, honestly, I've never got how protective they've been of some terms" (Woodward).[6] The response: "some guys are just being jerks. Some are just not willing to accept that the days of kayfabe are over, and the business it exposed now, including the lingo. Some are just still 'old school' in that way" (Woodward). That is, even though everyone knows professional wrestling is theatrical doesn't mean that wrestlers should openly discuss it as such—but professional wrestling scholars must.

It is noteworthy that the resistance to studying professional wrestling comes at times from both those who perform it (Goffman's 'insiders') and from the various arbiters of culture who would quickly rebuff those who might give the "sport" too close scrutiny. This dual doubt, in part with professional wrestling's popular appeal and aesthetics, has left professional wrestling with a problem of legitimacy. However, there is a long history of the study of professional wrestling in the academy that we might lean on to make the case for such work into the future. In addition, the professional wrestling form has a built-in critique, a way of watching and performing, in kayfabe that requires an investment in what wrestling *does*, even as it distracts us with questions of what it *is*.

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[6] Buck Woodward, "TNA Buying a New name, Bret Hart Having Back Up, Hogan at Live Events and More," *PWInsider.com*, 5 February 2010, accessed 2 May 2017, http://www.pwinsider.com/ViewArticle.php?id=44856&p=1.

Indeed, taking kayfabe as a central analytic for work on professional wrestling might open possibilities for expanding the work of professional wrestling scholarship outward to other disciplines and fields of study. Understanding kayfabe, even as a contested term, as wrestling fans and scholars do, might be the first steps towards a sort of popular ideological critique that quickly moves beyond professional wrestling to many aspects of public and private life. Certainly, to view the world through a kayfabe lens is to see the world cynically. Such a view supposes a con, a fix, and that everyone is working deceptively for their own benefit. Yet, and this is the gambit that makes such an endeavor possibly quite interesting, kayfabe is also potentially quite optimistic in seeing everything in the past and on the horizon as malleable and capable of being rewritten. This view of kayfabe is one that wrestling scholars might embrace.[7] How can we take kayfabe as an analytic, a way of studying and of scholarship, back to our home disciplines and departments? What does an emphasis on kayfabe offer us in our own conversations and development as a field and association?

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[7] Such work is forthcoming: kayfabe as a necessary analytic is taken up by Broderick Chow, Claire Warden, and myself in an article, that responds to Sharon Mazer's recent article in *TDR*, "Donald Trump Shoots the Match."

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Appendix

Year	Name	Title	Discipline (as indicated in thesis/ dissertation)	Institution	MA/PhD
2017	Brooks Oglesby	Daniel Bryan & The Negotiation of Kayfabe in Professional Wrestling	Communication	University of South Florida	MA
2016	Eero Laine	Professional Wrestling and/as Theatre: Bodies, Labor, and the Commercial Stage	Theatre	The Graduate Center, City University of New York	PhD
2015	Daniel Calleros Villarreal	Digital Narratives and Linguistic Articulations of Mexican Identities in Emergent Media: Race, *Lucha Libre* Masks and Mock Spanish	Spanish and Portuguese	University of Arizona	PhD
2015	Marcela Montoya Ortega	Resituating the Cultural Meanings of Lucha Libre Mexicana: A Practice-Based Exploration of Diasporic Mexicanness	Art	University of Arts London (UK)	
2014	Benjamin Litherland	The Field and the Stage Pugilism, Combat Performance and Professional Wrestling in England: 1700–1980	Media and Film	University of Sussex (UK)	PhD
2013	Nell Haynes	Chola in a Choke Hold: Gender, Globalization, and Authenticity in Bolivian Lucha Libre	Anthropology	American University	PhD
2013	Jessica Friedrichs	Good versus Evil in the Squared Circle: Foreign and Minority Representations in Professional Wrestling	Mass Communication	Middle Tennessee State University	MS
2013	Paul Swartzel	Barbeque Man Unleashed: The Greatest Professional Wrestling Work Of All Time	Music	Duke University	PhD
2013	Tamara S. Schnepel	Observational Learning: The Impact of the Aggressive Actions Portrayed on WWE Professional Wrestling on Juvenile Behavior	Psychology— Social and Behavioral Sciences	Capella University	PhD

2012	Nina Hoechtl	If Only for the Length of a Lucha: Queer/Ing, Mask/Ing, Gender/Ing and Gesture in Lucha Libre	Art	Goldsmiths University of London (UK)	PhD
2012	Casey Brandon Hart	Ideological "Smackdown": A Textual Analysis of Class, Race and Gender in WWE Televised Professional Wrestling	Mass Communication and Journalism	University of Southern Mississippi	PhD
2011	John Quinn	Morality, Commerciality and Narrative Structure in the Professional Wrestling Text	Narratology	University of West Scotland (UK)	PhD
2006	Lucy Nevitt	Combat Performance: A Study of the Structural and Ideological Codes of Tournament Drama and Professional Wrestling	Theatre	Royal Holloway, University London (UK)	PhD
2005	William Lipscomb	The Operational Aesthetic in the Performance of Professional Wrestling	Communication	Louisiana State University	PhD
2004	Barbara Allen Cole Kohler	The Psychological, Sociological, and Cultural Aspects of Professional Wrestling as a Soap Opera	Sociology	East Tennessee State University	MA
2002	David Eugene Everard	Wrestling Dell'arte: Professional Wrestling as Theatre	Theatre	University of Victoria, Canada	MA
2001	Heather Levi	Masked Struggle: An Ethnography of Lucha Libre	Anthroplogy	New York University	PhD
2000	Aaron Feigenbaum	Professional Wrestling, Sports Entertainment and the Liminal Experience in American Culture	Anthropology	University of Florida	PhD
2000	Dalbir Singh Sehmby	Professional Wrestling, Whoool: A Cultural Con, an Athletic Dramatic Narrative, and a Haven for Rebel Heroes	Comparative Literature, Religion, Media/Film Studies	University of Alberta	MA
1998	Terry McNeil Saunders	Play, Performance and Professional Wrestling: An Examination of a Modern Day Spectacle Of Absurdity	Folklore and Mythology	University of California, Los Angeles	PhD
1997	Chad Edward	Researching Historical Broadcast Audiences: Female Fandom of	Communication Arts	University of Wisconsin,	PhD

	Dell	Professional Wrestling, 1945-1960		Madison	
1991	Michael Turko	Ringside: An Investigation into the Experience of Professional Wrestling	Sociology	University of Manitoba (Canada)	MA
1989	Michael Ball	Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture: The Case of Professional Wrestling	Sociology	University of Nebraska, Lincoln	PhD
1977	Mark Elliot Workman	The Differential Perception of a Dramatic Event: Interpretations of the Meaning of Professional Wrestling Matches	Folklore and Folklife	University of Pennsylvania	PhD
1974	Allan Turowetz	An Ethnography of Professional Wrestling: Elements of a Staged Contest	Sociology	McGill University (Canada)	MA
1968	John Mack Kingsmore	The Effect of a Professional Wrestling and Professional Basketball Contest Upon the Aggressive Tendencies of Male Spectators	Physical Education	University of Maryland, College Park	PhD

Squared Circle Intentionalities: What a Framework for "Wrestling Studies" Can Look Like

GARRET L. CASTLEBERRY

I once had a brilliant professor (later my PhD advisor) who both understood and embodied the art of oratorical performance in the classroom arena. Several times I recall he carried in a comically large stack of books, each one balanced atop the other. "The Mad Man," as whisperers would refer to him, was a master of academic props. Along with charismatic mic work, this career intellectual evolved into a full professorial persona—a showman capable of translating wisdom into verbal spectacle. On the occasion when the impossibly tall stack of books made a cameo appearance, this larger-than-life figure strategically worked their product placement into his mid-lecture monologue. The Mad Man whistled through title and author, giving the most pertinent information about what made each text unique. These resources represent valuable information as much as they demonstrate the hard work and mastery of one's field of interest. This professor's gimmick was to educate but also inspire, his precision calculated yet entertaining.

Perhaps I was drawn to the Mad Man due to such performative prowess. Perhaps I felt complemented by his flexibility and respect for rhetorical thought and mixed methods interest. In truth it was a healthy combination of the two—the master and the apprentice, the performer and the understudy, the Main Card draw and the aca-fan understudy. In the spirit of this real-life professor's underground university infamy and elocutionary bravado, my goal with this essay is deceptively simple. I hope to establish several exciting potentialities and rigorous possibilities for present and future pro-wrestling scholars to consider. While I frame this expression with interdisciplinary openness, I settle on a preferred method conjoining the disciplines of media studies, communication studies, and television studies. Ultimately, I hope this roadmap inspires future students, faculty, scholars, and independent researchers to consider the intriguing directions ready for pro-wrestling studies to embrace.

What does wrestling studies seek to interrogate? Is there need for further intersection between audience and fan studies, theories in aesthetics studies, and

seeing popular culture as an interdisciplinary convergence of possibilities? This essay's goal is to provide several possible directions that emerging scholars can take when studying professional wrestling. This is not an attempt to cover or provide a "complete literature" of any single field or discipline. On the contrary, I hope to introduce scholars and readers outside of academia to possible ideas and avenues that inspire new interests and generate momentum in diverse research directions. Just as this essay suggests complementary as well as competing theories and methods for future scholarly consideration, I end with the proposal of a television studies model that encourages maximum rigor from pro-wrestling scholars to elevate and legitimize the potentialities of professional wrestling studies.

Wrestling with and for "Mainstream" Credibility

The field of popular culture studies, a broadly interdisciplinary category within the humanities, continues to blossom despite ongoing yet healthy epistemological resistance from some in the social and hard sciences. Perceptions of what higher education was, is, and should be can only benefit from productive dialogue and continued negotiation. Progress is a historically slow process to accommodate maximum consideration from eager progressives and traditionally conservative values. Yet recent years have shown accelerated interest and cultural capital in areas of pop culture study. With continued convergences between communication technologies, preferences in cultural taste and entertainment are more plural than ever. In the spirit of plurality, I present an overview of key texts that inform a television studies model of analysis for pro-wrestling studies to consider.

Wrestling scholarship is unfortunately low at this point while the proliferation of mainstream and independent performances and content increases in diversity and quantity. Like the sports entertainment genre, mainstream recognition poses distinctly relatable challenges (Fraade-Blanar and Glazer; Williams; Dundas; Shoemaker; Buckwood). For pro wrestling, a struggle always exists in the tension to embrace versus repel its genre conventions that link to carnival and the grotesque (Fiske 245). On one hand, a key point in the popularity of professional wrestling lies in its ability to speak to low-brow aesthetics in the tradition of the traveling circus show. In some ways, both traditional and contemporary wrestling play to the strengths of the circus performer, either through gargantuan "extreme"

bodies or high-flying acrobatics that perform the illusion of the tightrope walker's "fall." Except while tightrope walkers must never fall (for fear of injury or death), the pro wrestlers must always fall as point of intent. Arguably, no fall highlights the carnival/mainstream tension like the top rope fall in which the performer must land in that most sacred and sensitive of areas, hitting the ropes exactly between the legs. In live performance, such visualization signifies the very definition of "low-brow" and thus will always face public scrutiny from certain critical circles.

Wrestling scholarship shares a similar uphill battle. Already the humanities combat extinction through strategic defunding (Wright; Mitchell; Goldberg; Ruben; Smith). Limited financial institutional support benefits the classically-trained rhetorician, who can research and report without investing in physically expensive data collection processes. Likewise, the cultural studies critic can maximize theoretical legwork through inter-library loans or broader digitally-based investigations. Performance studies practitioners may be able to draw public attention to the physical and psychological communiqué required for pro wrestling storytelling by practicing synthesis between performative acts in minimalist conditions. Finally, the ethnographer-as-participant fan can gain rigorous insights accessed through personal passion and active networking. This liminal role holds the potential to reward pro wrestling scholars with new insights into a distinct and time-tested entertainment medium, one of limited scholarly approach beyond broad ideological assessments and close textual analysis. Ultimately, digital expansions offer each of these approaches extended access to pro wrestling potentialities at vary degrees of physical or interactive proximity. In the following sub-sections, I expand upon several of these previewed categories while continuing toward a final proposal that advocates a TV studies model for pro wrestling studies research.

Bare Knuckle Methods for Qualitative and Critical Inquiry

One of the quintessential tools taught throughout research methods courses is content analysis (Berelson; Krippendorf; Weber). Certainly, space exists to suggest the importance that content analysis or constant comparative analysis already plays for fans and must now play for scholars. With the advent of Internet streaming services such as the WWE Network, TV Asahi's New Japan Pro Wrestling World (Caldwell), and now products like FloSlam TV for Roku,

previously un-accessible content can be mined for data sets and contextual accuracy (minus certain expired music copyrights). Pro wrestling's evolving digital archives recreate history in ways that could theoretically invite historians, media theorists, cultural critics, and social scientists to observe and report on streaming content old and new. Whether focused on counting occurrence with content analysis or comparatively developing themes, such analyses could provide in-depth readings and understandings of wrestlers, characters, matches, promotions, and more.

Just as content analysis and constant comparative analysis emerge as qualitative methods that naturally extend to digital streaming archives, psychoanalytics may provide unique interpretations for fans and performers tethered to pro wrestling practices. Wrestling scholars could employ several theoretical analytic close readings from wrestling storylines and even more so in examining the genre's storytelling frameworks. One example might be to assess how Freud's *pleasure principle* works upon audience expectations whenever storylines or character arcs stretch too far or resolve too quickly (see Eagleton; Marcus). Psychoanalytics could tie into wrestling through the oft-repeated legacy arcs of storytelling. Certain well-known families achieve self-promoting mythologies that tailor toward melodramatic infighting associative to daytime or even primetime soap operas. Infighting may include tensions between fathers and sons, mothers and fathers, sibling rivalries, and even patriarchies at war with one another. Such storytelling symbolism repeats incarnations of the Oedipal and Elecktra Complex, respectively. There are numerous recurring Shakespearian qualities repeated throughout pro wrestling history where, for example, young up-and-comers must face the gauntlet of established masculinities representing the status quo or even an aged regime.

Thus, literary theory and traditional textual analysis also lend possible utility for pro-wrestling scholarship. In terms of linking qualitative forms with cognitive close reading, phenomenology lends itself to ongoing use and usage for wrestling scholars. The same can also be said of aesthetics studies, inspecting aesthetic phenomenon at both the individual level—the wrestler, the organization—or at the technological level, as with evolving integrated marketing techniques and global brand awareness. Pro wrestling is nothing if not a case study in visual storytelling. In the next section I link together several visual analysis options for pro wrestling researchers to consider.

From Visual Culture to Physical Performance

Given the onset of high definition technologies in the mid-2000s, wrestling was forced to evolve into an even grander visual spectacle. The product hence opens itself to similar analytic opportunities and even extends into areas of visual analysis. Visual culture and visual rhetoric scholars might consider the evolution of the bodily form as it mimics and possibly even influences publicly shared perceptions of masculinity, femininity, physical beauty, or, quite simply, visuality (Mirzoeff; Berger). Beauty notably cannot be qualified without its visual opposite, and thus the desecration or mutilation of the body, the performance of bodily harm and risk aversion, might be interpreted as appendages to public spectacle and entertainment aesthetics.

Scholarship focused in these directions could extend conversations about visual literacy at a time when digital media literacy converges between and subsequently re-negotiates meanings behind the social, the cultural, and the political. Such thematic convergence speaks to early cultural studies works on aesthetics in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism* (Adorno, Benjamin, et al.) or even updates such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. However, several contemporary texts might allow young wrestling researchers entrance into these aged conversations. In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Gillian Rose explores a plethora of visual methodologies that would benefit from innovative updates within the pro wrestling genre. Likewise, Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros's *Visual Culture* is the perfect introductory text that would immediately benefit scholars looking to penetrate the pro wrestling text from a classical approach or methodological lens.

Professional wrestling is, among many things, about storytelling, and while much of wrestling's in-ring action posits visual storytelling, detailed narrative work goes into the production and maintenance of these live and televisual cultural programs. Narrative analysis (Hostein and Gubrium; Reissman) is one way in which scholars can mine the archives of both in-ring and outer-ring storytelling. The resonant strengths and weaknesses relating to collaborative, and indeed physical storytelling, have a lot to say about pro wrestling and how it functions as "sport" or "performance art" or even "Americana." Additionally, when wrestling narratives succeed on a mass scale, they often do so because of the ideological or mythological power of their storytelling style.

As such, mythological analysis offers scholars a way to translate the rhetorical power of wrestling in past, present, and future conditions. Roland Barthes' oft-cited essay "The World of Wrestling," reprinted in *Mythologies* (15-25) could be recognized as the Bruno Sammartino of professional wrestling essays that, for some, has yet to be eclipsed. Claude Levi-Strauss tackles a broader approach that, while not especially interested in wrestling specifically, presents "the science of mythology."[1] Professional wrestling is without a doubt a bodily performance of myth-making. Wrestling characters undergo dramatic challenges that pit them in situations of seemingly insurmountable odds. Whether story arcs reach epic triumphs or tragic consequences, the effects are transformative for the entertainers as well as their fans. As a cultural anthropologist closely associated with structuralism, Levi-Strauss is deeply intrigued by binary opposition and the dualistic tensions that myths present.

Storytelling techniques of close reading should not be limited to myth, as the performative nature of bodies in motion produces dimensional synthesis between pro-wrestling studies and performance studies. Performance studies shares similar outsider qualities with professional wrestling. These commonalities recognize the performative power of the body as a communicative extension of how humans practice theoretical, narrative, metaphorical, allegorical, and even everyday life storytelling. Irving Goffman's notion of performances of everyday life deserves revisiting when possibly paired against pro wrestlers that walk a fine line between getting into character versus disappearing in their character.[2] WWE's owner and CEO Vince McMahon tells his employees that they are in the "storytelling business" of entertainment, which creates an offshoot distinct from professional wrestling.[3] Just as the WWE approaches storytelling through bodily performance,

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[1] Wendy Doniger recounts how much of Levi-Strauss's theorizations appeared in *Mythologiques* from 1964-1971, but contemporary scholars of myth will find his refined theorizations formalized in *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*.

[2] See Goffman's seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* or Broderick Chow, Eero Lanie, and Claire Warden's excellent contemporary anthology *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, which pulls together scholarly interests in performance studies and pro wrestling.

[3] Bully Ray aka Bubba Ray Dudley regularly recited this paraphrasing if not consummate direct quotation from McMahon during his weekly appearances on SiriusXM's *Busted Open Radio* program. Beginning as co-host in early 2017, Bully Ray's insinuations ranged from respectful to

the performance studies discipline approaches processes of theorization, critical praxis, and political activism. With numerous identifiable tropes and conventions practiced between these respective camps, synergy between the two creates a unique avenue whereby scholars can display provocative critiques of both.

Grappling with Media Analysis Techniques

The scholarly arena of media studies provides some of the richest potential for pro wrestling scholars. Given the digital convergence cultivated by the onset of the Internet age, popular culture overlaps with technology and social media with increasing prominence. Convergence culture, as Henry Jenkins coined the phrase, creates gaps whereby wrestling enthusiasts might locate unique data sets, digital archives, social interactions, and rationales for exploring each. As with Jenkins's widely circulated concepts like convergence culture and participatory culture, in *Networked: The New Social Media Operating System*, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman offer a moldable assessment through the lens of social media thresholds. Their book highlights how much of culture has become networked and this important distinction holds value for pro wrestling ethnographers. Given the race for media attention, an understanding of how networking culture works will aide researchers' ability to accurately archive and assess social media data. Notably, networked cultures also function as promotional cultures. In *Promotional Cultures*, Aeron Davis synthesizes these multi-layered processes into three parts that could form points of analysis for wrestling scholars interested in the blurred lines between social media identity, brand exposure, and the neo-kayfabe of the wrestling persona. With so many independent and mainstream pro wrestlers utilizing personal social media as a natural way to extend their brand (as discussed by wrestlers interviewed by Christopher J. Olson in this collection), a spreadable media model (Jenkins, Ford, and Green) provides aca-fans and digital ethnographers a pivotal analytic method for interpreting how wrestlers negotiate persona success through active channels and individual branding.

    The emergence of videographic criticism in recent years remains uncharted territory for wrestling scholars. Accessibility to various media editing software

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resigned in that McMahon habitually labels performers' work within WWE as "storytelling" rather than the industry-wide circulated term "wrestling" or pro wrestling.

evolves into a proliferation of uses for industry insiders, fans, and critics. Videographic criticism offers wrestling fans a platform for experimental art-criticism storytelling, a moving image audio-video method for intentional boundary blurring between text→context→reception→reaction. Jason Mittell initiated an experimental workshop on videographic criticism at Middlebury University, and co-founded the web destination *[in]Transition* along with Catherine Grant, Christian Keathley, and Drew Morton (Becker 127). *[in]Transition* is partnered under the *MediaCommons.org* banner. *Media Commons* shares space with additional sister sites, including the dialogic macro criticism journal *In Media Res*. The latter site has hosted several pro wrestling think pieces, including a 2015 topic week focused on "Hulk Hogan and the Cultural History of Racism in Wrestling" (Castleberry and Cramer). While this sample week engages ongoing probes into past-present multi-diversity problematics within the pro wrestling industry, *In Media Res* remains an open access archive that encourages unique approaches and assessments of media.

A Case for Television Studies

Recent decades demonstrate surging interest as well as creative and financial investment toward the medium of television. However, "television" is no longer a uniform medium. Instead, it has become complicated by Internet spreadability (Jenkins, Ford, and Green), the rise and fall of DVD boxed sets (Mittell, 37), the emergence of Internet streaming services, and the ongoing venture capitalist mergers amidst continuous diversification from competitive digital platforms like Amazon and Netflix. Notably, scholars fortified space for a television studies discipline years before mass audiences and corporate investors caught on to the "Peak TV" movement. During this emergence, the asynchronous dialogue between TV critics, scholars, industry insiders, and audiences narrowed just as open-sourced communication channels broadened. Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz represent two prominent contemporary TV scholar influencers with their 2012 book *Television Studies*. Together they formulated a television studies model that emphasizes overlap and accountability between programs, contexts, audiences, and institutions.

While critical cultural and media scholars have been writing about television since the advent of the medium—with much credit going to Raymond Williams,

Marshall McLuhan, Horace Newcomb, John Fiske, John Hartley, Lynn Spigel, Robert Allen, Annette Hill, and many others—TV studies emerges as a "primetime" discipline in an era when the last of high-brow and low-brow cultural markers have blended together in appreciation of televisual texts like HBO's *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*, AMC's *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*, or the quiet reserve and sophistication of BBC/PBS's *Downton Abbey* and Netflix's *The Crown*. The medium is the message now that students are witnessing the collapse of old stodgy professors and politicians suddenly willing to post spoilers and insert pop linguistics into Tweets and lectures alike. Additionally, while the framework of television studies served half a century in the making, Gray and Lotz astutely comprise TV's scholarly history into one essential method that embraces the multi-platform digital convergence age and TV's polyvalent position as a liminal medium. From a television studies perspective, pro wrestling would be studied for its programs, contexts, audiences, and industries.

Programs. Pro wrestling programming constitutes a text—or rather, a series of ongoing and overlapping and contradictory texts—that can be accessed and analyzed on a content level. Such techniques of "close reading" can be applied at the individual or character level, or to a group or faction (Brummett 3). An ongoing feud between competitors, typically the mythic storytelling alignment of face versus heel, offers an opportunity for scholars to analyze from positions of comparison and contrast, performance and reception, and the ultimate effectiveness of the program for individuals in the fans or company eyes. These hypothetical analytic impacts stress the significance of a television studies model, whereby the endpoint analysis of text almost inescapably merges into discussions of context, audience, and industry.

Contexts. Pro wrestling is, if nothing else, built upon the shoulders of context. Whether that context is "wrasslin'" or "sports entertainment" or "strong style," the way in which a company and its collective body project themselves matters. It matters to the organizers and the fans, and ultimately impacts the bottom line, or the financial means necessary to pay performers and continue providing entertainment services to consumer publics. Because pro wrestling history is tethered to the traveling circus, there is a designated low-brow cultural status associated with pro wrestling events. Despite occasional "high profile" appearances from celebrities, sports figures, and even politicians (including WWE Hall of Famer, Donald Trump). Wrestlers and wrestling fans are notably aware of

this status, and embrace its "outsider" reputation while others find a bit of shame or secrecy in such indulgence.

Audiences. Early in its relatively short history, pro wrestling studies shares a natural association with audience studies, also called perception studies. Audience and perception studies take interest in consumer perspectives, whether inquiring the financial, aesthetic, cultural, or political interests that audiences take in a specific rhetorical artifact or cultural phenomenon. Another way to close read the consumer is to identify the level of pleasure or enjoyment they take in a textual experience. Operating at a level of close affinity or involved passion is what Jenkins identifies as participatory culture, when an audience-consumer transitions from passive consumption to active participant. Here scholarly focus enters into the sub-discipline of fandom or fan studies. Scholars that practice fan studies are likely to bridge methods from ethnography, guerilla journalism, and other forms of qualitative research. The result ideally nets rich insights into distinct and perhaps clandestine rituals within varying fandoms. Fan communities are often "marked" by certain distinguishing factors, such as organically generated names like Trekkies, Whedonites, Losties, or Potterphiles.

Institutions. The last tier relating to a television studies model is the focus on institutions or industries. Industry studies is a smaller but equally important unit that is growing in recognition. Industry studies analyses tend to highlight how interrelated factors and operators and financiers each play pivotal roles in the creation and distribution of texts that are consumed by individuals and held in close collective favor as sacred artifacts. Industry inspections might assess creative or gatekeeper processes—the how's and why's some personnel or products receive more attention while others receive less—that dictate "textual legitimacy" (Castleberry 134) and even "temporal privilege" (135). Industry studies might also investigate the many tertiary modes of advertisement and circulation of information, from press releases to "free" internet videos. Industry analyses may explore how certain products proliferate or fail to find mass appeal. Scholarly focus on pro wrestling industry practices may draw from various industry resources, including magazines, fanzines, merchandizing, or even contemporary meta-media products like "dirt sheet" sites, podcasts, and even Twitter account histories or other social media metadata.

Applying TV Studies to Pro Wrestling

The television studies model can be applied to help explain the convergence culture phenomenon of Cody Rhodes' post-WWE career. One book that continues to circulate in academic conversations is Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*. The gist of Johnson's playful work is that popular entertainments—despite traditional American skepticism that they neuter intelligence—both stimulate and cognitively challenge people. Johnson coins concepts like "multiple threading" (65) and the "Sleeper Curve" (84) to demonstrate the vast quantities of information audiences must navigate to truly engage with the text.[4] Multithreading recalls what TV scholar Jason Mittell calls "narrative complexity" (17). Writing in *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, Mittell outlines how narrative complexity rejects "plot closure" and embraces "a range of serial techniques" that build over time (18). Such an approach bucks the traditional reliance upon "easy" conventional formulas and speaks to the increasing depth of creative investment and audience enjoyment with popular entertainment in the last twenty years.

Multithreading or narrative complexity can be understood within current pro wrestling: performers have histories that sometimes involve multiple personae across several companies. These storylines often linger, either directly or as a kind of spectral presence that haunts the performer's career. For example, see Dusty Rhodes' transition from "The American Dream" in the AWA to the "Common Man" in the WWF in the late 1980s (Dilbert). Overall, such information is nonessential to enjoying the text of wrestling, yet for fans these archival histories become ensconced into collective memory and nostalgic fandom. Such cases and oral histories have been mythologized for decades within wrestling circles, fanzines, and convention talks. Today, however, these narratives shift from marginal folk tales to social media trends and digitally archived historicities.

Fast-forward several decades past the Dusty Rhodes controversies to Dusty's son, Cody Rhodes, who musters the will to leave the financial security of the WWE due to creative differences over his diminished in-ring character, Stardust.

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[4] Johnson's theorization of a Sleeper Curve includes samples of how sitcoms have slowly evolved from a place of episodic convention, to the addition of in-jokes for steady viewers, to the outright meta-narratives many contemporary programs embrace.

The name Stardust already lacks invention as it merely functions as a spinoff to older brother Dustin's Goldust. The younger Rhodes brother seeks to rewrite his reputation with fans and for himself, yet legal tensions linger. WWE retains the copyright to his real name, "Cody Rhodes," and thus the son literally cannot possess his birthright title for entertainment purposes. Upon requested release, he elects creativity over legal entanglement, selecting the amended stage name, "Cody, the American Nightmare." Through this innovation, the son pays homage to the father's saga while carving an oppositional place for himself as a "free agent" throughout the independent wrestling scene.

As "The American Nightmare," Cody physically haunts the wrestling world's narrative dreamscape. His liminal status allows the character to peek in and out of companies at will; TNA Impact Wrestling, New Japan Pro Wrestling, Ring of Honor, and smaller organizations each welcome him. Cody's performances cumulatively spread across cable channels and syndicated stations: from PopTV to AXS, from Sinclair Broadcasting to njpdworld.com. Along the way, Rhodes happens to join up with the most popular smart mark underground wrestling faction in the world, the Bullet Club. Now Rhodes transcends traditional cable, pay cable, and syndicated coverage with appearances viewed by millions of streaming fans: YouTube and Twitter both feature the Bullet Club's indie sketch show, *Being the Elite*. With subsequent appearances and deepening of characterization, Rhodes experiences his most successful year as a pro wrestler outside of the coveted billion-dollar monopoly.

On a level of technological transcendence, Cody has self-actualized the American Dream (the U.S. ideology, if not also the stage name) by practicing what Jenkins, Ford, and Green call a "spreadable media" approach to mass communication. Moreover, audiences are following Cody, charting these personal pivots and digital dives. They listen over gossipy discussions emanating out of podcasts and YouTube shows. Active engagement spreads across numerous platforms in allegiance to Cody but also, quite simply, because this is now part of the evolving process of paratextual engagement and sustained aesthetic experience (Gray; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington). Fans ritualized these multiplatform engagements both consciously and unconsciously, exhibiting multi-threading and dissecting narrative complexity even over such a "simple" and "brainless" entertainment as pro wrestling.

In some ways, Johnson's "bad things are good things" critique functions as a cultural retort to Neil Postman's conservative position. Postman reads the popular

writing on the wall as a dystopic sign of cultural regression, whereas Johnson wants to celebrate if not revel in the level of detail baked into contemporary entertainment. Yet arguments like Johnson's are far from foolproof. Indeed, much of the broad appeal of pro wrestling lies in the genre's simplicity: the straightforward act of heel versus face, and the contrast between the rhetorical oratory mic skills and the in-ring physicality. The genre machinations can be as simplistic as audiences prefer, and yet, for the über-fans densely layered intertextual histories and historicities speak to second tier interests in wrestling's ability to sustain the popular imagination over decades of storylines, encounters, monologues, and matches. For the die-hards, multi-threading becomes a challenge accepted, and each additional wrestler-company rebirth signals both their past and potential future. It is a meta-narrative, a dream logic, cooked into the fabric of American ideology. And as pro wrestling increasingly attaches its methods to divergent digital streaming and multi-platform strategies, pro wrestling scholars need to consider all angles such implications present.

More specifically to a TV studies analytical approach, scholars could distinguish whether the text is represented by the Cody persona, the canon of his body of work, or individual segments that appear in isolation. However, because a TV studies model assumes information across varying source origins, scholars should consider Cody's brand-jumping liminality a pivotal point of conversation about the nature and form of the contemporary pro wrestler. The context for his WWE release and willful reinvention demands that scholars pay close attention to the physical and digital intersections that straddle diverse programs, media markets, merchandizing outlets, and digital platforms. Cody the character functions as a spreadable model while Cody the person succeeds as a flexible entrepreneur. His father's storied history compounds this narrative in textual and meta-textual ways, thus requiring cultural context to be understood as prerequisite to fan if not scholarly appreciation.

This further suggests how cultural context interlaces with fan or audience roles. The Cody case study offers a rich translation of the benefits of a multi-angular TV studies model of analysis. The originality of the text and the richness of the cultural context of The American Nightmare fuel smart mark fan interest in the public persona of Cody. Cody's supernatural success outside the mainstream marketing of WWE highlights the economic and commercial value driven by consumer-fans. Yet because consumer-fans and wrestling texts do not operate in a

vacuum creative space, the organizational bodies that negotiate these rules of engagement must also be researched and recorded.

To bring the Cody case study to conclusion at least temporarily, traditional rules and restrictions regulate pro wrestler freedoms and creative rights. Some industry codes are intended to restrict self-marketing and self-branding initiatives, while for most of the indie scene, digital tools now serve to generate social, cultural, and ultimately economic capital. Cody's ability to manage his individual brand in an upward trajectory demonstrates not only the vitality of spreadable media modalities but also the ways in which industry engines operate at both the macro and micro level. Thus, scholars performing a TV studies model of analysis must consider each of these four criteria of content, context, audience, and industry into simultaneous and dialogic consideration.

Concluding Synergy between Pro Wrestling and Popular Culture Studies

The intent of this essay is to widen the range of possible analytic directions for emerging and continuing professional wrestling scholars. Part of popular culture's strength lies in its elasticity across cultures, borders, identities, and differences. However, pop culture is ubiquitous in a sense because it contains different meanings and associations to various groups and individuals.

Likewise, professional wrestling represents a microcosm of similar elasticity. The sounds and images of events connect audiences as they intimate visual and physical storytelling. It is useful to note how and why—from lower-class kitsch to high-art auteur expression—many art forms have collapsed over time into what cultural theorists call monoculture. In this same vein, recognizing the pedagogical potential that pro wrestling affords could benefit classrooms struggling to retain creative interest from students. Professional wrestling syndicates have always understood the common tongue of pop culture storytelling. If Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's meteoric rise to Hollywood superstardom and John Cena's mimetic transmedia global popularity is any indication, the translation of the pro wrestling formula to mainstream pop culture appeal is verifiable and replicable. Now if we can only get those stuffy cantankerous lecturers to smell what the pro wrestling scholars are cooking, higher education might gain the upper advantage

in the larger culture wars in a reverse flip to redeem the "value" of education in two-headed arenas of public opinion and consumer trust.

I recall once more how the Mad Man, my wily veteran dissertation advisor, understood the significance of pop culture and even wrestling symbolism. He could tow the performative line within the seminar space without losing the rigor or the audience. And that's the bottom line—because education, for many, now exists as a social, cultural, and economic commodity. Much like pro wrestling.

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Emotions Are Running High: Psychological Approaches to the Study of Professional Wrestling

CATHERINE SALMON

Why would a psychologist be interested in academic approaches to studying professional wrestling? Involvement in fictional, imagined worlds—oral and written stories, drama, film, theatre—seems to be a human universal. What does a psychological perspective on the mind entail for our understanding of such fiction? It offers explanations for how the world around us has shaped our bodies, minds, and behavior, and how culture emerges out of human nature. Over human history, we have faced three main types of problems: survival, mating, and social living. From movie plot lines to theatre performances, from pornography to comedy routines, popular culture focuses on the ways in which people (successfully or not) deal with these problems in our modern worlds. These storylines draw in their audiences because they tap into the psychological mechanisms that we have for managing these problems in our own lives. Many professional wrestling storylines have a strong focus on problems in the mating and social living domains including competition, cooperation, and status striving.

Psychological approaches have long been used in the fields of literary theory and art, going back to Freud as well as the current interest in Darwinian literary studies, which focuses on evidence that our evolved history influences the topics of texts (Carroll 120). One can study romance novels, for example, and see evidence of women's mating strategies (Salmon and Symons 61); analyze folk tales from around the world and how they reflect sex differences in mate preferences; and see how human emotions influence our enjoyment of horror films (Clasen 222). In the end, this psychological approach is all about the important "why" questions. Why do people spend so much time on imaginary or fictional worlds? Why do particular genres (like professional wrestling) rise and fall? How much of a wrestling brand or its storyline success, for example, is due to its appeal to universal aspects of human nature, and how much is due to other factors, including the individual differences that make some fans prefer certain wrestlers and storylines or even promotions, such as Extreme Championship

Wrestling (ECW)? Using psychological theories, we may be able to arrive at a more satisfying and comprehensive understanding of why stars, storylines, and companies rise and fall.

Most fictional tales are representations of our social world. They are full of the natural patterns and concerns of life, and the rewards and dangers of the behavioral choices people can make. In many cases, those choices will be condoned or condemned, which is the morality-play aspect of stories, including those in professional wrestling. For the audience, they are a source of information about choices and their consequences. Products of popular culture focus on how social behavior plays out among individuals pursuing specific goals. Their success or failure is the plotline of any movie or the WWE.

To some, professional wrestling might seem an odd example of the psychology of storytelling. It is an unusual mix of athletics, drama, and comedy, played out by a largely testosterone-fueled cast in front of an audience of often rowdy fans. With its scripted outcomes, it is not entertainment in the traditional sports sense, but rather entertainment in the tradition of theatre and film, whether one sits in the audience at a live event or experiences it on television in the comfort and privacy of their home. It consists of a cast of characters both good and evil (and everything in between) with a wide range of storylines that can be as simple as the conflict over who is the best man to the strange male-male social group and family dynamics seen in many WWE arcs. Some popular culture theorists have suggested it is masculine melodrama, focusing on either the morality play of good versus evil or a masculine backlash against the politically correct (Barthes 23; Jenkins III 33). Certainly, morality and moral choices are important aspects of dealing with social living. Others have argued for attention to be paid to the significant percentage of female fans and whether they react (or are attracted to) differently than their male fellow fans to certain storylines and wrestlers (Salmon and Clerc 168).

Professional wrestling is a subject ripe for a psychological approach, and this is the perfect time to engage in such examination. The rise of professional wrestling that began in the 1980s has resulted in hours and hours of footage of live and televised events that document the full range of storylines from start to finish, along with their characters and audience reactions. In addition, the widespread use of the Internet among fans, whether through blogs, Tumblr, etc. provides detailed insight into fan response. The ubiquitous themes of professional wrestling are those at the heart of most human stories, including competition

between males for status and resources, mate choice, justice, cheater detection, and male coalitions, as well as solidarity and rivalry among kin. Wrestling provides us with the same cast of characters as Shakespeare—the hero, the villain, the love interest, and the comedic foil—and like Shakespeare's characters, they experience suffering and sacrifice as well as trust and betrayal. In this essay, I will focus on the psychologically relevant themes of male status competition and cooperation, morality, sibling cooperation and rivalry, as well as sex differences in audience response. The popularity of these themes in wrestling highlight how successful storylines reflect basic human concerns around mating and navigating our social world.

Competition for Status

Much attention has been paid by psychologists, among others, to the importance of competition between males. In most species, males make a smaller parental investment than females and females tend to be more particular in choosing a mate because of their greater reproductive costs. This has been well documented in the majority of mammalian species including humans (Buss 103; Trivers 58). As a result, men's reproductive success historically has been largely the result of their ability to compete for mating opportunities, either by winning fights with other males, clashing for status or resources, or by exhibiting traits, like facial symmetry (an indicator of good genetic quality) or generosity, that females find attractive (Little, DeBruine, and Jones 198; Miller 327). Successful men have, over time, produced more offspring. This procreation shapes traits that foster success, such as the greater degree of risk taking in the pursuit of status exhibited by men in comparison to women, including physical altercations and participation in extreme sports (Buss and Schmitt, 225; Daly and Wilson 255).

One can view professional wrestling as an athletic soap opera in which male-male competition plays out in front of a male and female audience in which everyone is interested not only in who wins but how he gets there. Of particular interest is how someone rises from the ranks to become the world champion. The typical paths include strength, skill, and the willingness to take risks. Treachery and betrayal, however, are not uncommon tactics. One wrestler who has exemplified several of these pathways to the world championship and its associated status is Ric Flair.

In professional wrestling, historically, the world championship has been the pinnacle of status achievement. In the 1980s and 1990s, this was exemplified by sixteen-time world champion Ric Flair with his multiple titles and lavish lifestyle cues including expensive suits, Rolexes, limousines, and a never-ending supply of beautiful women. Whether he was the hero or the villain, he was the epitome of success.[1] As he himself constantly reminded us, "To be the man, you have to beat the man." For the most part, the man to beat has always been the world champion. However, in the last 20 years some wrestlers have achieved status that transcends the world title, making them a constant target for wrestlers lower on the totem pole.

One of the biggest stars the WWE has produced is Stone Cold Steve Austin. For many years, Austin 3:16 shirts were seen everywhere, worn by athletes and celebrities as well as wrestling fans. Austin's most famous storyline was the power struggle between him and Vince McMahon (the real life and onscreen owner of the WWE). Austin was the first of a new generation of wrestlers: a rule breaker who was overwhelmingly cheered by the fans. His conflict with Vince reflected the tension between the common man and corporate power. Vince tried to get Austin to do what he wanted but instead Austin didn't listen, beat up his boss, and gave him the finger. Austin also sprayed Vince with beer from a Budweiser truck and filled his Corvette with cement.[2] Austin struck a chord with the WWE's largely working-class audience. He cut a dominant figure, with this status obtained through strength, resilience and a willingness to break the rules, though breaking them openly rather than in a sneaky way.

In many ways, Austin epitomizes the ultimate male competitor, an alpha male. He was a huge success, the man to beat, independent (one of his t-shirts reads DTA, Don't Trust Anyone), and did things on his own terms. Even though he held the world title several times, his status and popularity came more from his attitude and unwillingness to give up, even when faced with insurmountable odds. He was the kind of man male fans would want to be and female fans might want

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[1] For DVD footage of Ric Flair's career, see *WWE: Nature Boy Ric Flair: The Definitive Collection*, Warner Brothers, 2012.

[2] Recommended for coverage of Austin's storylines and matches in the WWE is *Stone Cold Steve Austin: The Bottom Line on the Most Popular Superstar of All Time*, Warner Brothers, 2013.

to have. In an unusual plot twist, Austin's reputation was cemented by a loss, not a victory. He faced Bret Hart in a no-disqualification submission match at *WrestleMania 13*[3] which resulted in a "double turn." After a long, fairly even match, Austin was caught in Hart's finishing hold, and he passed out from pain and blood loss. The victory was awarded to Bret Hart but it was Austin who received tremendous applause. Austin's never-surrender warrior attitude was embraced by fans both male and female. His merchandise was among the best-selling of all time for the WWE and they even released a baby doll women's tee-shirt to satisfy his female fans as well, beginning a trend of marketing more targeted merchandise to female fans. This match was highly significant as both performers cemented character turns, Austin into the rough around the edges hero and Hart, the former Canadian righteous babyface, into the anti-American heel.

Sibling Love and Hate

While many great rivalries have been fought over championship belts, other types of conflicts also have captured the audience's attention and emotions. Some of the most intense have involved family conflicts. Phrases like "band of brothers" call to mind a unity of focus, one at odds with the strife and fratricide in accounts of figures such as Cain and Abel or Romulus and Remus. Siblings have a vested interest genetically in each other's welfare, but they also grow up as each other's main competitors for parental time, affection, and other resources (Daly, Salmon, and Wilson 227; Salmon and Hehman 123). Their competition may be overt or subtle and at times they may also band together against outsiders. But sibling relationships have always been a focus of human interest, and their stories are as common in professional wrestling as in other theatrical genres.

There have been many sibling rivalries in wrestling, but few are as fantastical as that between the Undertaker and his younger brother Kane (not his real-life brother, but his wrestling storyline or "kayfabe" brother).[4] The Undertaker started

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[3] See the DVD, *WrestleMania XIII*, WWE, 2013.

[4] For DVD coverage of the relationship between the Undertaker and Kane see *Undertaker: This is My Yard, WWF Entertainment, 2001 and Brothers of Destruction*, Warner Brothers, 2014.

his career during a time when the gimmick was all important. His skin was pale, his clothes were dark, he frequented graveyards, and his manager was named Paul Bearer. He even engaged in matches that ended with his opponent dumped into a casket. After a turn as a fan favorite without his manager, Bearer returned with a surprise opponent for the Undertaker. It was his younger brother Kane, whom he had assumed was dead in the fire that had also killed their parents. It should be noted that Undertaker had a more elaborate backstory than most WWE characters. Kane wore a mask and did not speak due to burns sustained in the fire. Kane blamed Undertaker for the fire and his injuries and a series of vicious matches ensued. Of course, there is a fine line between love and hate, and eventually Kane and his brother joined forces to become the Brothers of Destruction.

A more classic storyline of sibling ring rivalry took place between Bret Hart and his younger brother Owen.[5] Unlike Undertaker and Kane, these two were brothers in real life and in the ring, part of the Canadian Hart wrestling dynasty. Owen was the classic younger brother, resenting being in the shadow of his highly successful older brother and wanting to be acknowledged as better. He verbally taunted Bret until they finally met in the ring. Owen cheated his way to victory in a match that highlighted the athletic abilities of both. But their conflict was always about who was the better wrestler, with Owen, the whiny younger brother, constantly trying to prove himself. Later, their rivalry resolved under pressure from an external threat. During Bret's feud with Shawn Michaels and Degeneration-X (aka DX), Bret sought help from Owen and Owen's tag-team partner, real-life brother-in-law Davey Boy Smith. They joined forces in an emotional reunion, reforming the Hart Foundation along with Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart (another real-life Hart brother-in-law). During their rivalry, Bret was the hero and Owen the villain, and the fans' allegiance tended toward the elder brother. By their reunion, both brothers were considered villains and routinely faced jeers from American fans though they still received cheers in their native Canada. But the rhetoric of their alliance strongly suggests family solidarity.

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[5] Some of the best coverage of Bret and Owen Hart can be seen in *WWE: Bret "Hitman" Hart - The Best There Is, The Best There Was, The Best There Ever Will Be*, Warner Brothers, 2011, and *WWE: Owen – Hart of Gold*, Warner Brothers, 2015.

Daddy's Little Boy

Unlike siblings, father and son are not typically direct competitors for women or status. But power struggles can occur between father and son over the allocation of resources. More commonly, we see father-son solidarity such as when a father comes to the ring to help his son, like Dusty Rhodes coming to the aid of his son Dustin or Cowboy Bob Orton assisting his son Randy in cheating his way to victory. Father-son relationships in professional wrestling are usually between real-life father-son pairs, contributing to the believability of the emotional performance.

But one of the most famous father-son pairs in wrestling has a history of alliance mixed with periods in which the son rebels against the father's authority, even facing him in the ring. Father Vince McMahon and his son Shane met in a street fight at *WrestleMania 17*.[6] Shane, a fan-favorite at the time, emerged victorious. Most of the storylines that brought them into conflict involved other family members, including Vince cheating on his wife Linda, Shane's mother. Vince was also complicit in the storyline kidnapping of daughter Stephanie, Shane's sister. Shane further feuded with his sister's boyfriend Test, believing him uNWOrthy of their family. This male proprietary interest in the sexuality of female kin is seen in other literary genres as well as reported in the anthropological and psychological literature (Perilloux, Fleishman, and Buss 227).

The Psychology of Morality

The evolution of moral reasoning and moral emotions is a topic that has fascinated philosophers and psychologists alike. Research has suggested that we are designed to be good at recognizing when someone has cheated or violated a social rule (Krebs 131). In fact, we often take pleasure in, and at times go to great lengths to see, individuals punished for their "wrongs." As attuned creatures, humans take vicarious pleasure when moral melodrama recurs in our entertainment. A majority of people believe prosocial behaviors should be

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[6] *WWF: WrestleMania X* (Seven, WWF Home Video, 2001).

rewarded and antisocial ones punished. However, whether an act is good or bad depends a lot on perspective and personal allegiance.

Wrestling is often described as a morality play: good guys versus bad guys. Typically, the only times two good guys or two bad guys fight is when one is aiming to switch sides. And we want our good guys to win. Today, however, the clean-cut morality and divide between the baby faces and heels of the 1980s and earlier has given way to blurrier lines. Once the heroes were clean-cut all-Americans, like 1980s Hulk Hogan. By contrast, the villains were nasty, egotistical, foreign, or all three; like Baron von Raschke or the Iron Sheik. Good guys were distinguishable from bad guys, but what makes someone a hero or a villain has changed somewhat since the 1990s and early 2000s. Rule breaking is not what determines good versus bad, but rather what a character stands for or represents—whether it be the power and seeming indestructibility of the Undertaker, the independence ("I stand alone and trust no one") of Stone Cold, or the in-your-face prankster attitude of DX.

The WWE has made good use of in-group/out-group psychology to create support for certain wrestlers and storylines. Evidence suggests that humans, especially men, make "us versus them" categorizations and develop a strong attachment to their group as well as being quick to discriminate against out-groups (Atran 1537; Fiske 127). Such a psychology was likely shaped by a long history of frequent intergroup conflict over resources (Buss 301). Professional wrestling takes advantage of this aspect of psychology to build a strong fan base for various wrestlers and groups of wrestlers. Hispanic wrestlers like Rey Mysterio and the late Eddie Guererro experienced huge followings among the Latino community (Eddie referring to himself as Latino Heat). The incredible popularity of DX was largely due to young fans (many older fans were appalled) who felt a sense of solidarity with the group's sexual innuendo and lack of respect for authority. Many Generation X fans, who grew up watching the wholesome Hulk Hogan era of the 80s, were also intrigued by increasingly adult and morally-ambiguous themes. The DX versus Hart Foundation storyline was highly entertaining partially because it didn't play out in a standard wrestling way. While most WWE events are held in arenas throughout the United States, some take place in Canada and other countries. During the Hart Foundation-DX feud, the members of DX were the fan favorites from a storyline perspective and the fans strongly supported them in the U.S. However, in Canada, the support was almost one hundred percent behind the local in-group, the Hart Foundation, led by

Canadian hero Bret Hart. Several televised events from this time period highlighted this tribal Canadian/American conflict including one where Shawn Michaels stuck the Canadian flag up his nose[7] and the *Survivor Series 1997* [8] which occurred in Montreal where the fans overwhelmingly displayed signs derogating DX (the American fan favorites) and praising the Harts.

Over time, the storylines themselves haven't changed much in a basic sense. The good guy loses through cheating and later rises to a victory more emotionally powerful because of the odds against him and the pleasure (retribution) we feel when the bad guy (the member of the out-group) gets what he deserves. Yet the reality is that they both cheat, and audiences cheer when their guy cheats and jeer when the other guy does.

Because he is our guy, and that is what really matters.

The Art of Betrayal

When it comes down to it, whether a wrestler upholds the "rules" or breaks them does not have a lot to do with being the one the fans cheer. We make excuses for "our" wrestlers; it is okay when they break the rules because they do it for the right reasons—or at least that is an audience attribution. Nevertheless, there is one sure-fire way to turn cheers to boos: have one tag-team member turn on his partner. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes perfect sense. Tag-team partners are portrayed as friends and allies and trustworthiness is one of the most important characteristics to look for in any cooperative relationship (Barclay 217). If an individual's self-interests are not aligned, a significant chance exists that a beneficial relationship may turn out to be costly in the end. As a result, tag-team betrayals turn the betrayer from beloved favorite to hated villain almost instantly.

It has been done effectively many times. Particularly well-done betrayals include when Hulk Hogan joined the NWO and when X-Pac turned on Kane. X-Pac's betrayal occurred at the tail end of a long storyline that had taken Kane from an isolated mostly heel character to a sympathetic fan favorite. The core of the story was X-Pac's befriending of this scarred non-verbal monster figure and

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[7] A clip of this incident can be found online at https://imgur.com/gA86bH7

[8] For coverage of this Survivor Series see *Hitman Hart: Wrestling with Shadows*, J-Films, 1998.

the bond of friendship that formed between them only to be later broken, turning X-Pac into a heel and elevating Kane to serious face.[9]

More than twenty years ago, perhaps the most stunning heel turn ever came from Hulk Hogan at WCW's *Bash at the Beach 1996*. Since the 1980s, Hogan had been professional wrestling's most famous good guy and one of its biggest money-making draws. By 1996, however, he was aging and his gimmick ("Say your prayers, eat your vitamins…") was not working with the now more mature Generation X fans. Brilliantly, Hogan ditched the superhero kitsch, becoming a Machiavellian cowardly villain that the fans loved to hate. In the main event of WCW's the pay-per-view,[10] Scott Hall and Kevin Nash—who had recently left the then-WWF[11] for WCW with an invasion storyline, calling themselves the Outsiders—showed up a man short for their six-man tag team main event versus the hero team of Lex Luger, Sting, and Randy "Macho Man" Savage. The Outsiders claimed their partner was in the arena, but the match started without him. Hall and Nash proceeded to beat down their opponents; Luger was carried off on a stretcher, leaving Sting and Savage in need of assistance. Everything appeared to be in Hall and Nash's favor when all of a sudden, clad in his traditional bright red and yellow, Hogan arrived to save the day. Except he didn't; Hall and Nash bailed out of the ring, but Hogan stunned the crowd when he gave his old friend Savage the leg drop. The live audience went crazy, throwing full cups of soda and trash into the ring while Hogan, Hall, and Nash mocked the fans. The NWO was born as Hogan not only betrayed his old friend but the fans as well. In his own words: "You fans can stick it, brother."

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[9] The relationship between Kane and X-pac played out on *Monday Night Raw* and various WWF pay-per-views between 1999 and 2000.

[10] Footage from Hogan's appearance through the heel turn can be found at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4jqhim

[11] WWF, the World Wrestling Federation, was the earlier incarnation of what is now known as WWE, World Wrestling Entertainment. The name change occurred in 2002, largely due to a dispute with World Wildlife Fund over the use of "WWF."

For the Benefit of Those with Flash Photography

While professional wrestling is often viewed as soap opera for men, there are a substantial number of female fans. The WWE estimates that approximately 35% of its viewing audience is female.[12] Just a quick search of the Internet reveals that girls and women take an active, often exuberantly salacious, interest in professional wrestling. Women have always been a vocal part of the professional wrestling audience, particularly regarding their interest in the display of male bodies. Today's female fans have new ways to express and communicate their pleasure online. Not only do they post photos and blog about the storylines, but they also write fan fiction about their favorite wrestlers, as can be seen in the over 6500 professional wrestling stories on *Archive of Our Own* (*archiveofourown.org*) or the over 5600 posted on *FanFiction.net*.

Some might wonder if there are any differences between male and female wrestling fans in terms of favorite wrestlers or favorite storylines. In fact, great storylines tend to appeal to both male and female audiences. The working man conflict between Stone Cold and Vince McMahon, the brotherly conflict between Undertaker and Kane, whenever best friends, and typically tag-team partners, turn on each other, all these scenarios produce emotional reactions in fans. Even the cute and humorous storyline involving the unlikely alliance between The Rock and Mankind (termed "the Rock and Sock connection," due to Mankind's tendency to stick a sock puppet in his opponents' mouths) appealed strongly to men and women alike. Good stories are good stories; they capture the audience's attention and emotions. The problems of social relationships, how the same ones can involve both cooperation and conflict, have been problems men and women have had to solve over our history as a species from tribal communities to modern city-states.

Yet male and female fans can have wildly different views on individual wrestlers. This should not be surprising if men are more drawn to the male-male competition per se and women to the mate choice appeal of the men doing the competing. For example, WWE wrestler Brock Lesnar has a strong male following largely due to his obvious strength and power. The majority of signs at

[12] http://indeedwrestling.blogspot.com/2014/07/wwe-viewer-demographics.html.

televised events when he has been active for the WWE have been held by men. You could imagine him beating almost any opponent. However, he has a much smaller female following due to a lack of interesting ring personality/backstory and relatively poor microphone skills (which are a good avenue for conveying information about personality and attitudes, features always ranked as important to women's mate preferences).[13] A performer that captured a huge male and female following was The Rock. In this case, it was a combination of athletic ability, incredible mic skills, sarcastic sense of humor, and attractiveness that made him the people's champion. His skills and personality have transcended the business, making him one of the top mainstream media stars of today.

For a long time, people failed to pay much attention to female wrestling fans. Yet, the WWE recognized that women made up a significant portion of their audience and now markets merchandise specifically to their female audience. An examination of this merchandise reveals a series of men with traits that would not surprise anyone with an evolutionary perspective on mate choice. First, the men that female wrestling fans really go for tend to be facially attractive with features that indicate high testosterone exposure during puberty, as well as having fit strong bodies.[14] The Rock is a good example of this as he is tall, physically strong, and possesses facial symmetry indicative of good genetic quality. Female fans do not necessarily favor the largest wrestlers (like the Big Show) or the most muscular, but rather ones that are powerful and also cardiovascularly fit looking (The Rock, Shawn Michaels, John Cena, Randy Orton). Personality, as demonstrated through interviews and relationships with other wrestlers, also has an impact. Displays of friendship and solidarity, such as one wrestler coming to the rescue of another, are seen very favorably and often elevate a performer's status among female fans as seen in the frequent appearance of certain wrestlers— such as Seth Rollins and Dean Ambrose or Shawn Michaels and Triple H—in fan

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[13] Many female fans have websites for their favorite wrestlers and discuss their attributes on discussion boards and in blogs as on sites like HowTheyPlay.com. See also the sites on the now mostly defunct "Ladies Love Wrestling Too" Webring or The Daily Hotness, or "Girls Love Wrestling Too" on Pinterest. The now defunct Men in Pink and Black site was well known for its Bakery section where they had pictures of the guys they thought were highly attractive.

[14] For a review of features women find attractive in a mate see Gildersleeve, Haselton, and Fales.

fiction as well as the frequency by which the WWE markets female specific merchandise on their website. A guy who wins all his matches, especially if he has a bland personality, may have a male following, but most female fans won't care much about him or his matches. On the other hand, a guy who loses all his matches will not have any fans, but a guy who struggles at times yet wins in the end gives the women more information to judge him on. Does he have drive and determination, the commitment to see things through? Does he show signs of attachment to others? These traits (physical prowess, good genes, status, agreeable personality) all make a man a good choice as a romantic or sex partner (Buss 106).

At first glance, the Undertaker might appear to be an unlikely choice for a female fan favorite, in that he is quite aggressively masculine in appearance, closer to seven feet tall than six and covered with tattoos. His scary and powerful presence has always been a huge draw to male fans. Yet, he is also tremendously popular with female fans who have romantic online fantasies about him (Clerc and Salmon 177). In several ways, he is the tall, dark, and mysterious dangerous hero seen in Gothic romance. The ultimate protector with his intimidating size and strength, his almost predatory sexual appeal has been most obvious during his "Lord of Darkness" periods as opposed to his American Badass biker run. Many of his promos presented him not only as powerful but sensitive, tormented by tragedies in his past. Like many romance heroes, the initial impression is the dark and dangerous "cad," but later comes glimpses of the "dad" type, a more sensitive caring male. In the 1990s, he referred to his fans as the "creatures of the night," many of which were young women often dressed in the goth style. But promoters walk a fine line in appealing to female fans in a way that will not turn off male fans.

This was never a problem with the Undertaker because of his size and aggressive masculinity but for smaller, more conventionally attractive wrestlers, like Shawn Michaels (the "Heartbreak Kid," the "Boy Toy," as well as the "Showstopper"), there is always a danger that being too attractive to women will drive male fans away. This did indeed happen during many if not most periods of Michaels' career, although his commitment to his in-ring performance always brought respect from a portion of the male audience even as his playing to the female fans brought jeers. But overall, Michaels' strongest, most loyal fans were his female ones. His good looks and athleticism provided an excellent indicator of good genetic quality while his social personality (he often teamed up with friends,

a group known as the Kliq, as regular or irregular tag team partners) suggested the reliability required for paternal investment. His behind-the-scenes, real-life loyalty and attachment to his friends (which in the age of the Internet became quite well known) also endeared him to female fans.

Conclusion

In the media, professional wrestling has often been viewed negatively, as a source of childhood violence. In academia, it has typically been examined through a variety of perspectives including gender roles, race, morality and class. Most often, however, it has not been taken seriously as a topic of scholarly discourse.

Yet like most forms of popular culture, professional wrestling reflects our basic human interests and desires. It is a microcosm of human nature, an athletic soap opera in which competition between powerful males plays out not only for a male audience but for a female one as well. We see issues of justice, family dynamics, sexual appeal and mate choice all enacted within the framework of sports entertainment. The success of this industry is testament not to human fondness for violence—even if it is "performed" violence—but to how well the relationships and conflicts between these wrestlers tap into our essential human nature, arousing our attention and emotions.

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A Critical Criminology of Professional Wrestling and Sports Entertainment

KAREN CORTEEN

The time has come for serious academic study of professional wrestling and sports entertainment. Such a study would be: legitimate; diverse in nature; multi- and interdisciplinary; and embracing a variety of connected and unconnected disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological lenses. In this spirit I propose a critical criminology of professional wrestling and sports entertainment (hereafter PW&SE). No standard definition of critical criminology exists; rather various branches of critical criminologies co-exist. However, most of the perspectives share an understanding of the power dynamics in society. Critical criminologists understand that "the powerful make, administer and enforce the law—and that the dominant subject of regulation and coercion are those with the least power" (Corteen "State Power" 53). With this understanding in mind, critical criminology directs its analytical lens and academic activism beyond that of crimes of the powerless to the crimes and harms of the powerful (Ugwudike; Corteen "State Power"). As such, it foregrounds the "view from below" as opposed to the "view from above."

Critical criminology, therefore, provides a particular perspective and theoretical lens that enables a critical discussion of, research on, and teaching about World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), a corporate entity that acts with immunity and impunity with regard to its workers' safety; more research needs to be done on the injuries and deaths among professional wrestlers. Together with an exposure to and examination of the decriminalization of this corporation's serial, recidivist, and harmful actions and wrongdoing, this analysis would be a useful perspective in the academic study of sports criminology. The discussion will focus on the WWE (formerly known as the World Wrestling Federation or WWF); however, this analysis suggests a future potential to explore many aspects of PW&SE, including other promotions. It could even be extended to other sports,

as professional wrestling is not the only sport-associated body to feature in notable "scandals" (Lee and Lee).

Professional wrestlers' accounts from the territory era illustrate that professional wrestling has always been a harmful and painful business (see Shoemaker). However, as the WWE has become a global social phenomenon, the harms and risks have become more damaging and routine due to the pressure to be continually even more exciting and entertaining (Atkinson). The WWE is also publicly visible, while information on professional wrestling deaths is predominantly limited to high-profile wrestlers who worked for the WWE (or the WWF) at some point in their career. The lack of official data in this area means that information gathered here is primarily from Internet sources concerned with this matter.[1]

The connections between sports and crime have been studied by criminologists since the 1990s (Finley), and in 2016 Nic Groombridge established a sports criminology in which he explores a critical criminology of sports and games. A critical criminology of PW&SE would build upon and further develop this branch of critical criminology. Such focus represents a timely development that is in keeping with the growing acknowledgement among philosophers, sociologists, and criminologists of the moral and ethical dilemmas of sports (Simon), sports barbarity (Perelman), and sports' intrinsically related violences and victimizations (Anderson and White; Corteen "In Plain Sight"; Young).

Due in large part to the powerful global monopolizing phenomenon of WWE, PW&SE is a significant and influential visual/cultural spectacle (Bateman; O'Sullivan) that, for many reasons, cannot be ignored. Given the cultural relevance of PW&SE, Oliver Bateman suggests it may be "time to consider seriously how the sport works." Additionally, interest grows in academia and beyond regarding the cultural role of PW&SE and how the WWE, in particular, operates. For example, in 2009, Jason Lee and Justin Lee discussed how Vincent K. McMahon (Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the WWE) is a powerful

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[1] See Fiona McQuarrie for an in-depth discussion of the difficulties of conducting research and accessing legitimate and valid information on the WWE. Also, for an incisive discussion of the collective intelligence and knowledges of the participatory modern wrestling fan and the achievements of pooling such insights through community sharing see Mario Dozal and Gabriela Morales (forthcoming) discussion about pro-wrestling injuries and *Botchamania*.

agent capable of improving the health and safety of his company's workers, and in so doing potentially improving the (mis)treatment and conditions of the whole of professional wrestling in North America and beyond. Furthermore, interest now focuses on the role of sports, culturally and otherwise, in terms of its athletes, fans, organizers, owners and "regulators." Therefore, the WWE could be studied criminologically and zemiologically, which is the study of social harm (Hillyard). Such a study could comprise an important dimension of professional wrestling studies.

This article first briefly discusses the key shared priorities of critical criminology including its cooptation of the concept of zemiology. It also discusses the main aspects of the very recent introduction of a critical criminology of sports. Second, the article outlines an overview of the harmful corporate activity of WWE follows, providing the justification for examining WWE as a branch of critical criminology including sports criminology. This justification enables a critical criminological and zemiological examination of the WWE's past, present, and future from 1982, when professional wresting changed.

Critical Criminology: From Crimes on the Streets to Crimes in Corporate Suites

No agreed upon origin or definition of critical criminology exists as it is a "fluid and vast field of study" that emerged in the 1960s, signifying a departure, or "radical break," from the vogue criminologies then and now (Ugwudike 11). Due to the diversity of critical criminological branches, it is more accurate to speak of critical criminologies (Corteen "Critical Criminologies"; "State Power"). While critical criminology "comprises several perspectives that emphasize disparate themes," many shared imperatives are present (Ugwudike 1). Among critical criminologists is a collective criticism of mainstream criminology due to its preoccupation with crimes of the less powerful that result in the over-criminalization (and sometimes victimization) of marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable individuals and identifiable groups. Also, mainstream criminology simultaneously ignores harms beyond the remit of criminal law and it decriminalizes crimes of the powerful—incidents and events that are far more damaging to the planet and it inhabitants and eco-systems than conventional crimes. For critical criminologists, the construction of "crime" and the responses

to it are rooted in an unequal social order characterized by the structural relationships of capitalism, racism, and hetero-patriarchy. Thus, critical criminologists are not concerned with a criminal justice system predicated on and implicated in social divisions and fault lines; rather, they seek a more inclusive and far-reaching agenda of radical legal change and critical social justice through academic activism comprising pedagogy, resistance, and revolution (Arrigo).

At the heart of critical criminology is an understanding and analysis of power dynamics and power inequalities. Subjects who experience coercive, regulatory, and criminalizing state practices are those with the least power (Barton et. al. *Expanding the Criminological*), while subjects who rarely feature in regulatory and law enforcement activities are those with the most power (Tombs and Whyte). Critical criminologists problematize and challenge the narrow remit of the state-defined "problem of crime" and criminal law. It advocates a social harm or zemiological approach to understanding the commission and experience of crime, victimization, and harm (Hillyard). Thus, critical criminology embodies a shift in emphasis "from conventional crimes to the crimes and harms committed by powerful actors, including agents of the state and corporate actors" (Corteen "State Power" 53), as well as institutional and green crime this includes state-corporate crime.

From the 1990s criminologists have explored the connection between sport and crime, which comprised looking at traditional street crime, tourist-related crimes, and crimes committed by fans and athletes (Finley). The first book to apply critical criminology to sport was published in 2016 (Groombridge), so this is a recent development within the discipline. Groombridge asserts that, to date, the relationship between criminology and sport has been tentative. Groombridge encourages criminologists to have a greater engagement with sports and to go beyond exploring athlete deviance and football hooliganism to an exploration of the crimes and harms committed by international sports associations, such as crime perpetrated within board rooms and in relation to mega-events in sport. This focus includes examining: crime prevention and desistance through sport; sports law; sport and justice; sport and social control; sports "scandals" involving sports celebrities and corruption; sport and violence; sport, crime, and gender; sport and social harm; and the role of sports mega-events in providing the contexts for crimes such as human trafficking. Groombridge's overall intention is to "always see the criminological in sport and to offer to criminology examples

from sport" (15-6). The criminological can be seen in the WWE, which can provide criminology with examples of crimes and harms.

The Harmful Business of the WWE

The WWE has emerged "as the premiere force in professional wrestling" (Lee and Lee 249). Individuals working for the WWE experience a range of work-related harms. Such work-related harms continue as can be seen in the unprecedented number of professional wrestlers dying prematurely in the United States (Cohen "High Death Rate"; Corteen "Professional Wrestling"; Corteen and Corteen; Lee and Lee). Various Internet databases exist that contain statistics on the deaths of professional wrestlers. While these databases' formats and justifications for who is, and who is not, included (if provided) may differ, one glaring consistency is the increase in untimely deaths of professional wrestlers from 1982 onwards (see for example Fandom; Cohen "High Death Rate"; Edwards; Wrestling Book; WrestlerDeaths). To date in 2017 some of the more well-known wrestlers who have died prematurely include: Timothy "Rex King" Smith, aged 55 (kidney failure); Nicole Bass, aged 52 (stroke); and Matt "Rosey" Anoai, aged 47 (heart failure).

The usual age of retirement is 65 years old but, sadly, many professional wrestlers have not reached this age. For example: Chris Von Eric died at age 21 (suicide); Andrew "Test" Martin died at age 33 (accidental overdose); Owen Hart died aged 34 (fatal accident at *Over the Edge '99)*; Davey Boy Smith (British Bulldog) died at age 39 (heart attack); Rick Rude died at age 40 (heart attack); and Miss Elizabeth died at age 42 (accidental overdose). Perhaps the most disturbing was the death of Chris Benoit at age 40 from suicide, after he killed his wife Nancy and his son at their family home.[2] Keith Pinckard, a medical examiner who has taken an interest in the fatalities of wrestlers, contends that the death rate of wrestlers is approximately seven times higher than the US population and that their chances of dying from heart disease is 12 times higher than other Americans aged between 25 to 44 (Swartz). Research undertaken by *USA Today* found that

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[2] For a more in-depth discussion of "noteworthy wrestler deaths" see Lee and Lee (253).

when compared to pro football players, professional wrestlers are 20 times more likely to die before age 45 (Swartz).

Since the 1980s, the relationship between the WWE's owners and workers has changed beyond recognition. This change, and the growth of this corporation, can be traced back to 1982 when Vince McMahon Jr. purchased the former WWF from his father Vince McMahon Sr. This exchange of ownership resulted in its dramatic transformation. By 1985 the marketization, commodification, and celebrification of the company had begun, and in 1989 the deregulation of the industry was initiated. Writing in 2012, McAuliff commented that the continued campaign for deregulation on the part of Linda McMahon, and the WWE resulted in the deregulation of wrestling in more than half of the country. In a monopolizing zeal, the new owner vastly expanded the company via live and televised performances that broke traditional territorial boundaries. The unstoppable new owner would "smash his adversaries" and he would either co-opt or "ruthlessly destroy his competitors" (O'Sullivan 80). Professional wrestling became reconstructed as "family entertainment" and "sports entertainment." The WWF's achievement of deregulation in many states allowed it to avoid paying taxes on their TV broadcasts as well as escaping regulatory oversight by the state athletics commission. Thus, many states had no requirement for wrestlers to take physical examinations before an event; for Dan O'Sullivan, this move was a "fateful dereliction in a business rife with injury" (82).

The work-related harms experienced by WWF professional wrestlers became more serious and routine from the late 1980s on. Such harms entail risky and injurious work demands and conditions, the misclassification of wrestlers' worker status, and an unprecedented number or work-related injuries. Writing in 2016, David Jr. Dennis observes that, the "WWE is in crisis mode and the injuries are piling up to the point where something has to be done. […] The WWE needs to figure out how to keep their stars healthier to curb this epidemic…there has to be something the company can do."

Within the WWE the working schedule is grueling, and this has a hugely detrimental impact on their bodies, their emotions, and their psychological state. The WWE professional wrestlers are on the road for over 300 days a year, and while other athletes have an off-season, those working for the WWE do not. They also endure "constant travel from one event to another; living in (non-glamorous) hotels and being away from their home for extended periods of time; and working in pain when injured" (Corteen "Professional Wrestling" 172). This leads to

individual burn out and familial breakdown.[3] While "accidents do happen and injuries occur...if wrestlers take time off, their wallets suffer significantly" (Cohen "High Death Rate").

The relentless work schedules and having to work when in pain for financial reasons results in: "The deadly slope that many wrestlers have found themselves facing. They become addicted to painkillers. The medicine keeps them too lethargic to wrestle, so they take drugs to get high. This deadly mixture leads to illegal drug dependency that many wrestlers have to cope with even after they retire" (Cohen "High Death Rate"). Lee and Lee comment that "wrestlers commonly share portable pharmacies in the form of personal bags or fanny packs, etc." (250). Due to the grueling schedule of PW&SE, an occupational culture of drug and alcohol use and abuse flourished (Lee and Lee). This abuse is furthered by the pressure of having "the larger-than-life size needed to be successful in the business" (Cohen "High Death Rate"). Such "super-human appearances" (Lee and Lee 249) means putting on excess weight in the form of a massive amount of muscle and/or fat—the latter of which puts additional pressure on the heart. The heart is also made to work harder due to the intake of supplements and steroids to achieve the desired (and required) larger-than-life physique. The cumulative effect can be seen in the "very high rate of premature mortality from cardiovascular disease, cancer and substance abuse" (Herman et al. 6).

To sustain ticket sales and profits, the spectacle must be maintained and on occasions increased. This requires WWE superstars to go to the edge and engage in dangerous, risky performances, as reflected in the titles of pay-per-view shows such as Elimination Chamber, Extreme Rules, Hell in a Cell, Payback, and Survivor Series. Injuries that have happened in the ring include: broken bones (including a leg, nose, back, and neck); dislocated limbs, tendons, and ligaments; temporary and permanent paralysis; and serious undetected concussion (Babcock). For example, one match that is continuously boasted about within wrestling circles is the "Hell in a Cell" match on June 28, 1998. In it Mick "Mankind" Foley wrestled Mark "The Undertaker" Calaway. Unbeknown to the both men, the cage they were wrestling on top off was not properly secured, and it gave way, hurtling them both to the floor. During the match Mark Calaway

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3 See for example the depiction of Jake "The Snake" Robert's past individual downfall and family estrangement in Blaustein's documentary Beyond the Mat.

suffered a broken foot and Mick Foley suffered two critical falls or "bumps" that resulted in concussion, numerous puncture wounds, internal bleeding, a bruised kidney, a dislocated left shoulder, loss of teeth, multiple stiches below his lip and a dislocated jaw.

Finally, individual, familial, and social harms result from the misclassification of professional wrestlers' worker status. This misclassification also impacts professional wrestlers' financial security given their inability to unionize and claim workers' rights and protections (Schiavone). Historically, professional wrestlers have been classified as an independent contractor rather than an employee of the company (Sonneveld), meaning they must acquire their own health and life assurance, onerously file state income tax forms in each state they wrestle in, and pay a hard-hitting self-employment tax (O'Sullivan). This classification also means the company avoids paying a range of taxes and does not have to make Social Security and Medicare contributions. Hence, this practice of worker misclassification is also known as wage theft and tax fraud.

This misclassification has several zemiological or social impacts. For example, the general public may have to subsidize wrestlers' loss of revenue in respect to the medical care and insurance premiums because of those that misclassify their workers. Cumulatively the loss of Social Security, Medicare, unemployment contributions and income tax collection deprives federal governments and states of billions of dollars of much-needed revenue. Thus, less funding is available to hospitals, law enforcement, schools, social services, and government programs. Cowley has established as a matter of law that professional wrestlers should and must be legally classified as employees.

A Critical Criminology of Professional Wrestling and Sports Entertainment

Although some academics have become attracted to the study of PW&SE including the WWE, very little, if any, attention has been paid to it by criminologists—including critical criminologists (and zemiologists); the author may be the exception in this respect. On the one hand this is somewhat surprising, as not only is the WWE massively culturally popular, it is also an industry fraught with worker-related harms including health and safety issues, cultures of abuse (by and of workers), and an unprecedented level and severity of injury which are

committed in plain sight (Corteen "In Plain Sight"). On the other hand, this is not surprising as fun, fakery, spectacle and feigned violence serve as a smokescreen that obscures and mystifies the early deaths and shattered bodies of professional wrestlers. In the main the deaths being discussed happened to professional wrestlers who worked for the WWE (or the WWF) at some point in their wrestling career.

Also, as discussed above, the WWE continues with the harmful practices that, if not directly causing the premature death or other harms experienced by professional wrestlers, at the very least play a role or a contribution to the harms. As Cohen ("High Death Rate") comments, "[v]ery few of the deaths on the list could be blamed 100% on the wrestling business and very few have a 0% to blame." Thus, the WWE may not be the worst offender in terms of professional wrestlers dying prematurely while under contract to this corporation, but they are without doubt part of a larger problem. In addition, by studying the premature deaths of professional wrestlers working for the WWE and those that were former workers of the WWE or WWF, attention can also be paid to the harmful business of wrestling beyond this corporation.

Critical criminology concerns itself with non-conventional crimes and harms. Therefore, past, current, and future situations regarding these crimes of power and worker-related deaths and harms endemic to this industry lend themselves to critical criminological investigation. As has been discussed, shared, collective, and inclusive characteristics of critical criminology include attempts to expose, challenge, and change suffering and pain, power inequalities, abuses of power, and crimes and harms of the powerful including corporations. Therefore, critical criminology would be a useful lens through which to study (and teach about) the WWE within a corporate occupational culture of worker mistreatment, job insecurity, denial of worker rights and protections, and worker misclassification. A social harm or zemiological approach, as embraced by critical criminologists, could be utilized to expose, challenge, and change the individual, familial, and social harms of worker misclassification and the resultant deprivation and shifting of financial resources regarding Medicare, Social Security, and so forth.

Critical criminology is concerned with corporate and state transgressions and the economic and political systems that result in crime and harm—including the degradation of workers. Such research also focuses on regulatory regimes, or lack thereof, that undermine workers' health, safety, and working conditions, including the rights to worker protections and the right to unionize. The ambiguous position

of the WWE as neither pure sport or pure entertainment means that "pro wrestlers—too often treated like circus animals—cannot join actors' unions or sports unions because they are dismissed as artists on the one hand and athletes on the other" (Wrestling Scribe). It also means that in over half the states in the U.S., the WWE slips through the regulatory net as it is decoupled from the state athletic commissions on the grounds that it is more entertainment than sport (McAuliff). This has led to "relatives of some wrestlers who have died in the ring" to believe that the push for deregulation sowed the "seeds that have grown into a culture of abuse" (McAuliff).

Harmful practices do occur in states where there is no regulatory oversight. However, harmful practices also occur in states that are regulated by the athletic states commissions (Corteen "In Plain Sight"). Given the concerns regarding the potential negative impact of deregulation on the health, well-being, and safety of PW&SE it is right to examine this harmful business in this context. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that PW&SE is still regulated in just under half of the states of the U.S. and these are not free from the harmful effects of this business (Corteen "In PlainSight"). Jim Wilson and Weldon Johnson state that where regulation exists it is minimum and that it is "primarily an exercise in tax collection" (489). Therefore, this industry needs investigation and change regarding *how it is* and *how it is not* regulated and the lack of unionization, worker protections, and its worker misclassification.

Critical criminology also concerns processes of dehumanization, humanization, and enhancing humanistic sensibilities. Through seeing past the celebrification and somewhat pantomimization of those working for the WWE, to seeing these performers and athletes as (predominantly poorly) paid workers, their human plight as vulnerable, insecure, unprotected, commodified, and exploited workers can be acknowledged, understood, critiqued, and hopefully changed. Critical criminology emphasizes hearing and valuing the "view from below," subjugated knowledges, and alternative accounts. Individuals within and without wrestling circles, including professional wrestlers themselves, through alternative and subjugated accounts, have attempted to draw attention to the darker and more damaging side of this industry.

Critical criminologists can use their academic activism to draw further attention to and give academic support to their situation and to such testimonies and narratives. Theoretically and methodologically the potential misinformation, silences, denials and distortions regarding the harmful practices of the WWE

could be investigated. The WWE is the largest organization with the greater power, and the most publicly visible and accountable. Also, it may be the biggest perpetrator of such harms but it is by no means the only perpetrator. Therefore, critical criminology could (and should) also scrutinize, analyze, and shed light on less visible and less publicly accountable wrestling organizations or sites in which worker health, well-being, and safety are at risk or undermined.

The recognition of social agency and resistance is also crucial to critical criminology (Barton et al. "Reading the Word"). There has been resistance within and without this industry, including legal challenges—albeit with very limited success. Critical criminologists could highlight and be part of such resistance and attempts to secure positive change, justice, and redress, and they could do so beyond the publicly traded and biggest employer of professional wrestlers. Critical criminology questions and deconstructs the surface reality to extend insights into the world and to propose radical solutions. As such, they could enter the world of the WWE and shed light on the transgressive actions and inactions of the powerful corporation that predominantly continues to act in a climate of immunity and impunity. More importantly, as argued above, they could (and should) go beyond this obvious target to less visible and less publicly accountable spheres which may also be guilty of the commission of recidivist harmful practices.

Conclusions and Future Directions

To summarize, the WWE is far more than a cultural phenomenon and a "billion-dollar, publicly-held 'mega company'" (Lee and Lee 13); it is a harmful business. The provision of "sports entertainment" entails activities that are not typically considered as criminal—but perhaps they ought to be (Corteen "In PlainSight"). Work-related harms in this industry are individual, familial, and social. They entail premature deaths (as a result of enlarged hearts, heart attacks, accidental and intended fatal drug overdoses) and non-fatal drug overdoses. They also comprise: wrestler mistreatment; short, long and permanent injuries; addictions to, and use and abuse of, painkillers, alcohol, and other drugs including heroin, anabolic steroids and human growth hormones; chronic physical ill-health and poor mental well-being; individual and familial breakdown. Bateman responds that, "McMahon has posted absurdly high profit margins on the backs of

uninsured, undercompensated bodies for too long." Dennis discusses how currently professional wrestlers are increasingly and routinely having to endure more "bumps" than they have in the past.

The WWE is a monopoly; it is the biggest, wealthiest, most powerful and influential wrestling company with little if any competition. The WWE, as with so many corporations who commit crimes and harms, acts largely with immunity and impunity. They have little responsibility to their workers; in some states they lack regulation and in others the nature, extent, and efficiency of regulation is questionable. The WWE does what corporations ordinarily do: they pursue profit and put the economic health and well-being of their shareholders over and above the health and well-being of their workers. The company maximizes profit and the output of its workers while it misclassifies their worker status and prevents them from unionizing and securing worker's rights and protections. I have begun to discuss how the crimes and harms discussed above may reflect the ordinary everyday practices of the corporation (see "In Plain Sight"), and I hope others will take up this call as well.

The WWE commits such harms in plain sight. Such harms are visible and condemnable because the WWE is a large powerful and public corporation. However, it may not be the worst offender, and it is not the only offender with regard to personal, familial and social harms as result of its business culture and practices. With this in mind, I conclude with the proposal that a critical criminology of PW&SE including WWE and beyond is a worthwhile and viable endeavor that would reinforce and extend sports criminology—a very new area of exploration within critical criminology. Importantly it could also form a significant branch of a legitimate and imaginative, multi- and interdisciplinary, academic professional wrestling studies.

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"I Learned Most of My Anatomy from WWE": A Health Communication Argument for Health-Related Studies of Professional Wrestling

GABRIELA I. MORALES AND MARIO A. DOZAL

While watching Bray Wyatt take on Finn Bálor at World Wrestling Entertainment's (WWE) *SummerSlam 2017*, our ears immediately perked up when announce team commentator Corey Graves jokingly uttered "I learned most of my anatomy from WWE." Graves' statement was a reference to former World Wrestling Federation (WWF) color commentator Gorilla Monsoon and his use of hyperreal medical-sounding terminology to add some drama to the action. With Monsoon, a kick to the stomach was a "blow to the solar plexus," and a strike to the back of the head was "a shot to the external occipital protuberance."

However, despite the perceived excess of Monsoon's commentary, growing up on the WWE, it seemed like professional wrestling taught us valuable lessons about health. Young Hulkamaniacs learned that training hard and eating their vitamins was essential to being in peak physical condition like Hulk Hogan. Even a heel like "Cowboy" Bob Orton taught us to avoid hitting others with the cast on your broken arm because it would delay your recovery by several years. Storylines that involved Scott Hall and Road Warrior Hawk wrestling while drunk, and the real life inebriated performance of Jeff Hardy at Total Nonstop Action's (TNA) *Victory Road 2011*, demonstrated that being under the influence of drugs and alcohol was a frowned upon behavior. Outside of the ring, documented reports on the negative effects of steroid use have shown us how performers with once-Herculean figures are now dead, confined to wheelchairs, or subject to regular dialysis treatments due to steroid abuse.

Yet wrestling has also sent viewers some negative messages concerning health. We have seen performers like Sting and Hogan "injured" onscreen only to reject proper medical attention and work through the pain, causing them to lose the match and make the injury worse as a result. Both good and bad health messages continue to appear in professional wrestling. WWE's partnership with The Real Cost anti-smoking campaign has used popular superstars like Sasha

Banks and AJ Styles to warn viewers about the dangers of smoking, harkening back to the early 90s when the WWF aired anti-drug and anti-drunk driving public service announcements featuring the Undertaker. The promotion of onscreen retirement speeches by the likes of Edge and Daniel Bryan all carry positive health messages that can inform and make audiences aware of the limitation of their bodies, yet storylines still involve negative health messages in which performers must prove their grit and toughness by performing while injured. However, these health messages extend past traditional wrestling programming and include the health actions outside the ring of former and current performers.

Thus, Graves' statement serves as a validation of what we want to argue: Professional wrestling has much potential to be studied for its health communication aspects, including its influence and ability to raise awareness and inform professional wrestling viewers about health topics and diseases. By examining professional wrestling through a health communication lens, we aim not only for the legitimization of professional wrestling studies, but also for the expansion of academic literature focusing on professional wrestling. With this in mind, we seek to argue for the promotion of health communication studies of professional wrestling, similar to studies on entertainment-education and other mediated pop culture texts. We do this by presenting and analyzing specific incidents in professional wrestling that can be examined through a health communication focus, and discussing what health messages can potentially be learned by audiences.

Education-Entertainment and Health Communication

Health communication is "the way we seek, process, and share health information" (Kreps and Thornton 2). Within this definition lie numerous ways of strategically disseminating health messages, bringing awareness of diseases, disseminating information on disease prevention, proactively engaging audiences in the use of health adoption practices, and using empowerment to help others make healthy choices. Within the world of professional wrestling, instances involving health messages have become part of storylines where the health concern (e.g. neck injury, broken nose, broken arm, etc.) became an integral part in a character's comeback storyline and/or their path to redeem themselves.

Arvind Singhal and Everett Rogers believed that "we are 'educated' by entertainment media, even if unintended by the source and unnoticed by the audience" (Singhal and Rogers 8). Entertainment-education (E-E) is a health communication methodology that has converted those unintended and unnoticed teachable moments into purposeful messages. Entertainment-education was first "accidentally" discovered in a Peruvian telenovela called *Simplemente Maria* (*Simply Mary*), which catapulted its viewers into action without knowing why. Some of these actions consisted of what Singhal and Rogers (1999) termed as "sewing fever." *Simplemente Maria* caused an increase in Singer sewing machine purchases throughout the many Spanish-speaking countries that broadcast the telenovela. The audience observed the telenovela's main character, Maria, an indigenous housemaid, buy herself a Singer sewing machine that eventually turned her into a successful fashion icon within the telenovela. Another unintentional effect was that many of the audience members who watched *Simplemente Maria* enrolled in adult literacy classes due to the main character's own enrollment in one. Mainly those of lower socioeconomic status (SES), like the character of Maria, asked their bosses for time off so they could attend these classes to better their lives. Two other effects resulted from the audience's engagement with the telenovela and its protagonist. Attention to the treatment of housemaids became a topic of discussion among Peruvians of higher SES. This telenovela also introduced the idea of "rural-to-urban migration" for a better life (Singhal and Rogers 34). *Simplemente Maria* increased the move for many who were looking for a better life for themselves and their families. While the research tied to this statement was never an exact result of the telenovela, there was a noticeable increase in people moving from rural to urban.

These effects, although unintentional, guided Miguel Sabido, a Mexican writer, producer, and director of theater and television. His interest in how *Simplemente Maria* affected its audience began his search for the implementation of entertainment-education. His objective lay in the "potential of telenovelas by analyzing the 'educational' effects of the Peruvian telenovela's broadcasts he observed in Mexico" (Singhal and Rogers 44). He was interested in producing socially beneficial soap operas that also earned high ratings (Singhal and Rogers). These telenovelas would teach by example by providing characters that audience members could emulate as well as develop their own self-efficacy.

Through Sabido's analysis of the telenovelas' potential, he integrated several theories to build his vision for E-E programming. The first theory that Sabido

looked at was Shannon and Weaver's (1949) communication model, which he rearranged into the circular model of communication. This updated communication model included the notion that communication was circular and allowed for active interaction between sender and receiver. Sabido also integrated the use of Bentley's dramatic theory (1967), which emphasizes the creation of positive and negative characters as well as a focus on storylines that revolve around these characters. Jung's collective unconsciousness (1970) was also part of Sabido's formula for E-E telenovelas. This theory suggests that characters and stories or scripts can transcend time. These characters and stories have the potential to become archetypes that work universally. MacLean's Triune Brain (1973), which focused on understanding the brain as three brains in one, led to the understanding that we process messages cognitively, affectively, and animalistically through the neo-cortex, visceral, and reptilian portions of our brain respectively.

Finally, Sabido integrated Albert Bandura's (1977; 1986) social learning theory, later known as social cognitive theory. One of the concepts in Bandura's social cognitive theory is the use of observational learning and self-efficacy. These concepts look at the changes in people's behavior through the development of self-efficacy, which is "one's perceived ability to take the action necessary to achieve the desired effects or outcomes" (Westmaas, Gil-Rivas, and Cohen Silver 55), and the observation of others as role models. These role models can be anyone from a friend to a character that the person relates to on television or any other form of media. Much like the character of Maria from *Simplemente Maria*, who influenced thousands to start attending adult literacy classes, entertainment characters can affect how people engage with change. Through social modeling, "models serve as transmitters of knowledge, values, cognitive skills and new styles of behavior" (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, and Sabido 78). Acknowledging the importance of role models' influence presents a window to study professional wrestling and the influence that WWE and its characters have on its audience.

Professional wrestling itself has often been characterized as a "highly physical, male-oriented soap opera" (Johnson and Layden 279) featuring "a little somethin'–somethin' for everybody" in the way of action, interesting characters, and narratives filled with drama, comedy, and excitement (Russo 254). Every week professional wrestling programming tells different stories using in-ring action, speeches, and televised backstage interactions, all of which are meant to hook the viewer and keep them watching week to week. If professional wrestling

is part soap opera, sharing many elements with traditional telenovelas (such as having audience members and fans relate to, follow, cheer, and support their favorite superstar or wrestler), then an entertainment-education lens can be applied to it. Because of the many ways health has played a role in professional wrestling, it is time to analyze how influential this pop culture phenomenon has been and has the potential to be on its audience. That is, the E-E methodology could illustrate how people learn health information from professional wrestling matches, performers, and shows.

An E-E Perspective on Professional Wrestling

Having established a theoretical and methodological foundation by which to study professional wrestling, we now move on to examine how this pop culture phenomenon can be studied though an E-E lens. By applying E-E to examine professional wrestling we aim to analyze examples from WWE, such as specific moments and storylines (both kayfabe and real life), to show the potential of this platform to inform its viewers about specific health topics.

WWE has engaged in presenting enthralling storylines and characters that fit the formula used by Sabido in his E-E programming. We witness a constant circular form of communication through wrestling characters' in-ring promos, which often become dialogues with multiple superstars at one time. There is a constant back-and-forth conversation that establishes the mood for what is to come. Bentley's Dramatic Theory also presents itself in wrestling by the babyface and heel characters who are often the focus of any major storyline that eventually leads to a face-off event on *Raw*, *SmackDown*, or any of the pay-per-view programming. Babyface and heel characters have transcended time in the WWE Universe. It seems highly unusual to have a babyface versus a babyface match. Even when it is two very likeable characters like John Cena and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson squaring off in a pair of matches at *WrestleMania 28* and *29*, one character always presents more unlikeable characteristics than the other. As for MacLean's Triune Brain, fans process these characters and storylines cognitively (thoughts), affectively (emotion), and animalistically (physical). Bandura's SCT observational learning has taught fans about a multitude of health topics, and encouraged them to learn from their favorite superstar about what to or what not to do.

Past and Present Messages about Injuries in WWE

As mentioned earlier, injuries are a large part of professional wrestling, and the way they are presented in programming has the potential to teach audiences several things about how injuries are viewed and addressed. An E-E approach can reveal how viewers could intentionally learn through their role models' injuries.

In professional wrestling, injuries are often used as a plot device. Within kayfabe, a babyface will rarely attempt to injure their opponent since they are presented as being morally good and want to make sure that their opponent is healthy in the name of good sportsmanship. On the other hand, a heel will deliberately try to injure their opponent to gain an advantage over their opponent. Injury adds to the conflict and often serves as an additional form of adversity that the babyface must overcome to defeat the heel.

This can be seen in instances when Greg "The Hammer" Valentine broke Chief Wahoo McDaniel's leg, and when Dusty Rhodes had his arm broken at the hands of the Four Horsemen. After some time away, McDaniel returned to exact his revenge on Valentine, and Rhodes similarly returned to defeat Ric Flair, leader of the Four Horsemen. Although neither of these injuries were legitimate in real life, they were presented as real in the narrative. Both performers stepped away from the televised product for a short period of time to give the impression that they were recovering, and appeared again once they reached a certain point in the recovery process. The presentation of these performers recovering from broken bones within a timeframe of several weeks rather than immediately provided viewers with an unintentional educational message on the time needed to properly recover from broken bones.

More recently, wrestling fans have seen this type of injury storyline with Seth Rollins who, after returning from a real-life knee injury several months prior, suffered a minor knee injury in the weeks leading up to *WrestleMania 33* that was then incorporated into an onscreen storyline. Rollins would appear in programming noticeably limping and using crutches, and the commentary team emphasized the uncertainty of Rollins' condition for WrestleMania. However, when it was announced that Rollins would not be medically cleared by doctors to wrestle, he still demanded to take on Triple H in an unsanctioned match at *WrestleMania 33*, with the stipulation that he would not hold WWE legally accountable if he became seriously injured. Again, the drama took center stage but rather than taking the time off-screen to properly recover, Rollins had a

consistent presence onscreen nursing his injury and becoming further injured when attacked by his opponent, Triple H. The health message that could potentially be learned from Rollins' handling of his injury is a negative one: that competing while injured and risking further injury are acceptable behaviors in the name of wanting to be the best.

As a specific type of injury common to professional wrestling, concussions seem more frequent in sports programming now, but in the mid-90s WWE built a storyline around concussions and (melodramatically) addressed the severity of the injury. Upon returning from injury,[1] Shawn Michaels suddenly collapsed in the ring after being struck in the back of the head by Owen Hart during a December 1995 episode of *Monday Night Raw*. In the following weeks, WWE aired various segments on *Monday Night Raw* detailing Michaels' collapse and subsequent diagnosis with "post-concussion syndrome," a genuine variety of symptoms experienced after suffering a concussion. In one segment, Michaels' personal physician, Dr. Jeffrey Unger, spoke on-camera about the severity of Michaels' condition and compared it to athletes of other sports, noting that Michaels' style of wrestling was very high impact and further damage could endanger not only his career but his life. Additionally, WWE detailed the times within the year prior to Michaels' concussion that he had been injured only to persevere and overcome his obstacles. Vince McMahon, owner of WWE, delivered a monologue on Michaels' condition, arguing that Michaels' concussion showed that he, like other superstars, was a mortal man capable of being hurt. While McMahon's monologue was melodramatic, the overall storyline focusing on Michaels' injury and the threat of it being severe enough to end his career, sent out a health message that injuries were a serious matter and concussions have lasting effects on the athletes. The involvement of Dr. Jeffrey Unger, an actual physician practicing out of California, also added to the authenticity and importance of the message being sent.

While some injuries are largely acted out to influence storylines, the presentation of real injuries can also be used to teach audiences about health; more specifically, the importance of rehabilitation and recovery times. Seemingly beginning with the Attitude Era in the late 1990s, and McMahon's declaration

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1 In real life, Michaels had suffered severe injuries after becoming involved in a physical
   altercation with several military members while leaving a nightclub in Syracuse, NY.

that WWE would become less cartoonish, WWE has attempted to more accurately present real-life injuries. In May 2001, Triple H suffered a severe tear to one of his quadriceps muscles during a match and subsequently required surgery to repair the damage. WWE documented Triple H's injury and recovery, focusing on things such as the surgery, interviews with the surgeon using medical terminology to describe the extent of the injury, and the months-long rehabilitation process that Triple H had to complete to return to ring shape.

Capitalizing on audience preferences in the digital streaming age, the WWE-produced documentary series *WWE 24* featured behind-the-scenes footage of both Seth Rollins and Finn Bálor as they dealt with injury and recovery. Substantial portions of each *WWE 24* episode devoted time to the process of performers going through their respective surgeries, taking the appropriate measures to recover, and the extensive rehabilitation process that each man went through as part of the recovery process. In addition to the rehabilitation, both men were shown training again, yet cautiously, after their injuries had healed to determine the impact that the injury and rehabilitation would have on their future performances. These real-life events taught viewers that the road to recovery is not as easy as it might have been presented elsewhere. By providing glimpses into the superstars' rehabilitation, people got to know the extent of their injuries and how those can affect someone's life, temporarily or permanently. Rather than come off as preachy, this information helped the fans learn and become aware of the serious nature of wrestling injuries.

More seriously, a professional wrestler who dies while still being regularly featured onscreen in programming sends out a variety of health messages depending on the circumstances surrounding that performer's death. Prior to passing away in November 2005, Eddie Guerrero became a symbol of drug addiction recovery. His battles with substance abuse were noted in his WWE-produced documentary as well as Internet news sites. When Guerrero was found dead in his hotel room in November 2005, some believed he had relapsed. However, Guerrero's cause of death was later determined to be related to heart disease that was impacted by years of drug abuse, including the use of human growth hormone later in his career. Guerrero's death inspired WWE to take greater measures drug testing its talent by establishing a wellness policy that penalized performers for repeated offenses and required them to attend rehabilitation counseling or be fired by the company. Guerrero's death raised

awareness among wrestling fans of the effects of steroid and human growth hormone use on the body.

Similarly, the circumstances surrounding Chris Benoit's death also sent a message of awareness to professional wrestling fans about the long-term dangers of head injuries and concussions. As a smaller wrestler, Benoit's style was very high impact and meant to look realistic. Benoit moved with strong snaps, and many of his moves involved jumping off the top rope, including his Dynamite Kid-inspired finishing move, the flying headbutt. The move involved jumping off the top rope and using his head to strike his opponent, usually in the shoulder or chest area. However, Benoit's high-impact style of wrestling also led to a strong reoccurrence of concussions that were said to have gone undiagnosed by professionals. After killing his wife Nancy, his son Daniel, and himself, media outlets attributed the Benoit murder-suicide to "roid rage," as Benoit was alleged to have taken steroids to maintain his physique. However, in the aftermath of the murders and the resulting media coverage, an analysis of Benoit's brain found that he had severe brain damage; damage so severe that his brain was equivalent to the brain of "an 85-year-old Alzheimer's patient." As a result, WWE began to place more emphasis on presenting a safer product; one in which blows to the head were done away with both in present performances and in edited archival footage, and one in which disclaimers urged audiences to refrain from emulating the moves of their favorite performers, showing how WWE intentionally presented health-related messages to its audience to make them aware of the dangers that come from not taking the proper precautions. WWE also went on to establish a stricter concussion protocol that required performers to undergo testing for lingering issues stemming from concussions and prevented those that exhibited such issues from performing. While WWE never openly acknowledged that Benoit's actions were a consequence of head injuries that he incurred while performing, their resulting ban of strikes to the head definitely delivered the message to audiences that any such moves were dangerous and should not be performed, even by their "professional" performers.

Messages about Awareness

In recent years professional wrestling has also been used to raise awareness of various diseases. WWE has largely been at the forefront of this movement by dedicating portions of their programming to stories on breast cancer and childhood cancer. Every October since 2012, WWE has partnered with the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation for national breast cancer awareness month. Initially this campaign centered around John Cena and the sale of "Rise Above Cancer" pink shirts and ball caps with a portion of proceeds benefitting the Susan G. Komen foundation. However, the campaign has grown to include pink ring ropes and Susan G. Komen stage decorations during the month of October, as well as pink merchandise for other superstars, and additional campaign slogans such as "Courage, Conquer, Cure," and "More Than Pink." While these things can be considered passive forms of campaign promotion, WWE has also actively devoted time in their programming to feature the campaign. WWE's approach to this has ranged from video vignettes with superstars discussing their own connection to breast cancer, such as Layla El talking about losing her mother, to in-ring segments that feature superstars like Enzo Amore and Big Cass presenting female breast cancer survivors with their own versions of the WWE title belt, thus including these survivors in the breast cancer storyline created by WWE.

The WWE has also been a source of information for childhood cancer with their Connor's Cure initiative. In June 2014, WWE personalities Paul "Triple H" Levesque and Stephanie McMahon founded Connor's Cure as a philanthropic way of honoring the memory of Connor Michalek, a WWE fan who passed away late April 2014 from medulloblastoma cancer. Michalek gained notoriety due to being the focus of several videos produced by WWE, including his first meeting with his favorite superstar Daniel Bryan in 2013, and his experience being present for Bryan's championship win at *WrestleMania 30* on April 6, 2014. While relatively new in comparison to Susan G. Komen, this campaign is equally effective at raising awareness for childhood cancer. Like the Komen campaign, WWE uses gold ring ropes during televised events throughout the month of September[2] and offers an array of Connor's Cure products, from bracelets to tee

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[2] September is Childhood Cancer Awareness month.

shirts, the proceeds of which benefit the Connor's Cure foundation. The WWE has also begun producing videos that educate audiences on childhood cancer, while still entertaining them by focusing on children fighting cancer as their wrestling personas.

Outside of WWE-led initiatives, performers such as AJ Lee, Diamond Dallas Page, and Mike Bennett have also served to raise awareness of serious health issues. While her onscreen character became visibly upset anytime someone called her crazy, outside of the ring AJ Lee has openly discussed her battles with bipolar disorder and become an advocate for awareness and support for those with mental health illnesses. In a post on her website in February 2017, Lee revealed that she had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder several years earlier. In her post, she described her own struggle with the disorder and the stigma surrounding a mental health disorder diagnosis, but she also argued that her goal was to "shine a light on mental illness," and act as "a resource for those fighting similar battles against mental illness" (Mendez-Brooks). Lee furthered her call to action when she appeared on the *WTF with Marc Maron* Podcast in May 2017 to discuss her struggles with bipolar disorder. She also shared that her book, *Crazy is My Superpower: How I Triumphed by Breaking Bones, Breaking Hearts, and Breaking the Rules* (2017), is about sending a message talking about the seriousness of mental health (Maron). For Lee's fans, this book became an outlet for their own struggles with mental health illness. By learning through observation/reading, fans going through a mental health illness, and even those who are not, can learn about bipolar disorder and how it affects someone's everyday life. By having their favorite superstar and role model be so transparently open about the challenges that come from being diagnosed with bipolar disorder, fans unintentionally learn and become active consumers of health information.

Similarly, Diamond Dallas Page has used his notoriety as a professional wrestler to become an advocate for healthy living through his DDP Yoga exercise program. Since 2005, Page has marketed DDP Yoga,[3] his own take on yoga exercise programs that was originally intended to serve a male audience. Page's program gained some traction when Arthur Boorman, a disabled ex-military

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[3] Originally known as *YRG*, or *Yoga for Regular Guys*

paratrooper, lost over 140 pounds and had his story featured by Page. Since then Boorman has become an advocate for DDP Yoga, and Page has featured testimonials from other clients who have had health success using DDP Yoga. Page has also featured fellow wrestlers, such as Chris Jericho and Mick Foley, who have vouched for the program's ability to help them stay in shape and regain mobility. Additionally, Page has also used his position as a wrestler to become an unofficial rehabilitation counselor. As seen in the *Resurrection of Jake the Snake* documentary, Page used the DDP Yoga program to help Jake "The Snake" Roberts and Scott Hall lose weight, overcome addiction to alcohol and pain killers, and get their lives back on track. Page's efforts and visibility have the potential to inspire wrestling fans to engage in self-efficacy and self-advocate for their own health, and follow in the footsteps of Page, Boorman, Roberts, and Hall.

While Page has helped Roberts and Hall cope with their addictions through exercise and accountability, current performers have also used their status to raise awareness of health issues such as addiction. In August 2017, WWE superstar Mike Bennett revealed in an Instagram post that he had secretly been battling an addiction to prescription drugs for three years and had recently made the decision to get clean. Bennett has since posted a variety of messages documenting his everyday mental, physical, and emotional struggle to achieve and maintain sobriety, and has also issued motivational appeals to help those who may also be dealing with addiction by using the hashtag "#theresalwayshope" (TheRealMichaelBennett). As part of Bennett's chronicles, he used photos and postings to document the changes in his body that have come from being off painkillers. Bennett's revelation that his prescription drug addiction began with a dislocated knee cap can serve to inform wrestling audiences that an addiction to painkillers can develop from injuries not traditionally associated with prescription drugs. Bennett's posts can also help audiences recognize the less-than-obvious signs of addiction in themselves or others. Whereas performers like Jake Roberts and Scott Hall have publicly shown extreme dependency on drugs and alcohol in the past, Bennett hid his dependency on painkillers so well that it was never openly known among audiences or his employers. Bennett serves as an example and informs audiences that not all addicts are junkies, while also serving as a potential catalyst to inspire others to seek treatment.

Issues with Health Communication through Professional Wrestling

Despite professional wrestling being a vehicle that can disseminate health information to new audiences, it is also important to note that there are potential issues in focusing on the health aspects of professional wrestling.

First and foremost, professional wrestling's blurring of the lines between kayfabe and reality can impact what is presented as a true and accurate health message and what is not. This becomes problematic when presenting kayfabe injuries as legitimate by using vocabulary that attempts to mimic medical jargon. Gorilla Monsoon's use of vague yet technical sounding medical jargon continues today with announcers like Michael Cole and Tom Phillips uttering phrases like "separated shoulder, cervical strain, and facial contusions" when describing a performer's medical condition following an attack. In this instance, a separated shoulder implies the shoulder has become dislocated or broken but the severity of the injury is not specified, while the terms "cervical strain," and "facial contusions" are overblown ways of saying a sore neck and facial bruising. These inflated injuries are further presented as not being severe despite the labeling as the "injured" superstar may participate in the show the following week with their vulnerable limbs taped up, or they may post on their social media accounts from a film set or other locale appearing in perfect health. The message sent to audiences is that these injuries sound severe but are not, and an assumption can be made that these injuries do not affect the performers due to their heightened physical condition. Conversely, injuries can now only be believed when there is video footage or photos of a surgical procedure being performed, along with commentary from the surgeon on the extent of the injury and the recovery time expected. In one sense this presents an accurate health message in that it shows that these injuries are real and severe enough to require surgery, but also sends the message that only injuries requiring surgery are valid.

One major instance in which the presentation of a kayfabe injury conflicted with a real injury took place when Michael Cole was attacked by Brock Lesnar on an episode of *Raw* in March 2015 and subsequently diagnosed with a "possible cervical fracture" ("Michael Cole Rushed to Hospital Following Lesnar Attack"). This presented an issue as, several weeks earlier, luchador Perro Aguayo Jr. died in the ring after suffering several cervical fractures while performing (Droste). WWE's diagnosis of Cole's injury was intended to play up the severity of Lesnar's attack, however fans and wrestling news websites quickly admonished

WWE for attempting to pass off the same injury that caused Aguayo's death as something that produced a safer outcome for Cole (Killam; McDonald). Thus, WWE's presentation of a kayfabe injury failed to gel with viewers who had already seen that cervical fractures could cause almost immediate death. Furthermore, this reveals professional wrestling fans as more knowledgeable and aware of actual injury and health outcomes based on the knowledge they gained from Aguayo's legitimate injury and death weeks earlier.

Another point of importance that should be noted is that a line must be drawn between health promotion and organization promotion. WWE's efforts to promote Connor's Cure as a legitimate foundation for cancer awareness and funding have helped raise the visibility of the organization and disease among its viewers, but have also faced criticism for appearing to be a deceptive marketing ploy by WWE. After naming a foundation in honor of Connor, WWE went on to posthumously induct him into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2015 as a winner of the Warrior Award, a move seen by many as a way of WWE attempting to promote its own image and get some mainstream attention. This move was further criticized when the week before WWE was set to induct Connor into the Hall of Fame, WWE Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon tweeted a quote from Twitter co-founder Biz Stone who stated that "philanthropy is the future of marketing, it's the way brands r going 2 win" (@StephMcMahon). Although Stone's statement that "the future of marketing is philanthropy" was made two years before McMahon's tweet, the statement has since been attributed to Stephanie and added to the perception that WWE's involvement in pediatric cancer awareness is disingenuous (Stone, "Coca Cola Saves the World").

Additionally, WWE's campaign with the Susan G. Komen Foundation has faced criticism largely because of the reputation that the Komen Foundation has as an organization that focuses only on generating money, raising awareness of breast cancer rather than pushing for an end to the disease, and diligently pursuing lawsuits against those who use pink ribbon logos and "for the cure" slogans in their own cancer campaigns. Ex-WWE wrestler CM Punk also spoke out against the Komen campaign in 2015 by tweeting that the Komen Foundation was "a scam," run by "people collecting money for themselves in the name of breast cancer" (@CMPunk). WWE may be intending to raise breast cancer awareness through their partnership with Komen, but the legitimacy of the Komen organization coupled with WWE's "philanthropy as marketing" approach raises issues about how much of the health information WWE is presenting its audiences

is accurate and whether the campaign is having an impact on helping those with breast cancer rather than just raising the promotion of both Susan G. Komen and WWE.

More recently, WWE's involvement with the OmegaXL dietary supplement also has the potential to send a negative health message to audiences. In a 30-minute infomercial hosted by WWE announcers Renee Young and Michael Cole, wrestlers the Miz, Charlotte Flair, Kofi Kingston, and Seth Rollins all appear on camera advocating the Omega-XL supplement as a miracle product that helps them recover from the wear and tear incurred on their bodies. The infomercial is carefully constructed to appear as though it is part of WWE's programming, from the use of Young and Cole as trusted interviewers, to the infomercial being named *WWE—In the Ring with OmegaXL*, and even down to the WWE Performance Center being used as a backdrop for the infomercial. The information is also presented in a carefully constructed way, as the interviewers first ask the performers something related to their experiences as superstars and use follow-up leading questions that allow the superstars to tout the benefits of using the supplement.

The negative health message threatened to be presented to audiences is that this supplement is a quick fix to the problems they may have with fatigue and joint pain, even those undiagnosed by a doctor, since the superstars are advocating that they themselves take the product and believe it will work on anyone. This is highly evident when at one point during the infomercial Michael Cole states that "Most of the WWE Universe aren't elite athletes…but they still can benefit from OmegaXL, right?"; this is immediately followed by the Miz stating that the supplement is for everyone, including his wife and his father (Cole). Charlotte Flair also presents the supplement as being so powerful that if performers with their bruised and aching bodies feel better from using it, then those who experience joint pain and work "sitting at a computer all day…[at] a 9-5 job," would feel even better (Flair). Ultimately, these statements and the influence that the performers have on audiences can potentially cause viewers to just take the supplement rather than seek out appropriate health treatment for any joint pain, fatigue, or discomfort.

Conclusion

Much can be examined in professional wrestling through a health communication lens. We have examined and suggested E-E as a possible theoretical and methodological framework to use when evaluating professional wrestling as a text and the performers people relate to, and have presented several examples in which professional wrestling can be examined for the hypothetical health information it disseminates. We believe that by analyzing professional wrestling using health communication, we can add another dimension to professional wrestling studies research and inspire others to research professional wrestling through a health-related lens. We also hope that we can encourage others to apply their own theoretical lenses to the topic and further grow the field.

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The Ballad of the Real American: A Call for Cultural Critique of Pro-Wrestling Storylines

MATT FOY

Pro-wrestling storytellers have historically traded in the ritualistic dramatization of cultural concerns and anxieties to charge ongoing storylines and feuds with resonance and significance. Yet storytelling steeped in politics, morality, and mythology is constitutive, not merely reflective, of social reality. As Sam Migliore argues: "To view wrestling as simply entertainment […] is to ignore the power of ritual and metaphor to transform a performance into a potent political statement" (82). By incorporating real-world conflicts and current events into characters and the conflicts that bind them, pro-wrestling storytellers frame the salient issues surrounding those conflicts in specific ways, providing implicit (and frequently explicit) instructions for audience members on how to orient to attending phenomena.

Despite pro wrestling's marginalized status in the cultural marketplace, scholars have long recognized that mythical and political storytelling remain central to wrestling's capacity to entice fans to tune in week after week. Sixty years ago, Roland Barthes famously observed that "What wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice" (19). Even those stories that don't explicitly rip headlines from the day's front pages routinely present audiences with "complexly plotted, ongoing narratives of professional ambition, personal suffering, friendship and alliance, betrayal and reversal of fortune" (Jenkins III 34).

In this way, pro-wrestling storytelling functions as what Kenneth Burke calls "equipment for living," "proverbs writ large" (*Literary Form* 296) that "size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (304). Relying on archetypical polarity—nefarious heels who breach social norms antagonizing virtuous faces who must test personal and social limits to cleanse their universe of wrongdoing—pro wrestling serves as explicit equipment for living in ways few forms of popular entertainment have.

Given pro wrestling's grand, frequently problematic history of servicing dominant hegemonic ideals (e.g., rugged masculinity, violence and aggression, American exceptionalism, fear and mistrust of cultural outsiders), the industry's unique brand of political storytelling necessitates continued vigilance from scholars and critics. Historically, scholars have primarily addressed the project of critiquing feuds and storylines at the macro level of broad trends in pro-wrestling storytelling. Less scholarly attention has been spent critiquing pro-wrestling storytelling at the micro level of individual characters and storylines as they unfold on an episodic basis. This essay advocates for increased scholarly attention to the individual storylines that fans encounter on a weekly basis, thereby supplementing a realm of pro-wrestling scholarship in need of further development.

American Ideology in Professional Wrestling

To date, considerable professional wrestling scholarship approaches pro wrestling primarily through a macro lens: condensing weeks or months of storyline development to demystify recurring tropes and storytelling techniques while drawing connections across eras and organizations. Jeffrey J. Mondak conducts fantasy theme analysis to explore how wrestling interpellates audiences into a shared economy of political and cultural values. Vaughn May employs a "status politics" framework to expose the conservative ideology that motivates both faces and heels. Danielle Soulliere analyzes pro-wrestling speech for its reification of dominant hegemonic masculine ideals of aggression, competition, and emotional stoicism.

Ron Tamborini et al. apply a media effects lens to codify the prevalence of verbal aggression in wrestling broadcasts. Brendan Maguire and John F. Wozniak examine the WWF's employment of racial and ethnic stereotyping and stereotyping's phenomenological impact on individuals' sense of social order. Gerald Craven and Richard Moseley approach the dramatic beats[1] of a wrestling

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[1] Another small yet vital body of wrestling scholarship (e.g., De Garis; Mazer; Smith) approaches the embodied doing of wrestling at the independent level through dramaturgical or performance lenses, thereby casting light on the embodied techniques that empower wrestlers to tell their stories in the ring.

match from a dramaturgical perspective. The eras and methodologies change, but the project of drawing connections between pro-wrestling storylines and culture and ideology remains essential to the study of pro wrestling.

A smaller yet significant contingent of scholars approach wrestling's production of ideology at the micro level of specific characters, storylines, and feuds. Through the lens of Daniel Bryan's "Yes Movement," Gino Canella utilizes Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to critique WWE's commodification of populist political movements. Kathleen S. Lowney uses the Right to Censor stable as a case study to critique WWF's response to criticism from the Parents Television Council. Wilson Koh considers wrestling's blending of reality and unreality in the "worked shoots" of Bryan and CM Punk to interrogate issues of postmodernity and mediated authenticity. Migliore and Sina Rahmani each explore geopolitical conflict between the United States and the Middle East through Hulk Hogan's feuds with Iraqi turncoat Sgt. Slaughter and Iranian arch villain The Iron Sheik, respectively.

By considering ways in which pro-wrestling storylines symbolically articulate social attitudes and anxieties on a week-to-week basis, we can better understand how professional wrestling, through featured characters, rhetoric, and symbolism, "communicate using clusters of key terms which anchor symbolic structures of association and dissociation necessary for social life" (Brummett 161). Furthermore, close scholarly readings of pro-wrestling storylines as they unfold episodically reveals opportunities for divergent interpretation. The following interpretation of storylines involving WWE's Jack Swagger from 2013 to 2014 demonstrates how narrative and ideology converge on a weekly basis.

The Real American

In February 2013, Jack Swagger returned to WWE television after a seven-month absence. An all-American amateur wrestler at the University of Oklahoma and a former World Heavyweight Champion, ECW Champion, and United States Champion, Swagger drifted down the card and out of the WWE Universe in the summer of 2012 after an extended losing streak. An arrogant jock heel since his debut on WWE television, Swagger remained a heel upon return, but was not the same All-American American.

Swagger was repackaged as the nationalistic, xenohostile Real American. Accompanied by new manager Zeb Colter (a repackaged "Dirty" Dutch Mantel,[2] his character's surname an apparent nod to right-wing provocateur Ann Coulter), the duo established their heel credentials by drawing heavily on the anti-immigrant rhetoric and faux-militaristic iconography of the far-right Tea Party movement. With Colter, the strident articulate mouthpiece, and Swagger the intense, grimacing muscle, the duo approached the ring to the sound of militaristic horns and snare rolls, described by David Shoemaker as "sound[ing] like it was lifted from a Fox News show" (295). The image of a Gadsden Flag loomed on the TitanTron and was even propped in the ring on occasion. He and Colter placed their hands over their hearts and pledged "We, the people!" before and after Colter's vitriolic diatribes against "illegals":

> The state of our union is pathetic, but real Americans are not to blame. The blame lies solely on the shoulders of the millions and millions of people living in this country illegally. Those people live in our country, but they don't have any qualms about taking our medical care, taking our jobs, our educations, and our freedom. [...] Real Americans need to stand up and say "no more." And that's what Jack Swagger is prepared to do ("*RAW* 1030").

Swagger rechristened his ankle lock submission the Patriot Act, later renamed the Patriot Lock.

Swagger and Colter were quickly programmed into a high-profile feud with World Heavyweight Champion Alberto Del Rio, a Mexican national and reformed aristocratic Foreign Menace. Colter slandered Del Rio as "a man who only came into this country to reap the rewards of our motherland" and equated Swagger's quest to dethrone Del Rio to "reclaiming America" ("Raw 1030"). As the feud escalated in the build to their championship match at *WrestleMania*

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[2] Colter is apparently intended to be an evolved version of Mantel's character Uncle Zebekiah, who managed Justin "Hawk" Bradshaw (later John Bradshaw Layfield aka "JBL") and the Blu Brothers in the mid-1990s. This connection appears to be confirmed in a February 2013 tweet from JBL: "Zeb … is one of the best talkers in the biz and he and Swagger will be a great team. Glad he's back!" (Layfield).

XXIX, Swagger (kayfabe) broke the ankle of Ricardo Rodriguez, Del Rio's personal ring announcer, with the Patriot Lock. Del Rio defeated Swagger cleanly at *WrestleMania*, but the next night on *Raw*, Swagger sufficiently weakened Del Rio's ankle in a losing effort, allowing Dolph Ziggler to take Del Rio's championship by cashing in his "Money in the Bank" contract. Steadily fading from the World Heavyweight Championship scene but unwavering in ideology, Swagger and Colter moved to the midcard and formed an alliance with Swiss heel Antonio Cesaro, whom Colter embraced as "one of the good ones" due to supposedly immigrating through legal channels ("The Good Ones").

One need not be fluent in the intricacies of professional wrestling storytelling to recognize that the feud between Swagger and Del Rio was WWE's attempt to capitalize on the unending controversy surrounding immigration in the U.S., most caustically the ongoing debate over documented and undocumented immigration from the U.S.-Mexico border. Lest there be any doubt this was a purposeful incantation of U. S. immigration exigency, WWE publicly acknowledged its intentions: "To create compelling and relevant content for our audience, it is important to incorporate current events into our storylines" (qtd. in Caldwell).

Outsiders and newcomers to the world of pro wrestling can be excused for finding distaste in WWE's exploitation of this incendiary political debate, the geopolitical consequences of which include political enmity and families and communities torn asunder. But wrestling fans—inclined to find the exploitation of racist xenophobia to build a midcard feud in poor taste—may struggle to muster antipathy given the familiarity of the storyline. Nationalism and racism recur as storyline tropes for WWE[3] and other major wrestling organizations dating as far back as historic turn-of-the-century bouts between Frank A. Gotch and "Russian Lion" George Hackenschmidt, whose rivalry served as "a symbol of masculinity and nationalism" in a period characterized by "fears of physical and moral degeneration associated with modernity" (Lindaman 780). Nor was Swagger versus Del Rio the first time WWE paired a resurgent Mexican face with a loathsome xenohostile heel draping himself in stars and stripes. In 2004, barroom brawler-turned-nefarious businessman John Bradshaw Layfield (JBL) established

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[3] This ignoble history stretches back before WWE changed its name from World Wrestling Federation (WWF) in 2002 and back further still to its pre-1980s existence as the World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF).

his antagonistic bona fides in a segment in which he hunted "illegal immigrants" attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in the night ("*SmackDown* 242"), which fed into a violent feud with popular WWE champion "Latino Heat" Eddie Guerrero.

It is tempting to adopt a cynical stance toward such politically charged pro wrestling storytelling, a fact upon which WWE relies with its refrain of "We're entertainers telling stories." WWE is indeed in the business of entertaining its customers through dramatic, episodic storytelling. There is also the pro wrestling truism that to manufacture a product that fans will embrace, the featured combatants must generate relevant and interesting conflict that motivates them to fight one another week after week. The scripted conflict between Del Rio and Swagger was reasonably successful in its objective to "communicate the histories of the combatants and legitimize or delegitimize each individual's position in relation to the other" (Mazer, "Doggie Doggie World" 97), which in turn helped WWE "build an event that would provoke a passionate response in a committed repeat audience" (104). Within the parameters of WWE's narrative universe, the story arc rendered comprehensible characters who otherwise lacked significant history and raised the dramatic stakes for their rivalry when both combatants had already held the championship.

By reading the Swagger-Del Rio feud through a lens of ideological criticism, pro wrestling scholars can recognize and communicate how wrestlers, storylines, and feuds capture the cultural zeitgeist and reflect audiences' realities in constructive and informative ways.

The Ideologies of Swagger-Del Rio

The trajectory of the Swagger-Del Rio feud illustrates the value of performing ideological criticism within pro-wrestling storytelling. It is a salient example of a high-profile narrative that deserves a close scholarly reading not only for its potent ideological content but also for potential polyvalent close textual readings.

Cultural studies scholars Stuart Hall and John Fiske contend that audiences have agency in interpreting mediated texts, including the capacity for critically minded readers to interpret texts in ways unintended by textual producers. This decoding process is undertaken by fans and scholars alike. Critics should not make the mistake of viewing professional wrestling's moral landscape as

predictable and pre-determined as its match outcomes. Scholarly interpretations that contextualize in-ring drama with the political and mythological undercurrents reveal how pro-wrestling morality becomes "imbued with essential contradictions within and between the fiction of the play and the fact of the business" (Mazer, *Professional Wrestling* 153).

For example, viewers' interpretation of the equipment for living constructed within the Swagger-Del Rio storyline will be influenced by their relationship with the history of race and pro wrestling in the U.S. For those weary of professional wrestling's decades of problematic indulgence in "exaggerated morality play fervently manipulating the prejudices of its audience as quickly as it could perceive them" (Henricks 178), this apparent inversion of pro-nationalist politics may seem effervescently cosmopolitan compared to the historic status quo of White American Heroes vanquishing Foreign Others.

Though Swagger and Colter's crusade against Del Rio in many ways repackages the aforementioned Guerrero-JBL feud of 2004, the two storylines differ in one key distinction: WWE vindicated JBL and presented the racist heel as the better man. After damning Guerrero's wrestling-royalty family as descended from illegal immigrants ("*SmackDown* 245") and tormenting Guerrero's mother into suffering a (kayfabe) heart attack in front of his family at a house show ("*SmackDown* 246"), JBL scored a victory over Guerrero by disqualification at *Judgment Day*, then two months later at *The Great American Bash* fulfilled his promise to "take America back" by dethroning Guerrero in a memorably gory Texas bull rope match. JBL went on to hold the WWE Championship for 280 days, one of the longer reigns in modern WWE history. Though JBL's title reign was characterized by cheating and improbable escapes, it is pertinent to this discussion that JBL received only ephemeral comeuppance from Guerrero and was never made to pay for the racism he performed in their feud. If pro wrestling "is above all a quantitative sequence of compensations" for foul play (Barthes 20), JBL's ultimate superiority over Guerrero reasonably infers WWE's storytellers felt JBL has nothing to pay for his attitudes and actions.

In contrast, Del Rio proved himself the better man by making Swagger tap out cleanly at *WrestleMania XXIX*, punishing Swagger and proving he and Colter's claims of white nationalist superiority to be false. Though Swagger gained a measure of revenge by weakening Del Rio and contributing to his loss to Ziggler, Del Rio quickly regained the championship from Ziggler, reaffirming his excellence. Given WWE's past narrative affirmations of anti-Latino nationalism,

one may interpret the moral dynamics of the Swagger-Del Rio feud as comparatively progressive in context of wrestling's pervasive history of nationalism as the province of the American Hero, dating back to Gotch, enduring through the days of Jim Londos and patriotic Americans Slaughter and Hogan, and still manifest in today's patriotically correct John Cena-Rusev feuds.

Despite its reputation for retrograde attitudes toward race and immigration, pro wrestling also boasts moments of empowering rhetoric. Encouraging audiences to support Del Rio, the proud Mexican national (and a morally rehabilitated Foreign Menace), over a red, white, and blue nationalist can be read as participating in wrestling's narrative capacity to "deliver a positive social message of peace and justice […] with great impact and gusto" (Souther 269). By encouraging audience members to boo Swagger and Colter's racist vitriol, WWE positions its audience in a stance of tolerance and respect for Del Rio the hardworking, resilient achiever. Just as the character of South African apartheidist Colonel DeBeers was once reviled by white audience members who otherwise were not ready to align against white dominance in other arenas of life, the punishment of Swagger and Colter's toxic morality participates in a subversive tradition of heels whose vile bigotry makes it easy for audiences to dip their toes in cosmopolitan waters.

Conversely, a critical reading suggests the Swagger-Del Rio storyline functions oppositionally to the progressive statement on xenophobia it purports on the narrative surface. Arguably, portraying Swagger and Colter as pure villains is neither progressive nor palpably divergent from wrestling's traditional masculine, conservative hegemony. For beneath the storyline's post-racial façade lies a neoliberal cultural clash in which Del Rio generically (and judging by fan indifference, somewhat blandly) embodies what May describes as the babyface's "traditional moral universe centered on hard work, achievement motivation, [and] self-control" (82). Following this line of interpretation, Del Rio's generic smiling heroism functions as his true distinguishing factor versus Swagger and Colter's puritanical antagonism, the latter of which will always be framed as heelish even when the content of their message holds degrees of merit (Lowney). In the reliably conservative universe of pro wrestling, identity politics are subordinate to the fact that "fans still cheer the loudest for those who work hard, have simple tastes, fight their enemies head on, and who do not give into the temptation of celebrity and self-indulgence" (May 92). More than embodying any meaningful appeal to cosmopolitanism or post-racial transcendence of xenophobia, Swagger

and Colter are rendered immoral not because they are racist, but because they take shortcuts, indulge in malice toward their foes (as opposed to the spirit of competition or righteous vengeance) and target faces rather than heels. In the case of Rodriguez, targeting weak, noncompetitive faces makes them bullies, to boot.

Though pro wrestling has the potential to tell stories of peace and tolerance, U.S. wrestling frequently fails to do so. U.S. wrestling fans are encouraged to cheer for their favorites even when they dabble in bigoted rhetoric. It was not the reviled heel Hollywood Hogan but classic red-and-yellow babyface Hogan who called heel WWF champion Yokozuna "the Jap" at *WrestleMania IX*. Cena was nearly a decade into his run as smiling face of WWE when he attempted to mobilize homohatred to emasculate The Rock—"Don't go racing to Witch Mountain, Rock, cause your mountain is Brokeback" ("*RAW* 926")—and The Miz and Alex Riley—"They're going to buy one of those tandem bikes and ride to Bed, Bath and Beyond to buy some duvets. […] Tonight I'm going to train you on how to be a man" ("*Raw* 927").

Furthermore, the oppositional reader (Hall) may also note that WWE's situating the locus of racism within a single pair of loathsome villains diverts attention away from systemic racism and xenohostility. Rahmani persuasively argued this point through analysis of the Iron Sheik's symbolic significance during the U.S.'s coming to grips with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Sheik, Rahmani argues, "emerged as an extremely useful character through which Americans reassert[ed] their perceived cultural and political dominance" (87) by his defeat at the hands of American hero Hogan. "Call a man a villain," Burke observed, "and you have the choice of either attacking or cringing" (*Attitudes Toward History* 3). By portraying Sheik as an archetypical depiction of irredeemable Evil, the WWF "alleviat[ed] Americans from any culpability in the deterioration of the relations" between the U.S. and Iran (Rahmani 97). Similarly, by localizing racism in two perfectly evil heels in Swagger and Colter, WWE defused the possibility of audience members confronting their shared culpability in systemic racism by containing it externally at the level of only the most cartoonishly racist of deeds and words. Such quarantine and diffusion "normalizes latent racist attitudes and presents a very sectarian social stance as neutral or natural" (Souther 274). Superficially inverting the stereotypes scripted to act out an inherently racist drama does not radically invert its ideology.

In terms of sudden, shocking character swerves, the second act of Swagger's moral (d)evolution was the antithesis of an RKO out of nowhere. On June 30,

2014 ("*Raw* 1101"), Rusev, "the Bulgarian Brute," undefeated Russian sympathizer and throwback to the classic scary Foreign Menaces of territory wrestling's past, stalked the ring as his valet Lana mocked the audience's "USA! USA!" chants. Lana ridiculed Americans as weak losers clinging to participation trophies and anointed Vladimir Putin as the "greatest leader in the world" as the crowd booed. "Who will be America's next failure to compete against Rusev?" Lana asks mockingly. Rusev paces the ring and eyes the top of the ramp.

The familiar sound of militaristic horns and snare fill the arena as Swagger, wearing a singlet with the coiled rattlesnake of the Gadsden Flag, enters, accompanied by Colter. In terms of appearance and demeanor, little has changed from Swagger's heelish feud against Del Rio, with one exception: Swagger was now wearing his blond hair in the Hitler Youth high-and-tight style favored by young white nationalists such as Richard Spencer. Despite this upping the ante of white nationalist iconography, for the first time Swagger was turning face. "There's a real American for you," swoons color commentator JBL.

Colter tells Lana to "shut the hell up" while lauding the First Amendment: "You know, Natasha, you and Boris over there, we couldn't come to your country and say the pack of lies you say here because your country would not allow it. But yet you can do it here because you've taken advantage of our freedoms." Pivoting from politics to wrestling just as he had one year earlier, Colter follows this casual racism and misreading of the First Amendment with suggesting he has the counter to the unstoppable Rusev Crush: "I think a Real American can stop it. I think Jack Swagger can stop it."

Colter urges "every Real American" in the arena to rise, "put your hand over your heart, and in a loud, clear voice say along with us, "We the people!" The crowd abides and chants "USA! USA!" followed by "Let's go Swagger! Let's go Swagger!" "A lot of patriots here," JBL says. "I never thought I'd agree with everything Zeb Colter said here tonight," Cole bellows. Without changing a thing, WWE's deliberate efforts to lead its audience to pledge allegiance to Tea Party politics was complete.

Conclusion

One of the enduring clichés surrounding discourses on pro wrestling relates to how wrestling is or is not a "real" sport. Professional wrestling fans are acutely

aware of how pro wrestling converges and diverges with unscripted athletic completion and have rolled their eyes more than enough in their lifetimes for that list to be rehashed here.[4] Yet there is room to conclude this essay with an additional incongruence between professional sports and pro wrestling: while both share a common capacity for reproduction and reinforcement of cultural values through portrayals of dramatic competition, professional sports scholarship enjoys a distinct home within the academy. Pro-wrestling scholarship, on the other hand, has been spread across disciplines and has yet to be recognized as a unique field of study.

Critical, cultural, and rhetorical approaches to studying pro sports have come into vogue in the past twenty years, with the September 11, 2001 attacks and swell of conservative action that followed seeming to serve as the catalyst for the increasingly pervasive melding of sports with conservative and neoliberal politics. The scholarship of Michael Butterworth, for example, is exemplary in its demonstration of the intersections of professional sports and race and whiteness ("Race in 'the Race'"); nationality ("Purifying the Body Politic"); purity and innocence ("Fox Sports"); citizenship ("The Athlete as Citizen"); militarism (Butterworth and Moskal); and suppression of democratic discourse ("Ritual"). This approach to sports scholarship helped establish sports studies as a legitimate scholarly field, and today sports-centric journals such as the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, *Journal of Sports Media*, *Sport in Society*, and *International Journal of Sport Communication* thrive.

Pro wrestling, though immensely popular, does not possess the same cultural currency as baseball, football, or the Olympics. Yet pro wrestling has one storytelling advantage that professional sports lack: pro-wrestling storytellers control the outcome of their storylines from conception through performance. In MLB and the NFL, varying degrees of cheaters win championships (see Alex Rodriguez and Tom Brady). Sometimes white athletes and black athletes unite in protest of police violence against Black bodies. Sometimes Pat Tillman is killed by friendly fire.

Yet pro-wrestling fans are consistently presented with what Barthes deemed "the popular and age-old image of the perfect intelligibility of reality," wherein:

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4 See Atkinson for a non-patronizing exploration of the topic.

What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of [humans] raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a univocal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction (23).

With hours of purposefully constructed—often problematically rendered—equipment for living served up to wrestling fans fifty-two weeks per year, and thousands of hours of archives available on demand on the WWE Network, there has never been more justification or opportunity for a vigorous, organized scholarly commitment to studying professional wrestling.

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Analyzing Discourse in Sports Entertainment through Multiple Modalities

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Consuming professional wrestling provokes a multimodal experience whereby meaning is constructed through "a complex interplay of semiosis" (Bhatia, Flowerdew, and Jones 129). That is to say, the audiences of professional wrestling texts, such as those produced by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), are invited to construct meaning in a variety of ways through a variety of means (Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran). These ways and means manifest in multisensory interactions (Collier 208) between the world of wrestling and the spectator. It is through these interactions that the aesthetics of wrestlers' bodies combine with the aesthetics of the arena, the ring, the set, and the audience to create the wrestled space. It is by means of exchanges that the chants and roars of the crowd fuse with the amplified blare of entrance music to construct a multifaceted and transitory soundscape. It is on the surface of the televised text that graphical overlays converge with spoken commentary and the framed image to bring an augmented world of wrestling into the viewer's home, and it is in combination that these interchanges create the rich, vibrant and multifaceted discourse of professional wrestling. This paper seeks to explore this multimodal process of meaning construction.

Within the field of discourse analysis (DA), the idea of considering such interactions as a meaning creating whole is a relatively recent development. That is not to say that the critical strand of DA has neglected significance of context (Van Dijk; Fairclough; Wodak), but rather that it is the more recent move towards multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) that has brought the confluence of multiple resources into scrutiny as a holistic form of meaning creation. As such, this paper has three main foci in exploring the multimodal process of meaning construction in the professional wrestling text. First, the paper provides a brief overview of MDA. The paper then returns to the existing literature of professional wrestling studies to demonstrate how the modes of multimodal meaning creation in professional wrestling have been conceptualized and defined by the professional

wrestling studies community. Finally, the paper, through application, demonstrates how the mechanisms of MDA allow for the unpacking and analysis of complex modes of institutional meaning creation in increasingly multimodal media texts, such as those of professional wrestling.

A Brief Overview of MDA

MDA remains in the process of developing as a field. Consequently, definitions and concepts are used "somewhat loosely" (Hyland and Paltridge 120) and terminology is varied. Compounding these issues is the notion that discourse itself is, at times, perceived as a fashionable concept which escapes definition (Jørgensen and Phillips 1; Kress 115). Yet perhaps the more significant challenge in understanding this area is not due to the lack of definitions, but rather the multiple concrete definitions stemming from different theoretical positions. While strictly linguistic approaches to DA perceive discourse as spoken and written language (Brown and Yule), the critical discourse analysis (CDA) school draws on a more Foucauldian definition, where discourses are conceived as the organization of meaning about the world from an institutional position (Kress 110). It is this broader view of discourse that informs MDA and serves the analysis of convergent multimedia texts such as those of professional wrestling.

In the widest sense, therefore, the object of analysis in MDA can be described as "the ways in which we make meaning" (Callan, Street, and Underdown 68). It is not always easy, however, to grasp what these "ways of making meaning" are or, more specifically, what exactly constitutes a "mode" of multimodal meaning creation. Addressing this issue, Gunther Kress suggests that "what counts as mode is a matter for a community and its social-representational needs. What a community decides to regard and use as mode is mode" (87). For Kress, then, since the materiality of a mode depends on societal understandings of what is important for meaning-making, it is impossible to point to essentialist definitions of what modes are*; rather, modes can only be categorized as such by virtue of what they do.* As such, drawing on Halliday's functional linguistics, Kress proposes a definition of modes based on three formal requirements: ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function (87). In short, a mode must have meaning potential, its own "grammar" or set of rules, and the capacity to be organized in a coherent and cohesive way. In turn, a multimodal analysis seeks,

therefore, to understand how modes fulfill these functions and interact to form a cohesive communicative event.

The Modes of Professional Wrestling

At the heart of prior research in professional wrestling studies, both directly and indirectly, lie attempts to understand and define the nature of the modes of meaning creation in the wrestled text. What follows, therefore, is a short exploration of what the professional wrestling studies community has regarded as mode and how these modes have emerged from the phenomenon's social-representational requirements.

In perhaps the most prominent early study of sports entertainment, "The World of Wrestling," Roland Barthes suggests that everything in professional wrestling operates on the level of a complex semiotic system (17) drawing on oppositions and external aesthetics to encode an immediately "intelligible" (16) account of the phenomenon directly into the design of the text. For Barthes, modes such as physical appearance communicate the role that the wrestler will play, where the ugly or obese signify the base human characteristics and combine with gestures and actions that correspond to the baseness signified (17). These semiotic choices allow the spectator to quickly grasp the nature of a character, where physique serves a preemptory function that suggests the future of the wrestling encounter and forms a "basic sign" (17) containing the entirety of the performance. Thomas Henricks defines this process as an amplification of the body, whereby interchangeable semiotic systems of dominance and submission construct a validity of competition that exploits the modes of sport in a representation of agonistic confrontation, which in turn exaggerates the existing moral prejudices of the audience (181). Here, the excessive gestures of the professional wrestler serve as an "exaggeratedly visible explanation of a necessity" (Barthes 16), attaining social cultural significance through the utilization of rhetorical resources (Webley 65).

For Gregory Stone and Ramon Oldenburg, this negotiation of professional wrestling through the modes of sport forms the principle ideational function of the phenomenon (Stone 307; Stone and Oldenburg 517). More specifically, Irene Webley suggests that while professional wrestling appropriates modes of boxing, it only does so in so far as providing a stage for the phenomenon to contravene the

norms of legitimate sport. Such contraventions, therefore, facilitate an interpersonal functioning of the text, constructing meaning derived from social relations. This reconfiguring of sporting modes completes the textual function of the phenomenon and is advantageous (Thompson 77) to the internal cohesion of the message-entity, enabling the phenomenon to exploit legitimate sport to sell a product (Atkinson 48) that can be readily refabricated according to audience needs.

Professional wrestling, therefore, operates on the level of mimetic metaphor (Forceville "Metaphor and Symbol"; Forceville "Multimodal Transcription"). For Michael Atkinson, legitimate sport is a mimesis of war-like behavior, exposing the participants to the pleasures of conflict without the risks (49). Professional wrestling is a mimesis of legitimate sport and expands on this mimetic exploration by utilizing exaggerated competition as a method of increasing and simplifying narrative comprehension (50). Professional wrestling, thus, represents sport, but not sport in the legitimate sense. Rather, it represents sport in the "mode of melodrama" (Levi 57). More specifically, it becomes a male mode of melodrama, constituting an exploration of the emotional lives of the wrestlers This mode adopts the foregrounding of the working-class masculine myths of vulnerability, male trust, male intimacy, and national community (54).

This use of multimodal metaphor and metonym (Forceville "Metonymy") in the professional wrestling text has formed something of a strand in the literature. In discussing the semiotic elements of professional wrestling (e.g. body, behavior, aesthetic, and voice), Webley demonstrates how these modes allow the characters of the wrestling world to appropriate commonly-held conceptions about particular ethnicities and explore them through the dynamics of plot (68). Such meaning-making capacities have historically occurred on the level of the stereotype and often feature a pejorative rhetoric (Maguire and Woznick 265-6), set against a wider political context of nationalism (Mondak 141-45). These modes are, therefore, not value free, but rather afford carefully planned discourses that respond to, simplify, and exaggerate a specific set of values, and become the means of disseminating the ritual metaphors of sports entertainment (Migliore 69-72) that dehumanize particular ethnicities to make and remake meaning for the specific cultural context of production and consumption (Thompson 57-69).

Such discussions of these phenomena prevail in the literature, resulting in ethnicity in sports entertainment being situated as a mode in and of itself. This representation "facilitates the coming to terms with the complicated political

occurrences in foreign lands" (Rahmani 87) and provides a guide to interpreting a contemporary political climate that does not require the consumer to engage in the argument's subtleties (Mondak 147). Using these modes to ideologically activate the live audience (Freedman 12-22) offers a particularly prominent and "dynamic unfolding of specific social practices" (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 3) that mobilize ethnic and racial stereotyping as a simple and effective way of eliciting a strong reactions from the consumers (Maguire and Wozniak 266).

These power dynamics of production and consumption suggest that the theatrical modes of professional wrestling develop concepts of morality and ethnicity in the spectators, which enable them to negotiate their place in relation to the wider structures of capitalism (Levi 58-60), whereby meaning about the social world is organized in the text from an institutional position (Kress 110). Wrestling fans, therefore, like soap opera fans, use these modes to construct an alternative community that parallels the reality of the viewer, allowing them to vicariously extend their own lives or construct new communities of event attendance (Maguire 172). This community can be related to social disenchantment, where the constraints of contemporary capitalist society arouse the need for excitement in the social actor, leading to the emergence of increasingly spectacular "cathedrals of consumption" (Maguire 173), provide places for the masses to experience exhilaration (172), and experiment with the simulated impoverishment of social control (Campbell 127; Fiske 240-7).

Toward Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Professional Wrestling Text

The foregoing section situates sports entertainment as a longstanding site of multimodal meaning creation and demonstrates how much of the existing literature in the field has addressed the functioning of these modes. However, the emerging discipline of MDA can offer more to the analysis of professional wrestling. Applying MDA is particularly appropriate given the increasingly complex and convergent methods of dissemination and consumer engagement afforded by developments such as the WWE Network. Here, the mechanisms of MDA can help understand how wrestling consumers interact with progressively multimodal processes of communication (White), not solely for the purposes of understanding professional wrestling, but also to understand the changing

contexts of the consumption of popular culture (Krzyżanowski; Macgilchrist and Van Hout).

On the level of the professional wrestling text, rich and divergent strands of textuality, and intertextuality, remain ripe for disentanglement and analysis. The plurality of analytical opportunity provided by MDA invites diverse scholarly communities to invest in the phenomenon through collaborative study, drawing on multiple fields of interest to understand the complex interplays of semiotic modes. Via the interaction of existing methodologies such as systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen), visual grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen) conversation analysis (Austin), iconography (Barthes), the psycholinguistics of gesture (McNeill), kinesics (Birdwhistell), and musicology (Way and McKerrell) it is possible to further unpack and understand the polysemy of sports entertainment and lay bare the divergent meaning-making capacities and conditions that form the texts.

MDA also opens the door to a return to study the effects that professional wrestling texts have on consumers. Rather than position professional wrestling as engendering antisocial behavior (Bernthal; Bernthal and Medway; Lemish "Girls Can Wrestle Too"; Lemish "The School as a Wrestling Arena"; Soulliere and Blair; Woo and Kim) or as a site of overly gratuitous violence (DuRant, Champion, and Wolfson; Tamborini, Chory, et al.; Tamborini, Skalski, et al.), MDA can be used to privilege the perspective of the creator/consumer (Bucher) as an active participant in the creating and recreating of meaning in the wrestling world. What follows, therefore, is a short MDA of the 2017 WWE Network event *NXT TakeOver: WarGames*.

A Short Multimodal Discourse Analysis of *NXT TakeOver: WarGames* 2017

The nature and purpose of the NXT brand of WWE has been subject to definition and redefinition since its inception in 2010. During this time, the institutional meaning encoded into the product has experienced significant evolution. In the initial format, talent contracted to the WWE developmental territory, Florida Championship Wrestling (FCW), were mentored by talent from the Raw and SmackDown brands in a pseudo-reality competition to break into the main WWE roster. This format continued for five seasons between 2010 and 2012. In this

incarnation, NXT was presented as a hybrid product, aesthetically indistinct (except for branding) and subservient to the WWE premier content Raw and SmackDown.

Here, ideational constructs, such as the hybridity of product, as well as the freedom of youth, opportunity, and aspiration, were immediately introduced into the meaning creating processes of NXT through a conflation of modes familiar to the WWE audience. Most notably, these modes manifest in the short graphical stings that open the broadcasts, where stylized text, along with voice over, rousing string-based rock music and branding combine to disseminate the WWE conceptualization of NXT through three simplistic audio-visual narrative units: "8 NXT Rookies", where the NXT logo is sandwiched between the numeral eight and the word rookies; "8 WWE Pros", where the numeral eight, the word pros and the WWE logo are sandwiched between the Raw and SmackDown logos; "1 Dream", where the numeral one and word dream are superimposed over an image of a full arena of WWE fans (the WWE Universe).

This process of ideation is built upon in the subsequent opening title sequence, in which footage of the eight aforementioned rookies, situated collectively and individually in a WWE ring, along with images of existing WWE pros, converge with the theme "Wild and Young" by American Bang. In this instance, modality encompasses materials such as the bodies of the rookies and pros, the NXT logo, yellow graphics in keeping with the NXT logo, the wrestling ring, text delineating and aligning the pros from/with the rookies, as well as song lyrics promoting NXT imperatives such as "we are wild and young" and "we have just begun" to inject the WWE institutional conceptualization of NXT directly into the viewer from the outset of the broadcast.

As such, within the opening fifty seconds of the text, these modes fulfill the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions desired by WWE, interacting to form a cohesive communicative event that situates NXT as an aspirational process, in which fresh young talent strive for the privilege to join the elite of WWE, thereby elevating the status of the premier products Raw and SmackDown. So successful was this incarnation of NXT that by the latter half of 2012, the institutional conceptualization of the product evolved from a developmental process subservient to Raw and *SmackDown*, to a WWE premier brand in its own right. This shift required a new internal conceptualization of NXT within WWE, transitioning away from the simplistic and tangible notions of youth, opportunity, and aspiration to something more complex.

WWE Executive Vice President, Talent, Live Events & Creative Paul Levesque (aka Hunter Hearst Helmsley, aka HHH, aka Triple H) attempted to articulate this new, more complex conceptualization of NXT in 2016:

> "NXT has kind of become the fastest growing brand in the entire industry, and, from a WWE standpoint, it [has] gone from what was being kept at one point in time, considered our developmental brand, where we were just grooming stars for the future, to really becoming a third brand that tours globally alongside of [WWE Monday Night] *RAW* and [WWE] *SmackDown*. NXT is no different. It's a slightly different style, and I don't mean by in-ring style, but [rather] the presentation is slightly different and it really tends to super-serve our passionate fanbase, the fanbase that kind of lives and breathes WWE and that lifestyle. And NXT on the WWE Network really captures the imagination of that group. The talent are maybe a little bit younger, a little bit more diverse, and they're really hungry and they're trying to sort of either make their name, or prove their point, or remake their name in some cases, and earn their spot as being at the top of the sports entertainment industry." (Csonka)

Levesque's challenge in succinctly articulating the institutional conceptualization of NXT presents an opportunity to use MDA to unpack that evolution of institutional meaning construction retrospectively. By exploring the established modes of professional wrestling at play in the *NXT TakeOver: WarGames* broadcast, it is possible to demonstrate how the NXT brand has redefined itself through the very modes of meaning creation it utilizes.

The title of the event is a logical starting point for this exploration and clear mode of meaning creation in the wrestling world. The wording *NXT TakeOver: WarGames* provides a discourse laden with hostility. Perhaps the consumers' first access point to the event, the title, suggests that NXT is no longer content to be subservient to the other brands of WWE. The implication of the TakeOver component of the title, and indeed the wider TakeOver series, simultaneously implies, however, that NXT is not truly of equal status with the other brands of WWE and must struggle to attain equal status by taking over broadcast or events, almost in a revolutionary fashion. This locates NXT as a dangerous other, almost on the outs with WWE, or threatening to it. This notion is compounded by the WarGames component of the text. Harking back to the historical WarGames

matches of the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) and World Championship Wrestling (WCW), both prior competitors of WWE, the WarGames element fosters notions of an alternative product little known or alien to the wider audience of WWE. In combination, these discourse elements suggest that NXT, once the subservient lap dog of WWE striving for the opportunity to be a part of *Raw* or *SmackDown Live*, could soon go to war with its parent organization, becoming an impassioned movement, intent on making its mark on the industry by force.

The ring is a further mode of meaning creation in the world of professional wrestling, which, in the case of *NXT TakeOver: WarGames*, interacts directly and indirectly with the event title to construct meaning and support institutional ideation. Within WWE, the space of the ring is multimodal in and of itself. Communicative processes such as the color of the ring ropes, the color of the canvas, the branding and imagery of the ring apron, all construct meaning. The aesthetics of the ring utilized during the *NXT TakeOver: WarGames* broadcast draw upon a dark, high contrast tone, with black ring posts and turnbuckles, mostly back aprons, and a charcoal canvas, contrasting with white ring ropes and white NXT and WWE logos. This suggests a polarized phenomenon, constructed in opposition to the aesthetics of the rings of *Raw* and *SmackDown Live,* which draw upon strong colors; red for *Raw* and blue for *SmackDown Live*. This absence of color again positions NXT as distinct from other WWE output. It presents a grittier, alternative, perhaps less flamboyant tone, whereby impoverished aesthetics defy the extravagance of *Raw* and *SmackDown Live* and reflect the hunger of the performers, for some of whom NXT represents their last chance to prove themselves. The very presence of the second ring also disrupts the norms and traditions of WWE, directly connecting NXT with the reinvention of events from the past rather than compliance with the currency of WWE.

While the above modes go far in differentiating NXT from the other texts of WWE, the set utilized during *NXT TakeOver: WarGames*, is very much a mode of WWE. The staging is near identical to that of *Raw* or *SmackDown Live*, or indeed, many other WWE pay-per-view events, as is the construction, temporal positioning and aesthetic of the wrestler entrances and entrance music. These modes construct a tension within the NXT text, pulling the aesthetic back toward the aesthetics of its parent organization and restricting the agency of NXT to forge an identity entirely distinct from the other outputs of WWE. This reflects the cognitive dissonance of Levesque's assertion that NXT is simultaneously the

same as and different from *Raw* or *SmackDown Live*, whereby opposing modes of meaning creation combine to disrupt each other.

The then-NXT champion, Drew Galloway, further represents this tension. Featured and once heavily pushed on the main rosters of WWE, Galloway was released by WWE in 2014, before re-forging his career on the independent circuit and Total Nonstop Action Wrestling/Impact Wrestling. It was during his absence from WWE that Galloway found success as a main event performer and in 2017 he was re-signed to WWE and assigned to the NXT brand. Galloway's character confronts his rejection by WWE through his participation in NXT. He remains rejected by the mainstream WWE products but has been elevated to the highest status in NXT. His success in NXT, therefore, exists as a challenge to the superiority of the Raw and SmackDown brands that rejected him. He personifies the redemption of the disempowered.

Even via such a limited MDA as presented, it is possible to unpack how the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of the modes at play in the *NXT TakeOver: WarGames* interact to form a cohesive communicative event that reveals the organization of meaning from an institutional position. The WWE is unsure as to what NXT is. NXT exists as an unfinished liminal state between *not* WWE and *of* WWE. Even a cursory analysis of its modes reveals a deep cognitive dissonance within the text that perhaps reflects a deeper tension within the institution and signals uncertainty as to the future of the organization.

Conclusion

This paper draws upon the mechanisms of MDA to situate sports entertainment as a site of multimodal discourse construction and offer MDA as a means of understanding the complex and institutional modes of meaning creation in the texts of professional wrestling. In doing so, the paper demonstrates the appropriateness of MDA to the study of sports entertainment by defining the nature of MDA and therein distinguishing it from other forms of DA, establishing that professional wrestling has long been considered a multimodal phenomenon, and suggesting through application that the emerging discipline of MDA will allow future studies of sports entertainment to unpack the complex interplay of semiosis (Bhatia, Flowerdew, and Jones 129) that is the wrestled text (Barthes 17) to better understand the nature of the phenomenon from the inside out.

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The Well-Wrought Broken Championship Belt: Thing Theory in Professional Wrestling Criticism

J. H. ROBERTS AND DOMINIC SEVIERI

On the June 10, 2013 episode of WWE's *Raw*, wrestler Triple H (Paul Levesque) insists on a rematch against Curtis Axel. His wife, Stephanie McMahon, and father-in-law, Vincent K. McMahon, object because they are worried about his health. Triple H begins the match, but Vince, owner of the WWE, orders the timekeeper to ring the bell, ending the match. Typically, the referee would make this call, but in this instance, the ringing of the bell, divorced from proper procedure, ends the match. Obstinately, Triple H restarts another match and again is foiled by Vince. His repeated insistence on a contest borders on obsessive, and to prevent the initiation of a third match—this time a 60-minute Iron Man match—Vince removes the bell from ringside and carries it into the back. The ceremony of professional wrestling (aka sports entertainment) starts and ends with the ringing of the bell—without this bell, a sanctioned match becomes definitionally impossible. The bell subordinates the desires of the wrestlers, the agency of the referee, and the action of the timekeeper to the physical object of the ring bell. Thus, instead of removing the wrestlers or referee, Vince removes the bell. The bell is a nonhuman actant equal to the human agents; it controls the match.

As announcers incessantly remind the audience, wrestling is a "very physical contest," yet objects are intrinsic to the art and drama of professional wrestling. Examples range from the obvious (being hit with a chair hurts), to the practical (ring rope tautness affects how one performs moves), to the abstract (things can win open contests). As these examples show, the study of things in professional wrestling elucidates the multifaceted ways objects affect human experience. Just as Shakespeare once asserted, "the play's the thing" (II.ii.633), so too are the props, the audience, and the actors the things, in theatre as much as sports entertainment. A standard pro-wrestling contest consists of entrance music, an announcer, a ring, a bell, two competitors, a referee, and an audience. The music introduces the competitors, the announcer states their names and the terms of the

contest, and then the bell rings. The contest happens primarily inside a ring, where both wrestlers and the referee work together, as the audience interacts with them in the co-creation of public spectacle. Absence of any of these actors can negatively affect a performance. The network of things grows larger from there. For example, if the performance is a championship match, then the belt functions as actant. If a ladder match occurs, then the ladder bridges actors and action. Professional wrestling thus posits an apt form of popular culture to analyze through the critical lens of so-called thing theory. Things affect and prescribe the movements in the performance.

One purpose of this study is to elucidate how professional wrestling creates meaning. Pierre Bourdieu argues that "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded" (2). Professional wrestling, like all art forms, has a specific code for creating meaning, and things factor into this meaning creation. Bourdieu's text argues that there is a difference between "high" and "low" culture, and professional wrestling is often considered low, like other areas of popular culture. Other popular culture narratives, such as comic books, have earned their place in the academy through the efforts of scholars, including Scott McCloud explaining comics' code in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Similarly, this paper attempts to show that, like comics, professional wrestling is a mix of high and low culture, or, more radically, it might be art in the postmodern fashion. Uninitiated scholars may not possess mastery of this code and thus do not adequately address professional wrestling as an art form.

Pioneered by Bruno Latour and named by Bill Brown, thing theory is part of a current, ongoing series of debates in the social sciences. Scholars such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Jane Bennett have expanded on such theories to rewrite what it means to be human. The core basis of thing theory is that objects have agency, both in and of themselves *and* in how they affect human behavior. At present, scholars in the humanities and arts are still forming ideas on how to use thing theory in their fields. Rita Felski made great strides in this area by applying it to literature. Performance study of theatre made headway with Alban Déléris's recent exploration of how props altered the choreography of Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*. Like other forms of theatre, professional wrestling lends itself very well to such approaches, and thus acts as an in-road to applications of thing theory in other forms of popular culture.

This paper hopes to expand critical use of thing theory by applying it to professional wrestling. Case studies range from the most popular wrestling promotions, such as WWE and New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW), to local independent promotions, such as Southern Fried Championship Wrestling in Monroe, GA. Through these examples, the vibrant materiality of things and their effect on human behavior emerges.

Literature Review

Kit MacFarlane's thoughts on professional wrestling criticism help to justify this study, and thus it is valuable to quote them at some length:

> Though professional wrestling is a highly stylised drama, the actual process of its dramatic construction is frequently overlooked and undervalued in Western academic and cultural analysis, with the art-form itself relegated to being a signifier of anti-drama or broad (and often base) cultural norms rather than a complex and unique constructed dramatic form in its own right. (137)

Through application of thing theory, scholars can analyze professional wrestling's dramatic construction with more depth and accuracy, thus elevating the art-form's esteem in academic circles. Furthermore, MacFarlane emphasizes that without "examining specific, individual dramatic texts" professional wrestling scholarship becomes uniform and alienated (138). This study's goal is not to reproduce uniform pro-wrestling scholarship, but instead to move towards a more dynamic and engaged analysis of professional wrestling by narrowing the scope to examine things' agency in professional wrestling.

Early on, academic study of professional wrestling addressed spectacle, but even now rarely addresses things' role in that spectacle. Many consider Roland Barthes' article "The World of Wrestling" as the initiation of professional wrestling scholarship. In it he argues that "wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle" (3). Sharon Mazer's monograph asserts that wrestling is sport and spectacle, when she asserts how "wrestling, then, is a hybrid performance practice: a professional sport in which players can earn their livings at the same time that it offers its audiences a spectacle that goes beyond contest into theatrical spectacle" (6). Bodies are crucial to the corporeal storytelling of professional

wrestling, yet so are things. Broderick D. V. Chow contends that the "bodies of wrestlers are reproduced and endlessly circulated as commodities, their stripped, exposed, shaved, tanned, and hypermuscular images sold as posters, as action figures, in video games, and on other branded merchandise" (81). The corporeal body is important because, as Chow suggests, aspects like "scars, bruises, broken bones, dislocations, and excessive muscle gain" are markers of the physical work of the wrestler (81). These scars, bruises, broken bones, and dislocations can be the result of things, which may or may not be functioning correctly. Leon Hunt's "Hell in a Cell and Other Stories" discusses physical objects in professional wrestling's spectacle, but he focuses on "[b]lood […], barbed wire, cages, assorted weaponry ('foreign objects'), [and] fire […] these are the stock-in-trade of the so-called 'hard-core' wrestling match" (118). These "stock-in-trade" objects are not of interest here, as they do what they are intended to do: make wrestlers bleed. Rather, this paper discusses "stock-in-trade" objects when they do not follow their intended use, and therefore become things, such as when a ladder wins a championship match.

Though film and professional wrestling are different types of genres, each employ similar narrative devices. For instance, Paula Cohen contends that as a visual medium "movies show us bodies in motion, engaging with material things" (79). Wrestling is also a visual medium, and shows us bodies in motion engaging with other bodies and material things as spectacle (Chow). One of Cohen's other revelations has to do with male material glamour, which is a combination of male bodies and material objects. Cohen defines "male material glamour" as "male characters' relationship to *things* […] that has nothing to do with plot" (80, italics mine). "Things" here signifies material objects, but the same applies to things as defined by thing theory.

Wrestling also engages material things in specific ways. From the ubiquitous use of foreign objects to the WWE's pay-per-view event Tables, Ladders, and Chairs, material objects in wrestling serve unique narrative functions. According to MacFarlane, "It is not the overall spectacle of the entire wrestling show" that scholars should study, but rather "the unique, carefully-negotiated, and often semi-improvised mini-dramas that take place from 'bell to bell'" (138). As demonstrated, the bell affords a rich generic case study, while additional broken and unruly physical objects like championship belts present alternative narrative props. Additionally, by thinking in terms of the immediacy of live improv and theatre, the ways things immediately affect a performance become clear.

Spectators can see the action while it happens, especially if viewing it live. If the ring breaks, it affects everyone involved.

Ring Theory

When critically studying professional wrestling through the lens of thing theory, one is overwhelmed by the multiplicity of objects confronting the viewer. Some things simply do what they are intended to; as such, they are regarded as objects but not "things" (Brown 3). For instance, a chair in which one sits is an object. An object that does not fulfill its intended purpose, such as a chair used to hit an opponent, is a "thing." For the sake of brevity, this essay focuses on "things" when their "thingness" becomes apparent. According to Brown, "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us" (4), meaning when an object ceases to fulfill its intended function, it becomes a thing. Similarly, Graham Harman discusses the ways broken objects force themselves onto human consciousness and assert their identity independent of human existence:

> When using a hammer, for instance, I am focusing on the building project currently underway, and I am probably taking the hammer for granted. Unless the hammer is too heavy or too slippery, or unless it breaks, I tend not to notice it at all. The fact that the hammer can break proves it is deeper than my understanding of it (186).

His analysis shows that objects have agency outside of human experience and use; if objects only existed to fulfill human use, they could not break. Because they only define objects in relationship to human experience, object-oriented ontology and thing theory often run into trouble. How does a human speak about objects' agency outside of human existence if one cannot escape their own human perception? This paper offers no answers to larger existential questions involving thing theory. Rather, by studying a controlled narrative like professional wrestling, where humans interact with nonhuman objects in real time, the things' agency emerges.

Latour, publishing as Jim Johnson, provided a salient example of how things shape human behavior. He described the ways an automatic door "disciplines" humans by closing the door behind them, so they do not have to (300).

Additionally, if the automatic door closes too quickly, people learn to move before it hits them (301). Latour refers to things' imposition of behavior on humans as "prescription." He further describes the ways prescriptions are only relevant to local contexts and are thus examples of "local cultural condition" (301)—not all automatic doors close too quickly.

The same can easily be applied to wrestling. The local cultural conditions of a particular ring set up—the ring height, rope tension, smoothness of the canvas, type of turnbuckle covers, height between the ring and the ceiling, and ceiling fans—all alter the way wrestlers move in a match. Once accustomed to a particular ring set-up, the wrestlers engage in prescribed behaviors shaped by the physical ring. A wrestler's physical body and the physical ring interact in some unexpected ways. When "running the ropes," a wrestler should be able to cross the ring in three steps. If a wrestler is closer to five feet than six, they must take longer strides, and if they are around seven feet, they need shorter strides. Additionally, if the shorter person wants to enter the ring over the second rope, they may not be able to depending on the height of the ropes, whereas a taller wrestler (see Cody Hall in Fig. 1) can go over the top tope. Other factors also affect one's in-ring experience: in Figure 1, the placement of the ceiling fan and the height of the ceiling constricted the types of moves available to Cody Hall. He is actually an inch away from the ceiling fan—this picture was not taken at an angle to create the illusion of his height. The ring dictates entrances, moves, and mobility, even when the ring is in good working order.

The ring, however, is not always in good working order. Latour describes the effects of things on humans when they fail in their prescribed function; in his example, the door does not close itself, and thus is left open all day during the winter because they fail to realize the door is broken (300). The door's brokenness breaks the script of human behavior, and humans must adapt. Similarly, at a 2015 Southern Fried Championship Wrestling show in Monroe, Georgia, the ring temporarily broke. One of the boards under the canvas bowed up, causing an uneven surface. An uneven surface or a ripped canvas can be very dangerous, as such imperfections can impede movement. If this board had an edge facing up, it could seriously injure a wrestler. The two competitors spent the rest of the match avoiding hitting the board directly while doing moves next to it in an attempt to make the board fall back into place. This broken ring, by not fulfilling its intended function, altered the course of the match and forced the human competitors to work around the broken board. Things matter in wrestling.

Figure 1. Cody Hall at SFCW. Photo credit Robert Newsome.

Championship Belts as Things

In the world of professional wrestling, one object soars high above the others, epitomizing ring prowess and main-eventing pay-per-views: championship title belts. A wrestler who metaphorically holds the title of champion literally holds the championship belt; thus, a belt is more than a symbol, it is a thing. By possessing this physical object, a wrestler shows his or her superiority over others. Their dominant ring prowess may be honest, by being a better wrestler than one's opponent, or dishonest, by pulling the tights or using the ropes for extra leverage, but the result is the same. If the two wrestlers compete in a championship contest, the symbolic win results in a physical trophy. If ring prowess asserts superiority, then championship belts epitomize in-ring mastery. That the belt is important, as both a thing and a narrative trope, is axiomatic in the context of professional

wrestling. Belts are not symbols but subjects in earnest, especially when their symbolic function fails.

Belts show their "thingness" when operating outside of the standard use. As professional wrestling fans know, a belt is typically worn around the waist or over the shoulder of the champion. The belt physically adorns the champion while also symbolizing victory. The physical detail, the weight, and the size of the belt impress the viewers. Mildred Burke's championship belt is described as follows: "It weighed fifteen pounds and was said to be twenty-four carat gold with four sapphires, six amethysts, and a seven-carat diamond" (Leen 7-8). They have only become more extravagant since the first half of the twentieth century.

Still, the belts sometimes appear stripped of meaning. For instance, CM Punk tweeted a picture of his WWE World Championship belt not in its normal place, but instead stored in a refrigerator. The story goes that after he got home from *Money in the Bank 2011*, he went straight to the fridge for some water and absentmindedly shoved the belt inside. The belt occupies a private, domestic space, and is no longer a public symbol of victory, but just a guy forgetting something he works with in his fridge. Here, the belt loses all its pretensions and simply becomes the material object, a thing out of place, stripped of symbolic meaning. Its placement in the refrigerator suggests it is as consumable as the Jiffy Peanut Butter and the Pepsi; it is simply an article made for capitalist consumption. The placement of the championship belt breaks it from its narrative function and makes apparent its thingness. This is one of many examples in which a championship's status as an auxiliary object becomes hazy and unnerving.

Much like a misplaced belt, a broken belt presents the audience with unique challenges. On May 18th, 2017 at *Best of the Super Juniors 2017 Night 2*, Tetsuya Naito, then-holder of the IWGP Intercontinental Championship, cracked the belt's faceplate by repeatedly throwing and swinging the title into nearby steps and ring posts. Certainly, this brazen act of defiance helps to build his character as an anti-establishment outsider of sorts. Much like the previous example with CM Punk's WWE title, Naito's belt exceeds the status of a mere prop. Though it seems like a burden or a curse to Naito, there is an undeniable compulsion toward obtaining and keeping the belt nonetheless. In his continued attempts to devalue and destroy the belt, Naito, however paradoxically merely augments the object's power. As Harman states in his description of the hammer, when it serves its function, the user does not take notice of it as a thing (186). The same applies to a pro-wrestling audience's appreciation of championship belts: they are physically

present but so commonplace as to be unremarkable. It follows, then, that no matter how many times Naito tosses it away, the audience's focus (and the camera's focus) returns the belt. Its agency radiates outward at all times; the belt is a subject unto itself, and proves itself deeper than its symbolic meaning.

Another belt exceeds its intended purpose by losing its normal positioning and narrative function. In the December 18th, 1995 episode of *WCW Nitro*, the newly-signed Madusa, formerly known as Alundra Blayze in WWF, announces her entrance at the new company. There is one particularly stunning aspect of her arrival—she carries with her the WWF Women's Title, only to pitch it into the trash. Here, on this rival program, the title should be stripped of meaning, since it comes from a different narrative universe, but it is not. Outside of the larger corporate rivalry between WWF and WCW, this event smudges the belt's status as a stable symbol. Similarly, when Robocop appeared at WCW's Capital Combat 1990, the cohesive narrative cracks and the invading person or object attains preeminence; the story became not about Sting or the Four Horsemen, but about Robocop. Even the poster featured Robocop larger than the other characters. The same can be said of the belt: the belt becomes more a subject in earnest than Madusa. It acts both as a signifier, in this case of corporate triumph, and another actor in the strange network of competing wrestling promotions. As Bennett argues "a vital materiality can never really be thrown 'away,' for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity" (6). Such is the case with the belt. Once in the trashcan, this vital materiality overwhelms the rest of the segment. The symbolic as well as physical weight of the belt hitting the bottom of the can resonates larger than any of the humans in the scene.

All three of these belts show their thingness in different ways, and show they have agency outside of human use. CM Punk's title appears without a human and in an alien context, creating affinity with the objects around it. Naito's belt, in its brokenness, forces the gaze to return to it again and again. Madusa's title overshadows the commentary team and the title holder herself. The preceding instances are all relevant in their thingness, but the most apt example matters not only in itself, but based on its champions: Dramatic Dream Team's (DDT's) Ironman Heavymetalweight Championship. As an object, much like the belts mentioned previously, it exerts absolute dominion over human actors. The title's stipulations are also noteworthy: it has a 24/7 defense clause, meaning the contest has no definite start or finish. Conscious or unconscious, the title holder must be ready to defend at all times. The title defense clause disciplines the competitors

and the viewers (Johnson 300), in that they all must be alert for a title change, on DDT programming and off. On July 31, 2016, Joey Ryan dropped the title to the audience at Beyond Wrestling in Providence, RI, and then won it back. As an open challenge, the belt can be won and lost anytime, and literally anywhere, even in dreams.[1] Additionally, a belt or match that is an open challenge, like the Heavymetalweight, means anyone can compete for it, as the previous example of the audience shows. As one might suspect based on the other title stipulations, the title holder in this instance does not need to be human.

DDT takes the logic of professional wrestling to its furthest conclusions, and thus is the case of the Ironman Heavymetalweight Championship belt. The logic of this title seems to be if anyone can compete, cannot any*thing*? If an acting referee is present, the title can change physical or metaphorical hands. As such, logically, if a painting covers a wrestler whose shoulders are down to the count of three, it can win the title. On June 23, 2013 at *What are You Doing 2013*, a calligraphy painting "Kōmyō" did win the title. At WCPW's *State of Emergency* on April 1st, 2017, Joe Hendry won the title only to throw it into the trash shortly thereafter. Subsequently, the trash bin briefly became the champion. Unlike when Madusa discarded her title, it is not the belt's vital materiality that asserts itself, but that of the trash bin. As of this writing, twenty-five inanimate objects have held the Ironman Heavymetalweight title (if one considers Yoshihiko an inanimate object; the authors do not agree on this point[2]), including three ladders, a chair, a table, a ringside mat, a Hello Kitty doll, and a pint of beer. On April 29, 2014 at *Max Bump 2014*, the belt itself became champion by falling onto the chest of Sanshiro Takagi, becoming the thousandth title holder. Here, the belt's symbolic and material statuses combine into one. The logic of professional wrestling does allow for this occurrence, because wrestling has always valued the vital materiality of objects.

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[1] Joey Ryan lost the title on July 28 to Candice LeRae in a dream. In a video posted to Joey Ryan's Youtube channel, Candice tells him over the phone that she is coming for his title. She meets his reaction ("That's not even possible. You're in Cleveland and I'm in California") by wishing him sweet dreams. As he sleeps that night with the Heavymetalweight title on his chest, they compete and she pins him. Upon waking, the title is gone.

[2] Yoshihiko is one of two so-called love dolls who compete in DDT. They are treated as human competitors, not as objects.

Conclusion

A championship belt is much more than a symbol of victory; if these belts were simple props, the emblematic weight of reinforcing a competitor's triumph could easily be borne by announcers and commentators. There is little need to go through the time and expense of fabricating a belt if its fate is that of an inert signifier. Returning to MacFarlane, and to push professional wrestling scholarship forward, criticism must now actively concern itself with the minute complexities of the artform. By applying elements of thing theory to the study of professional wrestling, this study attempts to elucidate but one of these complexities. Though an extended focus on championship belts expounds the degree to which things matter in professional wrestling, there are still countless avenues of approach to consider.

Most importantly, at least in the context of professional wrestling, scholarship has much to gain by considering things as active, vibrant agents in their own right. In other words, this examination is merely a starting point. Professional wrestling, as a form of live theater, is uniquely well-suited to matters of non-human agency and object-oriented ontology. Week after week, there are near-countless opportunities to engage with professional wrestling in real time. As such, and in a broader sense, it provides a valuable, constantly active inroad for thing theory's inclusion in the realm of pop culture studies at large.

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Squaring the Circle: Removing Violence from the Equation in a Quest for Excitement

RASMUS BYSTED MØLLER AND THOMAS KLINTØE LAURSEN

Introduction

To excite the audience, professional wrestling has evolved from legitimate wrestling contests to staged matches. This transition involved a gloomy period of fraudulent match fixing, but by the 1920s and onwards the combination of showmanship and wrestling slowly developed into a choreographed wrestling performance more in line with theater than sports competitions (Lindeman). Many academics with interests in body culture have viewed this transformation from "true" to "fake" wrestling as a downfall. In ancient Greece, sport was associated with positive values such as health and the creation of moral character (Reid 3-17), whereas popular entertainment in the form of theatrical plays was criticized by Plato for its corrupting influence on youth and society at large (Plato 202-4). Today staged wrestling matches have been criticized for promoting stereotypes, fascism, and bigotry; while sport by and large retains its positive image as promoter of fair play and sportsmanship. Such criticism overlooks the civilizing effect involved in allowing politically incorrect themes to appear in a storyline surrounding the fight between two protagonists in a ring with one main purpose—to entertain and excite the audience. To expand on this defense of professional wrestling, it is necessary to introduce the notion of a "civilizing process" as conceived by the German-British sociologist Norbert Elias.

The Civilizing Process

In Elias' groundbreaking book *The Civilizing Process*, he traces the development of etiquette and bodily habits from early-medieval times through the renaissance up until modernity. This development is then linked to the centralization of the

state with increased political, military, and administrative power transferred from the nobles to the king due to military development that eventually made the nobles obsolete as an important military force. As soon as guns and cannons replaced swords and lances, kings no longer depended on the readiness of their noble alliances to enter the battlefield in heavy armor, thus shifting the power balance in their favor. Consequently, kings gained monopoly over the use of violent force as well as the control over taxation. The court society saw a shift in power balance and had a profound influence on the aristocracy, who suddenly no longer needed a readiness to act swiftly, forcefully, and violently if needed. Instead, an ability to behave and speak elegantly and develop intricate plans to forward personal interest at court was called for; all of which demanded a controlled levelheaded mind. Slowly the norms regarding sex, bodily functions (i.e. eating, sleeping, defecating, how to blow one's nose, etc.), table manners, aggressive behavior and violent displays changed from more or less unrestrained to highly controlled.

This transformation first relied on an outwardly imposed social pressure for people to conform to new standards. Over time, the need for external pressure was replaced by internalized self-restraint with regards to sexuality, aggression, and self-control over emotive volatility. The result was the development of conscience, or what Freud called the "super-ego," as a necessary regulator of behavior at court, and later, due to a trickle-down effect, in broader society. This process of emotional repression did not relieve individuals of the capacity for strong feelings and the need for excitement (Elias "Essay on Sport" 163). Such feelings and needs still existed even though their public display had become socially unacceptable and, consequently, rare. Although self-restraint can prevent people from acting in accordance with intense feelings, thereby allowing them to get along smoothly in everyday life, it also creates a psychic tension, which from time to time needs release: "One of the crucial problems confronting societies in the course of a civilizing process was—and remains—that of finding a new balance between pleasure and restraint" (Elias "Essay on Sport" 165).

This conceptualization seems to follow Freud when he claims that the development of an increased self-awareness and self-control have created psychic tensions, which must be released or redirected somehow in order not to cause personal as well as societal problems. The unintentional creation of modern sport proved to be part of the solution.

Civilized Excitement

Elias is the only highly influential sociologist who has ascribed a significant role to sport in his sociology. Not only did he write about sport, he also believed that sport had a crucial role to play in developing civilized societies. In the anthology *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (1986) co-edited by Eric Dunning, he highlights sport as a particularly well-suited solution to the above-mentioned problem of resolving built-up psychic tension. He writes: "Within its specific setting sport, like other leisure pursuits, can evoke through its design a special kind of tension, a pleasurable excitement thus allowing feelings to flow more freely. It can help to loosen, perhaps to free, stress-tensions." (Elias "Introduction" 48) Sport, says Elias, can thus bring about a "liberating, cathartic effect." (Elias "Introduction" 49)

The rules of sport create a space within which tension arise, as a pleasurable excitement builds up and a release of tension is brought about in the end. In other words, it creates and legitimates strong emotional outbursts in a controlled environment. Sport mimics the excitement of a Darwinian battle for survival at safe distance to the brutality of nature, and thus plays a crucial role in the civilizing process. If sport should function this way it is important, Elias argues, that the dynamics of sport is "equilibrated so as to avoid, on the one hand, the frequent recurrence of precipitate victories and, on the other, the frequent recurrence of stalemates. The former cut short the pleasurable tension-excitement; they do not give it time to rise to an enjoyable optimum. The other draws out the tension beyond its optimum and lets it get stale without any climax and the 'cathartic' release from tension which follows" ("Essay on Sport" 168-9).

It is very likely that humans simply need battle excitement either as participants or as spectators as "complementary correctives for the unexciting tensions produced by the recurrent routines of social life" (Elias "Introduction" 59). Battle excitement can be experienced in all contact sports with oppositional groups involved but it is most directly displayed in martial arts. Various forms of battle-contests have been staged for different reasons through human history, but according to Elias, it was not until modernity that such contests took on the form of sport. Olympic contests in antiquity for example served religious and military purposes and "the customary rules of 'heavy' athletic events, such as boxing and wrestling, admitted a far higher degree of physical violence that that admitted by the rules of the corresponding types of sport-contest" (Elias "Genesis of Sport"

132). A development can be traced in which modern sports with an emphasis on rules and the prevention of serious harm have replaced more de-regulated violent and dangerous leisure forms known in pre-modern times. This process was a necessary consequence of "heightened sensibility with regard to acts of violence" (Elias "Genesis of Sport" 133). The argument suggests that such as the folk games of the late Middle Ages and boxing slowly became civilized by being "subjected to a tighter set of rules" that restricted the forms through which violence could be expressed (Elias "Introduction" 21). Elias also used fox hunting as an example of this development. Fox hunting originally had its climax in the killing of the fox by the hunters, but because of the mentioned increased sensitivity towards violence, a change took place that still allowed fox-hunters to kill the fox, but instead of killing the fox themselves, the killing was done by proxy and emphasis changed from the pleasure of the final killing to the excitement of the hunt itself (Elias "Essay on Sport").

The De-brutalization of Sport and the Catharsis Thesis

Elias' thoughts of the role of sport in the civilizing process fits very well with sport's early development at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century—the same period that saw the emergence of modern professional wrestling. In England, sport was linked to educational goals based on lofty gentleman ideals. Bishop Ethelbert Talbot represented this period's sports ethos well when he, in celebration of the 1908 Olympics, let these words resound in the St. Paul's Cathedral: "In these Olympiads the important thing is not winning, but taking part" (De Coubertin 587). In reality, according to the Danish sport researcher Verner Møller: "Sport is the cultivation of the will to win taken to the threshold of evil" (Møller *Ethics of Doping* 15). Doping scandals, rule breaking, foul play, and sometimes even a reward system with the aim of rewarding players who injure opponents (the so-called bounty scandal in American football) points to a winning-is-all philosophy rather than an emphasis on mere participation. Møller observes that the very choreography surrounding sporting events contradicts Talbot's idealism: "At the end of each Olympic competition the winner is celebrated, whereas not much attention is paid to the 'also-rans.' […] The winner's ceremony shows the same as it is only the three best-placed athletes

or teams that are invited on the podium and once again the winner is the center of attention" (Møller "Being a Poor Sport" 21).

The importance of victory in modern day elite sport has resulted in staggering injury rates, most notably in American football (Waddington). Even though cushioned boxing gloves have been introduced in boxing, they actually increase the risk of serious brain damage because they protect hands from fracture thus allowing boxers to hit harder and more frequently than otherwise possible (Association). Confronted with objections to the idea of an overall de-brutalization of sport such as these, Elias would undoubtedly point our attention towards the brutality of one of the most prestigious and popular contest at the ancient Olympic Games: wrestling. Indeed, records show that "Leontiskos of Messana, who twice in the first half of the fifth century won the Olympic crown for wrestling, obtained his victories not by throwing his opponents but by breaking their fingers" (Elias "Genesis of Sport" 136). There is ample evidence to suggest that the pankration, or ground wrestling, was a brutal affair, and up until the end of the 20th century no official sport existed with a similar display of violent combat. When the Olympic games were revived in 1896, pankration was the only one of the classical disciplines not reinstated due to its brutality.

However, in 1993 the sport Ultimate Fighting was created in the United States, with inspiration from primarily the Japanese discipline Shooto, promoted by the mixed martial arts promotion company Pancrase Inc., who called its champions "King of Pancrase" with a deliberate reference to its Greek predecessor in antiquity (Grant). This form of full-contact combat sport that eventually came to be known as MMA (mixed martial arts) initially had rules similar to pankration, but for promoters to conduct events legally in the US, and to be accepted as a legitimate sport, a set of unified rules was adopted (Commissions). Rules introducing obligatory four-ounce gloves, weight classes, and five rounds of five-minute duration were implemented to increase the likelihood of exciting and fair fights. Rules clearly preventing throat strikes, kicking, kneeing, or stomping the head of a grounded opponent and striking the spine were instated with a health-preserving rationale. Still, such rules have not prevented MMA fights from being highly violent with occasional massive bleeding (taking place while the fight is allowed to continue), bone breaking, large joint dislocation, and, of course, brutal knockouts. In a recent MMA fight, the former Danish wrestler and Olympic silver medalist, Marc O. Madsen, performs what is called "a standing guillotine" in which his opponent is lifted

from the floor by his neck and thereafter thrown unconscious to the floor, accompanied by enthralled shouting from the audience and the commentators.[1] True, modern day MMA is undoubtedly more regulated than its ancient cousin pankration, but its mere existence and increasing popularity indicates that Elias overestimated the power of civilization over an apparent human lust for violence.

As shown above, Elias' idea of an overall slowly-developed de-brutalization of sport is not altogether unproblematic. At first sight their catharsis thesis seems to have more in its favor. Do not televised MMA and boxing fights allow the kind of excitement that relieves tension and thereby protects society from such violence in public? Is sport in general not a prime example of controlled de-control?

Reason exists to be skeptical towards a positive answer to both these questions. In his research, sociologist David Phillips examined the impact of mass media violence on U.S. homicides by looking at homicide rates after 18 heavyweight-boxing championships. Most of the earlier studies of the connection between mass media and aggression were conducted in laboratories and has shown that media violence can trigger aggression. Real life, however, is not played out in a laboratory. Phillips wanted to test whether the connection also holds true in the real world. His study presents the first systematic evidence of such a connection showing that after such championship fights between 1973 and 1978, homicides significantly increased, with the largest peak by far appearing on the third day after the fight (Phillips). The findings were controlled for secular trends, seasonal, and other extraneous variables. Since the increases were greater after heavily publicized prize fights, his findings supported his hypothesis that the homicides were triggered by the fighters modeling aggression. This finding mirrors laboratory experiments, which found that people were more likely to imitate an aggressor if they perceived themselves like the aggressor and their victim like the one on screen.

Phillips mentions six criteria for stories most likely to prompt aggression as one of the reasons he chose heavyweight prize fights as a research site. These criteria are derived from George Comstock's literature review on media effects. For Comstock, a violent story is more likely to trigger aggression if the violence

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[1] For the full match, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKZHPMxlSUU

was rewarded; the violence was rewarded, exciting, real, and justified; and if the violent perpetrator was not criticized and was framed as not intending to cause injury (Comstock). Evidently heavyweight prize fights as well as high profile MMA fights display "stories" that live up to all six of the characteristics. Not only is violence presented as rewarding, exiting, real, justified and so on, it is also, which is arguably more important, perceived by the audience as such. Thus, ample evidence exists to suggest that the catharsis thesis is problematic when it is applied to excitement created by real life combats exposed by mass media. No matter the etiquette intended to civilize the violence, it seems as if exiting high-profile battles fought within the confinements of sportive rules work in the exact opposite direction of what Elias expected.

Removing Violence from the Equation in a Quest for Excitement

Let us turn our attention to professional wrestling and analyze how this entertainment form can be understood considering Elias' theory. With respect to the catharsis thesis, no empirical evidence exists, as far as we know, to suggest that professional wrestling has the same detrimental effect on society by influencing a spectator's propensity to act violently,[2] but there are several other reasons for doubting that it has that effect. First, professional wrestling does not live up to all of Comstock's six criteria.

The violence displayed is not real and there is never any real intent to injure anyone. We base this claim on sport philosopher Michael Smith's stipulated definition of violence. Smith defines violence as "physically assaultive behavior that is designed to, and does, injure another person or persons physically" (Smith 204). Of course, what matters is how wrestlers present the violent story and how it is perceived by the audience. In this respect pro wrestling differs from most violent stories, as it does not aim to present violence as realistically as possible. To the contrary, violence is presented in such an exaggerated manner that it is entirely impossible to mistake it for real. This lack of realness is particularly true for WWE's "sport entertainment" version of pro wrestling.

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[2] This lack of knowledge thereby suggests a future direction for research.

At WWE's 2017 *Hell in a Cell*, Shane McMahon and Kevin Owens met in a "Hell in a Cell" match in which the ring is surrounded by a 20-foot steel cage meant to keep wrestlers inside. Nevertheless, performers often find themselves atop the cage at some point in the match. These matches often include moments of extreme "violence" much to the delight of the audience—and this match was no different. At one point, Owens smashes through a table while trying to hurt McMahon, who manages to get away just in time. As the wrestlers later descended the cage after battling on top of it, McMahon bashes Owens' head into the cage until he falls off the side of the cage and through an announce table. McMahon proceeds to place the barely conscious Owens on another announce table and climbs the cage wall once again. Standing on top of the cage, he draws the sign of the cross on his chest and jumps off the edge in an elbow drop aimed at Owens on the table. Right before impact, Owens is pulled from the table by fellow wrestler Sami Zayn. McMahon crashes through the table and eventually loses the match (Benigno).

Throughout the match, after the extremely "violent" moments, fans cheer and chant, as is the usual response to such moments at pro wrestling events, "Holy shit! Holy shit!" The recurring "Holy shit!" chants show that the audience knows how to react to these extreme actions that follow a special kind of logic. Their memetic chants suggest that they are not truly shocked by the violence they see—they know to perform their role just as the wrestlers perform their own.

In wrestling matches the seemingly violent behavior is often done in an obvious rule-breaking manner. Such actions are thus not justified but highly criticized by the opponent, commentators, and the audience. Professional wrestling therefore fails to live up to Comstock's fourth and fifth criteria either. The "violent" perpetrator is rarely justified in their actions and is often highly criticized. It is even doubtful whether professional wrestling lives up to the first criteria, of being rewarded for their violence. Although wrestlers win/lose title belts and are celebrated or booed accordingly, the audience knows that it is all a show. The championship belts are part of a planned storyline and are not a real reward for a legitimate fight.

Pro wrestling matches are often delivered in a comical and surreal fashion with an undertone of chaos that sets it far apart from reality. From time to time characters are introduced that give the whole wrestling universe an otherworldly aura, making any aggressor or victim modeling associated with real prizefights highly unlikely. One example of this phenomenon can be observed in Bray Wyatt,

who posits an occult character with a cult leader-esque persona. His tactics often include scaring his opponents both verbally before the matches and by his mad behavior in the ring. Wyatt faced and defeated Matt Hardy on November 27. 2017, causing Hardy to have a "mental breakdown" and slowly turn into "Woken" Matt Hardy, a kind of campy inversion of Bray Wyatt with an exaggerated comical laugh, indistinguishable accent, and frequent use of archaic words. Their feud has evolved into a contest of out-weirding each other with Wyatt applying his usual tactics and Hardy countering in a comical fashion that leaves Wyatt slightly confused. Needless to say, modeling either the aggressor or victim is not an option in cases like these. Nothing about either character is like, and thus identifiable by, members of the WWE audience.

The audience plays an active role and has an indirect influence on character development and storylines by voicing their enthusiasm and disgust during an event. The only one of Comstock's six criteria that pro wrestling stories truly live up to is the second; that is, the matches excite the audience, which is of cause both their *raison d'être* and a precondition for being relevant for the catharsis thesis in the first place. When it comes to the ability to produce excitement, pro wrestling has an advantage that sport typically lacks.

In the chapter "Never Trust a Snake," Henry Jenkins III uses Elias' sociological ideas and observes that in the real world not many sporting contests reach the optimal tension-equilibrium because "actual athletic completion, unlike staged wrestling, is unrehearsed and unscripted" (Jenkins III 40). Professional wrestling matches, on the contrary, "are staged to ensure maximum emotional impact, structured around a consistent reversal of fortunes and a satisfying climax" (Jenkins III 40). Wrestling, however, also explores the emotional and moral life of its main characters as part of the storylines building up to the battles in the ring, and can therefore be viewed as a melodrama built on a masculine mythology. The excitement of a masculine melodrama, involving physical combat, is rule breaking, risk taking, and spectacular feats, as well as a display of strong emotional outbursts from the wrestlers. Such excitement makes wrestling particularly well suited as a site for male catharsis, especially with regards to the working class where the need for catharsis is arguably the greatest.

Following Elias' view on the class-specific needs for excitement, Jenkins III places wrestling alongside boxing as a "lower-class sport" with a "particular significance for its dominantly working-class male audience" (39). Thus, one crucial difference between sports such as boxing, MMA, and pro wrestling, all of

which can deliver battle-induced excitement in abundance for athletes and spectators alike, is the fact that only pro wrestling has found a way to do it without real violence. The violence is all show, known to the audience, and rarely, if ever, life-threatening.

Professional Wrestling: Squaring the Circle

In this concluding section, we return to Elias for the importance of sport as he observes that, aside from sex, humans require "other forms of enjoyable excitement" and that the "battle excitement" found in sport provides such excitement ("Introduction" 59). As civilization advanced, he argues, and "when a fairly high level of pacification has been established, that problem has to some extent been solved by the provision of mimetic battles, battles enacted playfully in an imaginary context which can produce enjoyable battle excitement with a minimum of injuries to human beings. It is, like squaring the circle, an almost impossible task" ("Introduction" 59). Elias thought sports competitions of various kinds solved the puzzle of humans desiring violent excitement but needing to exist in a pacified civilization.

However, as we have seen, sport is not the best example of "controlled decontrol," since excess is in the nature of sport. Pierre De Coubertin writes: "To try to make athletics conform to a system of mandatory moderation is to chase after an illusion. Athletes need the 'freedom of excess'" (De Coubertin 581). With the rise of MMA as a relatively new and popular sport with very similar brutality to that of ancient pankration, it seems as if this need for a freedom to excess also includes brutal violence. Using Comstock's criteria for violent stories leading to modeling behaviors, the "battle excitement" found in such contact sports appears to contradict Elias' conceptualizations.

On the other hand, professional wrestling can be considered the ultimate example of what Elias saw as the overall trend in the civilizing process, because it has succeeded in creating an immense emotional impact on its audience by mimicking violent combat in a thrilling sport setting, often resulting in ecstatic excitement, without the use of real-life violence. Only in the scripted world of professional wrestling can psychic tensions be released and emotions be allowed to flow free in a fully controlled setting. Only here is it possible to mediate on contradiction after the other as non-violent violence is displayed as cooperative

competition. Professional wrestling is both antihegemonic and reactionary; it reinforces stereotypes and celebrates brute power but at the same time it "lends its voice to the voiceless and champions the powerless," as Jenkins III expresses (64). Surprisingly it was not the unplanned creation of modern sport that solved the almost impossible task mentioned by Elias. The circle was squared by booted wrestlers in tights and costumes.

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"My Guy or Girl in the Ring" and on My Newsfeed: A Study of Viewers' Uses and Gratifications of WWE Social Media

JACK V. KARLIS

World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) is a publicly traded global media conglomerate that has an international audience and revenues of more than $800 million in 2017 (WWE Corporate, "Investors"). The company has taken the sports entertainment industry, previously known as wrestling, from smoke-filled bingo halls and old gymnasiums into sold-out stadiums and even its own Internet-based streaming service channel. Most notably, in addition to its original programming watched by more than 650 million homes worldwide in 25 languages (WWE Corporate, "Who We Are"), WWE's far-reaching social media presence helps augment its programming and enhance the experience for viewers. In 2016 alone, WWE social media had 1.14 billion engagements over 739 million different social media accounts (WWE Corporate, "Key Performance Indicators"), numbers that helped them achieve their financial and company goals during broadcasts.

WWE live broadcasts are a unique mixture of theatre, entertainment, reality television, and gameshow. They regularly "social cast" during their live and taped broadcasts, taking fans' opinions and suggestions through engagement to help shape the on-air outcomes of the product. They routinely plug their social media handles and accounts during broadcasts to create a two-way dynamic between the "superstars" and the fans. It works so well, in fact, that the company is listed weekly among the top ten social media scores by Neilson Social Media (2017) for series and specials, outperforming other events such as Monday Night Football on social media. Each "superstar" has their own social media account, at times breaking "kayfabe" or the audience's perceived interpretation of that character to interact with fans, both during and between broadcasts. While the writers are the main authors of what the outcomes will be, the fans and their social media presence can shape the programming. WWE writers will revise sometimes long-term plans for characters based upon fan reactions on social media. WWE social

media has helped grow its outreach and engagement exponentially, and its impact cannot be ignored.

While the activity and impact of WWE social media are widely regarded as a success, the use of this technology is relatively new in the WWE's history. As with any phenomenon of using new communication technology (Ruggeiro), what requires attention is why users engage with WWE social media. This study's theoretical significance is important on several levels. Most research exists on the WWE through the critical-cultural and qualitative lenses; however, little to no quantitative scholarship exists on the sports entertainment genre. Furthermore, while there is ample scholarship on uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler and Guretvich) and social media, this study will be the first to look specifically at the psychological underpinnings or the "why" an individual uses social media to interact with WWE performers on social media. The television product drives social media use and, in turn, social media use is often used as a barometer for the television show's programming. The study reviews uses and gratifications of legacy media, the Internet, and social media to explore the motives of WWE social media use, as phrased with this research question:

> RQ1: What kinds of gratifications are most likely to be sought from WWE social media use?

The findings presented in this study not only add to the existing body of uses and gratification literature, but also provide insight to the co-viewing phenomenon with live televised events and offer predicting variables for WWE social media use. Based on prior literature, this study uses five gratifications (i.e. habit, surveillance, voyeurism, entertainment and relaxation) found in legacy media, parasocial interaction, and three psychological antecedents (i.e. contextual age, locus of control, and affinity) to predict viewers' use of WWE social media.

Uses and Gratifications

This study deals with a very constrained use of social media, specifically WWE personalities on social media, but the findings will contribute to an already rich body of uses and gratifications research literature. Before researching the cultural and societal implications of new media technologies, the reasons of why and how individuals use those new technologies (Perse and Dunn) must be explained.

When new technologies are diffused widely in society, scholars apply the uses and gratifications paradigm to understand new media use motivations and behaviors (Rubin and Bantz) and, thus, how the new technologies are being used (Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgren).

In the theory of uses and gratifications, "(a) media behavior is purposive, goal-directed and motivated, (b) people select media content to satisfy their needs and desires, (c) social and psychological dispositions mediate that behavior, and (d) media compete with other forms of communication—or functional alternatives—such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention and use." (Rubin, Haridakis, and Eyal 129). The uses-and-gratifications theoretical framework thereby assumes that an individual's sociological and psychological makeup will influence an individual's media use; any effects from the mediated communication then relate to the reasons for using it (Katz, Blumler and Guretvich; Rosengren). It further assumes that (1) in using the chosen media, the audience remains active with "goal-directed media behavior"; and (2) individual predispositions, social interaction, and environmental factors shape audience members' program expectations (Wimmer and Dominick). Since this study focuses on the use of legacy media (television) in conjunction with an Internet-based media (social media), a review of literature on both is necessary.

Uses and Gratifications and Legacy Media

In a response for calls for more updated theoretical and methodological studies in uses and gratifications, Shyam Sundar and Anthony Limperos explained that studies with gratifications found in Internet-based media were similar to those found in legacy or traditional media. WWE social media would not exist without WWE television programming. Thus, legacy media gratifications, despite this study's main subject of inquiry being social media, are appropriate to use as measures due to television being the source material for social media use.

In a fraction of his abundant research of television with uses and gratifications, Alan Rubin ("Ritualized") found that media use is either ritualized or instrumental. He posited ritualized use as the habitual use of media to pass the time or to divert attention from one's reality. The opposite was instrumental use or active and goal-oriented use of the media. A look at reality television programming through the uses and gratifications paradigm (Papacharissi and

Mendelson) found the most common gratifications were relaxation, habitual use or passing time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism. Surveillance and habit have been found to be very significant predictors of news consumption of current events in uses and gratifications literature (Diddi and LaRose; Vincent and Basil). Of these motivations, habitual use, surveillance, and voyeurism are synonymous with WWE social media use. Users can access, with the aid of mobile or portable devices, WWE personalities on social media anytime they want to as a force of habit or simply to pass time waiting for the next task. Surveillance on social media gives them a sense of WWE programming and an opportunity to learn more about the current storylines on television. People can also observe what WWE personalities are using social media to talk about as evidenced by the links, photos, and statuses posted. In other words, social media offers voyeurism to the user of his or her WWE network partners.

With these observations in place, the following hypothesis was generated:

H1: Gratifications of legacy media (habit, voyeurism, surveillance) will be gratifications of WWE social media use.

Uses and Gratifications of the Internet

While legacy media can offer some gratifications related to this study, uses and gratifications literature on the Internet, a medium that any social media needs to operate on, can offer additional gratifications. In an early study of uses and gratifications of the Internet, entertainment, personal relevance, and information involvement were found to be the most significant motives for using the Internet (Eighmey and McCord). Barbara Kaye and others (Johnson and Kaye) strengthened those findings when entertainment was found to be the strongest motive in Internet use. Zizi Papacharissi and Rubin found that interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment were the most salient motivating factors of why people used the Web. Another study (Ferguson and Perse) found more consistent motivations for audiences using the web and television: entertainment, passing time, and social information.

Paul Haridakis and Gary Hanson examined YouTube users' motives and individual differences such as social activity, interpersonal interaction, locus of control, sensation seeking, innovativeness, and affinity to predict viewing and sharing behaviors. Subjects viewed YouTube videos for information sharing, and

viewed and shared videos for entertainment, co-viewing, and social interaction. In the vein of WWE social media, videos can be viewed as entertainment as they are customized to gratify each user's need for excitement and preferences predicting viewing videos on YouTube and sharing videos.

Considering the findings on gratifications for Internet use, the next hypothesis proposes the following:

> H2: Gratifications of the Internet and social media (entertainment, relaxation) will be gratifications of WWE social media use.

Predictors of Media Use

Prior uses and gratifications literature has revealed a slew of predictors that enhance an individual's use of media in addition to gratifications of use: affinity, parasocial interaction, locus of control, and contextual age. Papacharissi and Rubin operationalized Internet use as the total number of hours spent on the Internet each day. For WWE social media use, it is logical to look at the number of hours a user consumes WWE social media: first, by looking at the number of hours one accesses WWE social media. However, social media is not simply about the hours one spends on it. More importantly, the unique nature of social media is an amalgamation of previous media interactions.

Social media is also personalized based on the user's volition to control what pictures or newsfeeds are on his or her account, meaning that users will more likely have an affinity toward social media. In their Internet uses scale, Rubin and Papacharissi adopted the Television Affinity Scale (Rubin "Examination") to assess users' liking or affinity for the Internet. Rubin ("Examination") linked affinity for television programming to several motives including arousal, habit, pass time, escape, entertainment, companionship, and information seeking. Affinity toward soap operas, which the WWE has been described as, has been related to entertainment and relaxation (Rubin "Daytime Television") as well as information seeking, escape, and voyeurism (Perse). Rubin ("Uses and Gratifications") found that habitual, less-engaged users exhibit an affinity with their chosen medium while instrumental, active users have an affinity for the selected content. Since social media users are active users because they control the information they see and consume, they will likely have affinity for certain subject matters

Along with activity level, another predictor of media use and gratification is parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction (Horton and Wohl) is a bond of familiarity and closeness that is formed with media personalities over time. John Turner found that "attitude homophily" was the strongest predictor of parasocial interaction with different television programs. Additionally, research indicates that parasocial interaction was highly correlated with reliance on television (Rubin, Perse, and Powell), the main platform of WWE "superstars." Thus, fans may look to their superstars on television coupled with social media for emotional support.

Contextual age (Rubin and Rubin) is another possible predictor pf WWE social media use. Contextual age's dimensions consist of physical health, economic security, interpersonal interaction, mobility, and life satisfaction. Research found people lacking in those dimensions relied more on television for a variety of gratifications (Rubin and Rubin). All these factors may or may not influence the amount of use one has of WWE social media. Subjects may or may not be where they want to be in life, and as a result may rely on WWE social media to fulfill other areas in their life.

Julian Rotter's locus of control may be another predictor variable, which theorizes that people have a degree to which they believe they have control over the outcomes in their lives as opposed to external forces. Rubin ("Effect of Locus")) found that loci of control were significant predictors of aggression and satisfaction, respectively, on television. Since WWE is a violent form of programming, and fans believe they can hijack the outcomes of live shows through social media, locus of control is an appropriate predictor variable.

Given the range of potential predictors for WWE social media use, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: What are the strongest predictors of WWE social media use?

Method

Sample

The questionnaire used in this study was administered online via Qualtrics software to 14 different WWE fan groups on Facebook with their administrators' permission from April through August 2016. It was posted in the groups'

newsfeed and their membership was composed of various geographic location, age and races. The common attribute for all members was their WWE social media use. This sampling method produced a total of 206 respondents.

General demographic questions were asked regarding gender, age, income and race. Of the 206 respondents for the survey, 189 were male (91%) while 17 were female (8%). The average age of the respondents was 33.08. Forty-one percent of the sample had earned at least a high school diploma. The largest racial category was white (36.4).

A qualifying question asking if subjects used WWE social media at all was posed first. The first section of the questionnaire examined how often subjects used WWE social media and what device they used for to access the content. Users in the sample followed WWE social media accounts the most on Twitter (M=19.63, SD=52.26), then Facebook (M=8.26, SD=13.55), Instagram (M=5.84, SD=11.74) and YouTube (M=1.42, SD=2.82). Subjects reported via an open-ended question that they actively used WWE social media on average about 6 hours (M=5.94) per week.

Motivations and Psychological Dispositions

To discover the gratifications of use of WWE social media, this study relied on prior relevant research. A total of 18 measures were taken from prior scales in empirically significant uses and gratifications research. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreements with statements concerning the reasons why they used current events on a Likert scale of 1 "not at all" to 5 "strongly agree. A principle component exploratory factor analysis using Varimax rotation was used to identify the gratifications of app use with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The resulting factor analysis, or gratification categories, will be discussed in the analysis section, as seen in Table 1.

Affinity, parasocial relationships, contextual age, and locus of control were measured to develop a coherent scale for each. Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated for all scales and deemed them acceptable for use.

Affinity (α=0.824) was measured through four questions using a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement with the following statements: "I would rather use WWE social media than other social media accounts"; "I could easily do without WWE social media for several days"; "I would feel lost without WWE

social media"; and "WWE social media is one of the most important things I do every day."

Parasocial relationship (α=0.868) was measured using 10 questions using a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement with the following statements: "WWE social media shows me what the superstars are like"; "When the superstars joke with one another on WWE social media, it's easier to watch"; "When my favorite superstars posts about how they feel about something on WWE social media, it helps me make up my own mind about the same thing"; "I feel sorry for my favorite superstars when someone says something bad about them on WWE social media"; "When I'm using WWE social media, I feel as if I'm part of the WWE"; "I like to compare my thoughts to what my favorite WWE superstars post on social media"; "The WWE superstars make me feel comfortable on WWE social media, as if I'm friends with them"; "I see my favorite superstars as a natural, down-to-earth person on WWE social media"; "I like seeing what my favorite superstars post on social media"; and "I like to watch videos of my favorite superstars doing different things on social media."

Contextual age (α=0.737) was measured using 11 questions using a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement with the following statements: "I've been successful in achieving my aims or goals in life"; "I find a great deal of happiness in life"; "I am very content and satisfied in life"; "I have enough money to buy things I want, even if I don't need them"; "I live quite comfortably now and have enough money to buy what I need or want"; "I have no major financial worries"; "I usually drive my own car or bus to get around"; "I usually don't travel more than a few blocks from my home each day"; I spend enough time communicating with family or friends by phone"; "I get to see my friends as often as I would like" and "I often visit with friends, relatives or neighbors in their homes."

Locus of control (α=0.717) was measured using nine questions using a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement with the following statements: "My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others"; "I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful people"; "Getting what I want requires those people above me"; "When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work"; "My life is determined by my own actions"; "I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life"; "It's not always too wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune"; "Often there is not a chance of protecting my personal interest from bad luck happenings"; and "When I get what I want, it's because I'm lucky."

Analysis

Social Media Repertoire and Engagement

Respondents were asked to report approximately how many official WWE social media accounts they follow. The cumulative total of these sites was summed for a social media repertoire score, suggesting on average respondents followed 5-6 accounts (M=5.58, SD=7.78, α=0.553). The measures were used in multiple hierarchical regressions to predict WWE social media use.

For social media engagement of WWE social media, respondents were asked "When watching a live WWE show or event" how likely they did each of the following: follow WWE social media, interact with the social media, comment about it, or search what is being discussed online. Each item used a Likert scale to measure the frequency for which they did so, from "never" to "always." Responses were summed and averaged (M=2.96, SD=64.39, Cronbach's Alpha α=0.857) to form composite variables for analysis.

Gratifications of Social Media

The 18 Uses and Gratifications items were analyzed with a principle component factor analysis with Varimax rotation to answer RQ1 and to test H1 and H2. Statistical tests were calculated to verify how these 18 items grouped together to coalesce into the gratifications for this sample.[1] Thus, Table 1 indicates presents the five main reasons WWE fans gave for why they followed WWE social media accounts.

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[1] The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.828) indicated that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated significant correlations among the items for analysis (X^2=961.86, df=153, p<.000). A five-factor solution, with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0, accounted for 68.94% of the total variance being explained.

Table 1: Gratifications of WWE Social Media

Measures	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue of Rotated Factor	Variance Explained	1	2
Habit	**3.86**	**.875**	**.86**	**6.96**	**38.66**		
It's part of my daily routine	3.71	1.25				.796	-.0
It's a habit of mine	3.46	1.32				.765	.1
I always do	4.10	1.08				.751	.0
I find what the Superstars post fascinating	4.08	1.14				.604	.3
I can learn more about my favorite superstars	3.64	1.29				**.540**	.4
I always have access to them	3.71	1.28				**.536**	.0
Voyeurism	**3.53**	**.820**	**.72**	**1.732**	**9.62**		
I enjoy reading about others' people	3.85	1.14				-.057	**.8**
I like to watch events in others' lives	4.01	1.07				.175	**.7**
I can see how others interact with the accounts	3.79	1.13				.151	**.5**
Entertainment	**3.88**	**1.08**	**.85**	**1.59**	**8.86**		
WWE programming amuses me	4.18	1.13				.117	.0
WWE programming entertains me	4.00	1.13				.112	.1
I can see what is going on with the WWE	3.69	1.19				.412	.4
Relaxation	**3.61**	**.89**	**.89**	**1.12**	**6.22%**		
It relaxes me	3.73	1.18				.176	.1
It allows me to unwind	3.91	1.08				.262	.1
It's a pleasant break in my day	3.52	1.18				.192	.1
Reality	**3.44**	**1.04**	**.623**	**1.0**	**5.58**		
I find the superstars more fascinating than what's on fictional programming	3.20	.91				.109	.1
I find the WWE more enjoyable than fictional programming	3.21	1.28				.081	.0

Table 2: Hiearchical Multiple Regression Analysis Summary Predicting WWE Social Media Use (N=206)

Variable	B	SEB	β	R²	ΔR²
Step 1				.000	.000
(Constant)	6.485	2.15	.008		
Contextual Age	.149				
Step 2				.326	.326
Constant	-10.960	10.838	-.027		
Contextual Age	-.518	1.948	.115		
Locus of Control	2.515	2.145	-.192		
Parasocial Relation	-3.420	2.067			
Affinity	**9.356**	**1.583**	**.644*****		
Step 3				.360	.035
Constant	-8.475	10.69	-.034		
Contextual Age	-.659	1.91	.123		
Locus of Control	2.699	2.105	**-.243***		
Parasocial Relation	**-4.310**	**2.07**	**.596*****		
Affinity	**8.653**	**1.59**	**.206***		
Social Media Repetoire	**.340**	**.166**			
Step 4				.388	.028
Constant	-5.730	10.63	-.058		
Contextual Age	-1.141	1.90	-.096		
Locus of Control	2.100	2.10	**-.306***		
Parasocial Relation	-5.431	2.13	**.536*****		
Affinity	**7.785**	**1.63**	-.185		
Social Media Repetoire	.305	.164	-.209		
S.M. Engagement	3.051	1.631			
Step 5				.420	.032
Constant	-11.274	12	-.044		
Contextual Age	-.867	2	.088		
Locus of Control	1.94	2.24	**-.431****		
Parasocial Relation	**-7.66**	**2.60**	**.518*****		
Affinity	**7.53**	**1.78**	**.152**		
Social Media Repetoire	.251	.169	.158		
S.M. Engagement	2.31	1.77	.140		
Habit	2.28	2.42	-.038		
Voyeur	-.552	1.74	-.020		
Entertainment	-.326	2.08	-.006		
Relax	-.080	1.82	.185		
Reality	2.904	1.93			

*p<.05, ** p<.01, **, p<001 ***

Discussion

This exploratory study examined the consumption of WWE social media by viewers through a uses-and-gratifications theoretical framework (Katz, Blumler, and Guretvich). This study adds to the existing body of uses-and-gratification literature and can provide insights to the rapidly evolving entertainment environment as social media becomes more than a complement of legacy media, but rather a routine part of the viewing experience. The findings for each hypothesis and research question will be discussed in numerical order.

To answer RQ1, the first factor, "habit," was created from the six items (α=0.863).[2] The second factor, "voyeurism" was created from the three items (α=0.720).[3] The third factor, composed of two entertainment items and one surveillance item, created an "entertainment" scale (α=0.85).[4] The fourth factor contained three items to form the "relaxation" scale (α=0.89).[5] The final factor that emerged from analysis was composed of three items, two of the items were entertainment items, while one was from voyeurism: "reality" (α=0.623).[6]). The categories of entertainment, voyeurism, and habit were dominant in their respective groupings after their respective factor analysis, thus providing empirical support for H1 and H2.

To answer RQ2, a series of multiple regressions were conducted in the following order of variables: contextual age, locus of control, parasocial

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[2] Eigenvalue of 6.96 and explained 38.66% of the total variance.

[3] Eigenvalue of 1.732 and explained 9.62% of the variance.

[4] Eigenvalue of 1.59 and explained 8.86% of the variance.

[5] Eigenvalue of 1.12 and explained 6.22% of the variance.

[6] Eigenvalue was 1.0 and it accounted for 5.58% of the variance.

relationship, affinity, social media repertoire, social media use, and gratifications.[7]
Such tests can indicate the extent to which any one variable can predict the
presence of another variable. The dependent variable was the number of hours
one spent on social media. The final equation was found to be statistically
significant ($F_{(11, 72)}$=4.734, p=0.000). It accounted for 31% of the variance.
Parasocial interaction (ß= -0.431, p=0.004) and affinity (ß=0.518, p=0.000) were
the two statistically significant predictors of the equation (Table 2).

RQ1 asked what kinds of gratifications are most likely to be sought from
WWE social media (Table 1). The concept of habit was a dominant gratification
in this study. WWE social media users habitually engaged with WWE social
media because it was part of their routine when WWE live programming is on.
This finding is important for several reasons. First, it is unique from Rubin's
("Ritualized and Instrumental") concepts of ritualized and instrumental use of
media. The activity is routine, meaning it is not done consciously or with a guided
intent; it is, rather, part of a WWE viewer's daily activity. Social media accounts
can be accessed anywhere and at any time, further easing any difficulty a WWE
viewer would have to make WWE social media a part of their daily routine.

Voyeurism was the second prevalent gratification found in the factor analysis.
It is logical to hypothesize that users of WWE social media would want to see
what these "larger-than-life" performers or personalities do when the broadcast is
not on—be it workouts, social activities or other content that let users "peel back
the curtain" to see behind the scenes. Because WWE programming is a mixture of
reality television and athletic contest, voyeurism (a gratification found by
Papacharissi and Mendelson in reality television use) would make inherent sense.
Thus, H1 displayed weak evidence of being true. Surveillance became parts of
other factors.

H2 had statistical evidence to support it. Since social media by and large runs
on an Internet connection, it would make sense that Internet gratifications would
also be present for WWE social media use. Both entertainment and relaxation
were represented strongly in the factor analysis, making up the third and fourth

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[7] All regression models were tested for multicollinearity and not one variable scored more than 4.0
in the variance inflation test (VIF) during analysis. Assumptions of linearity, normally
distributed errors and uncorrelated errors were checked and met for all regression analyses.

factors. Social media offers a blend of entertainment and relaxation for its users, especially with entertainment-based programming.

The concept of "reality," the fifth factor discovered because of the factor analysis, is unique to WWE social media. With the unique avenue of programming that constitutes WWE live programming as an amalgamation of theatre, entertainment, reality television, and gameshow, the on-air product seems more "real" to users than traditional fiction programming as the content is live and the story is unfolding before the viewers' eyes. Even though outcomes are predetermined, users feel as if they are watching the next tragedy or triumph play out before their eyes. Perhaps, because they use WWE social media concurrently with live programming, users may feel as if they have some say in the outcome if their "guy or girl" wins that evening. Overall, most gratifications of legacy media and the Internet appeared in the factor analysis. Perhaps the most important finding was the creation of a new gratification that is specific to WWE social media—"reality."

RQ2 asked what were the predictors of WWE social media use (Table 2). The psychological antecedents of parasocial interaction and affinity were the predictors of WWE social media use, but parasocial interaction had an inverse relationship. This finding indicates psychological attachments are the strongest predictor in explaining why people use WWE social media. A variety of possible explanations exist for this finding, but one possible rationale is the image in which users view the WWE superstars—as gladiators. Users may not view the on-screen characters and their social media personae as not being real humans with emotions, pain, and feelings, but rather as "products," seeing the superstars as ultimately expendable. Perhaps it's the blurring of these lines regarding what is "real" and what is not "real" that creates this inverse relationship for parasocial interaction. Users would develop an affinity towards the superstars that they identify with on some level, yet may dislike another superstar who may prevent their "guy's" or "girl's" in-ring success, but they still feel as if they have some idea of what that superstar is like both on and offline. The less a parasocial interaction happens, the more a user would base their affinity for that superstar on why or why not they want his or her superstar to win. Ultimately, in a gladiatorial contest, one participant is picked over another based upon a variety of factors. On WWE programming and social media, maybe the superstar is an underdog in the storyline that a viewer identifies with or maybe they have resentment towards authority.

Limitations

This study, while as comprehensive as possible, does have its limitations. Limitations are discussed to clarify this study's contribution to uses-and-gratifications literature and offer suggestions for future research. This study only examined why WWE social media is used, and not the live programming or other media WWE employs to distribute content. More work can be done to understand how uses for and gratifications from WWE social media relate to other WWE-related media uses and gratifications.

The sampling method for this study was appropriate and accounted for cultural differences as it was posted in places where one would expect to find WWE social media users: on social media, specifically Facebook WWE fan groups. The study was also conducted in English, the primary language of WWE content; however, WWE programming is presented in 24 other languages, suggesting that nuances in gratifications, and their predictors, may not have been measured. Also, the sample size and location does not allow for statistical generalization to the entire population of WWE social media users.

Another limitation concerns the self-report nature of the questionnaire used in the study. Sometimes capturing truly cognitive responses without any other confounding variables can be a less than perfect science in uses-and-gratifications research. Some researchers have argued that such studies routinely rely too much on self-interpretation rather than observable behavior (Rosenstein and Grant). Subjects may not be aware of the higher-order cognitive processes that control their behavior (Nisbett and Wilson) and self-report based on whatever stimuli, including some effect of social desirability (Catania, Gibson, Chitwood and Coates). Sundar and Limperos also argued that gratifications are "conceptualized and operationalized too broadly" and miss more refined gratifications in new media.

Since this study attempted to identify the "why" people use WWE social media and a very preliminary "what" they are doing, more research would call for more of the "what" and the "how." An online ethnography would also help examine WWE social media users' culture. This method would allow for more rich data to be collected and preserve the form of online interaction. This would also account for any lack of validity in self-reported responses.

Conclusion

This study adds to the existing body of literature of uses and gratifications, but with a focus on a specific and burgeoning audience: WWE social media. Five gratifications were found of WWE social media, four of which were found to be gratifications for other tangentially related mediums in legacy and the Internet. Most importantly, this study found a new gratification unique WWE social media— "reality."

Perhaps no single entertainment entity incorporates social media into its programming and characters more than WWE, making this study currently unique. The WWE's use of social media will only continue to grow, especially with younger generations becoming the next wave of news consumers that will drive the platforms and content of tomorrow's entertainment decisions. In addition, other television programming may follow suit, as more television shows promote themselves through social television practices such as livetweeting. Further, as the lines between reality and performance of the celebrities, like the WWE superstars, on social media become blurred, so does this study's significance.

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Independent Professional Wrestling as Crucible for Research into Masculinity

JOHN HEPPEN AND DAVID BEARD

Excerpt from "For Most Men, an Extra Large Heart Means the Grave, but Most Men Aren't Terry Funk"

> I said Well, how big are Ricky Steamboat's arms?
> He said Oh, they're a lot bigger than yours, too.
> I said Well—I want you to know something, neighbor:
> I have an extra large. An extra large. Maybe not arms. Maybe not legs.
> But I have an extra large.
> What I have an extra large in is a heart
> (Wrestling promotional patter from Terry Funk, delineated as a poem by
> Colette Arrand, You Have to Deal with Me Breathing, pg. 5)

The epigraph to this essay pushes the hypermasculinity of Terry Funk's wrestling promo tough talk into tension with the gentler emotions of poetry. Terry Funk is a long-time wrestler from the 1960s to the present who wrestled for WWF (World Wrestling Federation, later World Wrestling Entertainment or WWE). Funk achieved his greatest success in the mid-1980s when he feuded with Hulk Hogan and appeared in a tag-team match in *Wrestlemania 2*. He brandished a cowboy gimmick in the mid-80s, and later in his career became known for hardcore and death matches featuring blood, weapons, broken tables, and ladders both in Japan and in various smaller wrestling organizations in the United States. His promotions and interviews made him a long-time fan favorite.

Funk's promo text was delineated as poetry by Colette Arrand, a wrestling fan who is playing with the hypermasculine culture of wrestling in a series of small-print-run, photocopier quality zines called *You Have to Deal with Me Breathing*. In these zines, published through the Fear of a Ghost Planet press, Arrand takes the angry, intense speeches or "promos" delivered by wrestlers between matches on television and delineates them as poetry. These are the moments when

wrestlers "build heat" and generate interest for a future match on television or live show.

Arrand's literary, openly emotional expression of her fandom is significant for this essay because it runs counter to the dominant narrative of wrestling fandom, in which fans wave signs that egg on and accelerate the masculine culture of the ring, hoping to be caught on camera for the national TV audience. Arrand is engaged in a small-scale, local fandom, selling her zines at coffee shops, music shops and alternative culture outlets—anywhere willing to display a photocopied expression of fandom for sale. Arrand may never be in the background on WWE's *Raw*, but in her hyperlocal expression of fandom, she may be an indication of a new, local wrestling fan culture. Local wrestling may be an expression of a new wrestling culture—a wrestling culture that works against hypermasculinity. Professional wrestling has long been recognized as a field of "hypermasculinity," in which the cardboard cutouts of professional wrestling characters enact extreme aggression and other stereotypes of masculine identity.[1] Corollary to wrestling's hypermasculinity has been an absence, if not hostility, to alternative masculinities in the national, mass-media form of pro wrestling. However, in local pro wrestling communities, more diverse norms for masculine identity can be found in the ring. For example, Minnesota is home to Terrance Griep, whose wrestling name is Tommy "Spider-Baby" Saturday. Griep claims the distinction of being the first openly gay professional wrestler inside and outside the ring.[2] Griep, who is a professional comic creator and freelance writer as well as wrestler, is not crusading for equality as he performs as Spider-Baby. In the context of the twin cities wrestling scene, he reflects the values of a community that has been open to LGBTQ identity for a long time.

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[1] We take "hypermasculinity" from Patrice A. Oppliger. Masculinity has been at the core of pro wrestling studies, including central essays from Douglas Battema and Philip Sewell, and Henry Jenkins III.

[2] Spider-Baby's claim is complicated; there have been gay wrestlers who have played straight characters and straight wrestlers who have played gay characters. Griep's claim is to being the first openly gay inside and outside the ring. As a regional wrestler Griep may not be the most prominent wrestler to make this claim. Matt Cage came out as gay in 2015 and is currently retired. Cage wrestled in slightly higher profile independent leagues and his news was mentioned in larger media outlets like the *New York Daily News* (Murphy) and *E! News* (Malec). Mike Parrow also made headlines recently when he came out (Moye).

By keeping our eyes on local, independent professional wrestling, we can see changes in the masculine culture of professional wrestling that are not visible at the national level. In this essay, we examine independent regional professional wrestling or indie wrestling (IW) and indie fan communities to assert that independent wrestling is a site for circulating alternative models for masculinity and gender. To do this, we proceed in three steps:

First, we survey the literature on professional wrestling, masculinity and gender, noting that most of it focuses on professional wrestling as a mass-media phenomenon (hereafter called "mass-media wrestling"). Therein, we see an opening for a novel contribution to the study of wrestling from the perspective of local circuits, with an eye toward the construction of masculinity within independent wrestling.

Second, methodologically, we look at independent wrestling promotions as overlapping periodic markets. We will use the tools of geography to map the venues of multiple independent wrestling promotions in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota. We also examine the relationship between where independent wrestling events are held and the economic character of the locales.

Third, we use geographic analysis to map Griep's wrestling activities. Griep wrestles in a series of promotions within the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-Saint Paul) area, reaching across Minnesota and into Wisconsin. We chart the appearances he made (inside the ring and in character outside the ring) as a map of the presence of his reconstruction of wrestling masculinity. As Griep wrestles in new venues, he brings his transformative masculinity with him.

Griep works to move us away from the homophobic and violently masculinist norms of mass-media wrestling. Many more kinds of men can express themselves, both inside and outside the ring, in independent wrestling than in the national circuit. The study of independent wrestling is poised to make significant contributions to our understanding of professional wrestling as a cultural phenomenon.

Decline of Regional Professional Wrestling as Cultural Phenomenon

The development of mass-media wrestling has erased local wrestling from the consciousness of the public and often from the consciousness of scholars. Nationally televised wrestling began in 1949, when the DuMont network aired

Wrestling from the Marigold (the Marigold Arena in Chicago) nationally (Shoemaker 39). This was a kind of false start, though; the rise of basic cable television in the 1980s was the real beginning of the end of regional professional wrestling in popular consciousness. For example, Vince McMahon's WWF was televised on the USA cable network and syndicated across the country. By 1985's *WrestleMania*, the WWF began putting its competitors out of business, slowly killing the old territorial system and becoming, to the public and to scholars, the major league of professional wrestling.

Independent wrestling, however, fills a void left in the old territory circuits when the WWF created a national market. Promoters stage shows in armories; American Legion and VFW halls; commercial banquet halls; nightclubs and smaller music venues; community centers; or gymnasiums. During the warmer months rings may be set up outside on bar parking lots or at county fairs and festivals. Generally, independent wrestling can be found in any arena available for the right price for a promoter (Beard and Heppen, "Wrestling Ring").

Typically, independent wrestling attracts a class of professional wrestler who achieves only local fame, although "guests" from mass-media wrestling are often invited to wrestle, referee, and sign photos to boost attendance. Additionally, many former wrestlers with national profiles, after being let go from WWE, TNA, ROH, and other major televised/arena promoters, often wrestle the indie circuit where they serve as a top draw. For example, Cody Rhodes (son of Dusty Rhodes) appeared at South Saint Paul High School in October 2016 at a Twin Cities indie show to sign autographs, take pictures, and wrestle. Rhodes was one of WWE's top attractions from 2007 to 2016 and later asked for his release (for more, see Castleberry in this volume). Even older wrestlers who found fame in the old territories before WWE became prominent serve as attractions at local indie shows. These guests, who earn both appearance fees as well as fees from fans for signatures and photographs, often are the only wrestlers who can earn a living full-time in indie wrestling.

Because promoters offer low wages, most independent pro wrestlers support themselves primarily with income earned in non-wrestling-based employment. Some independent pro wrestlers also supplement their income at wrestling shows by selling autographed photographs, pictures with fans, and t-shirts at "gimmick tables" (Beard and Heppen, "Wrestling Ring"). Often the supplemental income from gimmick tables can supersede what they make wrestling.

For these reasons (i.e. intimate venue size, close to home, with a high level of wrestler-fan interaction) independent wrestling is not just "minor league wrestling," in which the wrestlers and fans watch something approximating the major leagues. Independent wrestling is a different beast, closer to the hearts and values of the audience it serves. As a result, independent wrestling can be a crucible for studying the values of performers and fans of professional wrestling with more nuance than most studies of the mass media phenomenon, a project we began in "The Dynamics of Identity in the Communities of Local Professional Wrestling" and are picking up in this essay.

While the national wrestling engine of the WWE has replaced most independent wrestling in the consciousness of the public, it has also erased indie wrestling from the agenda of much pro wrestling studies scholarship. For example, while much has been written about the ways that professional wrestling reflects national values and anxieties (e.g. Henricks), the focus has been on mass-media wrestling. Similarly, scholars have studied gender politics, xenophobia, and tensions over race and class (see Maguire and Wozniak; Campbell) in mass-media wrestling, but much less has been written about the vagabond experience of independent wrestling, which enacts local identities values and anxieties (See Hill; Smith) The relatively sparse literature creates our opening for a novel contribution to the study of the construction of gender from the perspective of independent wrestling.

Mapping Independent Wrestling: The Promotions

Our central methodology is Geographic Information Science (GIS) technology. GIS technology allows us to create maps of wrestling performances and to merge those maps with maps derived from census data to get a better picture of the wrestling world of the Twin Cities. We map the appearances of a single local pro wrestler over a two-year period; we map some of the most active wrestling promotions in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul (Twin Cities) area, and we overlay income data to enhance our picture of the overlapping periodic markets for independent wrestling in our community.

The promoters of pro wrestling in the Twin Cities area constitute multiple periodic markets. Periodic markets, as analyzed in geography (Veeck), are markets that appear for a limited time to serve a community, like a Saturday-only

farmer's market. Periodic markets exist when there is not enough demand for a permanent market, like a grocery store that is open 7 days a week. Independent wrestling, like a farmer's market, moves from location to location and has limited operating hours with periodic shows (weekly, monthly, or even annual shows, depending on the promoter's resources and the audience's desire). A VFW hall might host a pro wrestling show on one Saturday a month. Also like a farmer's market, the product at a wrestling show may vary each time it appears. Some wrestlers appear at every show and others appear selectively.

Periodic markets become viable when a threshold population is not present to support the market on a regular and continual basis. In the theory of central places, a threshold population is the number of people necessary before a particular good or service can be provided in an area or range (Christaller). The Twin Cities metro area fails to meet the threshold population for even weekly wrestling shows in a single venue, despite serving as home to approximately 3,000,000 people and having once been the central home of one of the major wrestling promotions in the years before the WWE monopoly, the American Wrestling Association. Regrettably for these fans, a vital culture of wrestling in the Twin Cities in the 1980s has not persisted into the 21st century.

Periodic markets reduce the distance that a buyer must travel to obtain goods and services. In our Minnesota example, shows are dispersed across more than a dozen venues from Western Wisconsin to Central Minnesota. The distance to commute to a show is minimized for at least some of the audience, some of the time. However, there are diehards, the core of the community of fans, who will travel across the distances from venue to venue, eagerly consuming all the wrestling that they can.

Periodic markets also serve social functions. In a study of periodic markets in rural China, Gregory Veeck found that, despite the growth of permanent vendors, periodic markets still held appeal for social functions. Villagers continued to patronize periodic markets because it gave them a chance to see friends and relatives and allow for continued social interaction with people (Veeck). As we began to discuss in our "Dynamics of Identity" essay examining local wrestling fandom online, local indie shows serve a social function for fans of the local wrestling community, becoming a social event as well as a spectacle.

To discuss independent wrestling in the Twin Cities area, we need to orient readers to the major promoters. Some promotions are significant for their longevity: Steel Domain Wrestling (SDW) of Lakeville, Minnesota started

promoting professional wrestling in 1998 and claims to be the longest running pro wrestling promotion in Minnesota. Others have a different hook, like F1rst Wrestling, founded in 2007, which attracted media attention quickly by booking shows at First Avenue, the nightclub made famous in the movie *Purple Rain*. Heavy on Wrestling is the geographic outlier, programming two to four shows a year in venues two to three hours north of the Twin Cities but using primarily Twin Cities talent. Other promotions include American Wrestling Federation (AWF), Independent Wrestling International (IWI), Minnesota Independent Wrestling (MIW), Northern Lights Wrestling (NLW), Prime Time Wrestling (PTW), Pro Wrestling Battleground, and Revolution Wrestling Association (RWA), which also promotes shows in Iowa, just outside the range of this study.

Altogether, this appears to be a vibrant market, with at least ten formal promoters exhibiting in a two-year period. Map One shows the wide-spread geographic distribution of venues around the region. Map Two illustrates the relative income of the areas where these venues exist. As seen in Map Two, the venues for independent wrestling exist in relatively low-income neighborhoods (for the Twin Cities area, at least)—not the poorest neighborhoods, to be sure, but at or near the median income for the region of $66,000. This is relatively consonant with audience data for national wrestling TV shows, where half the WWE audience earned less than $50,000 per year in income, according to survey group Scarborough (Harrington).

In the aggregate, independent wrestling shows occur on average once a week within driving distance of the Twin Cities Metro. In some weeks, competing promotions will host events in the same week, typically geographically distant from each other and programmed on different days (e.g. a performance on Saturday in St. Paul promoted by IWI, a performance in Minneapolis promoted by F1rst on Sunday) to prevent head-to-head competition for the hardcore audience that will drive to multiple venues. (During holiday weeks, no events may be promoted.) Thus, as many wresting performances occur in a year within this Twin Cities periodic market as there are nationally televised performances of WWE's *Raw*. This is a deeply understudied area of professional wrestling studies, and analysis promises to reveal new dimensions of the culture of professional wrestling.
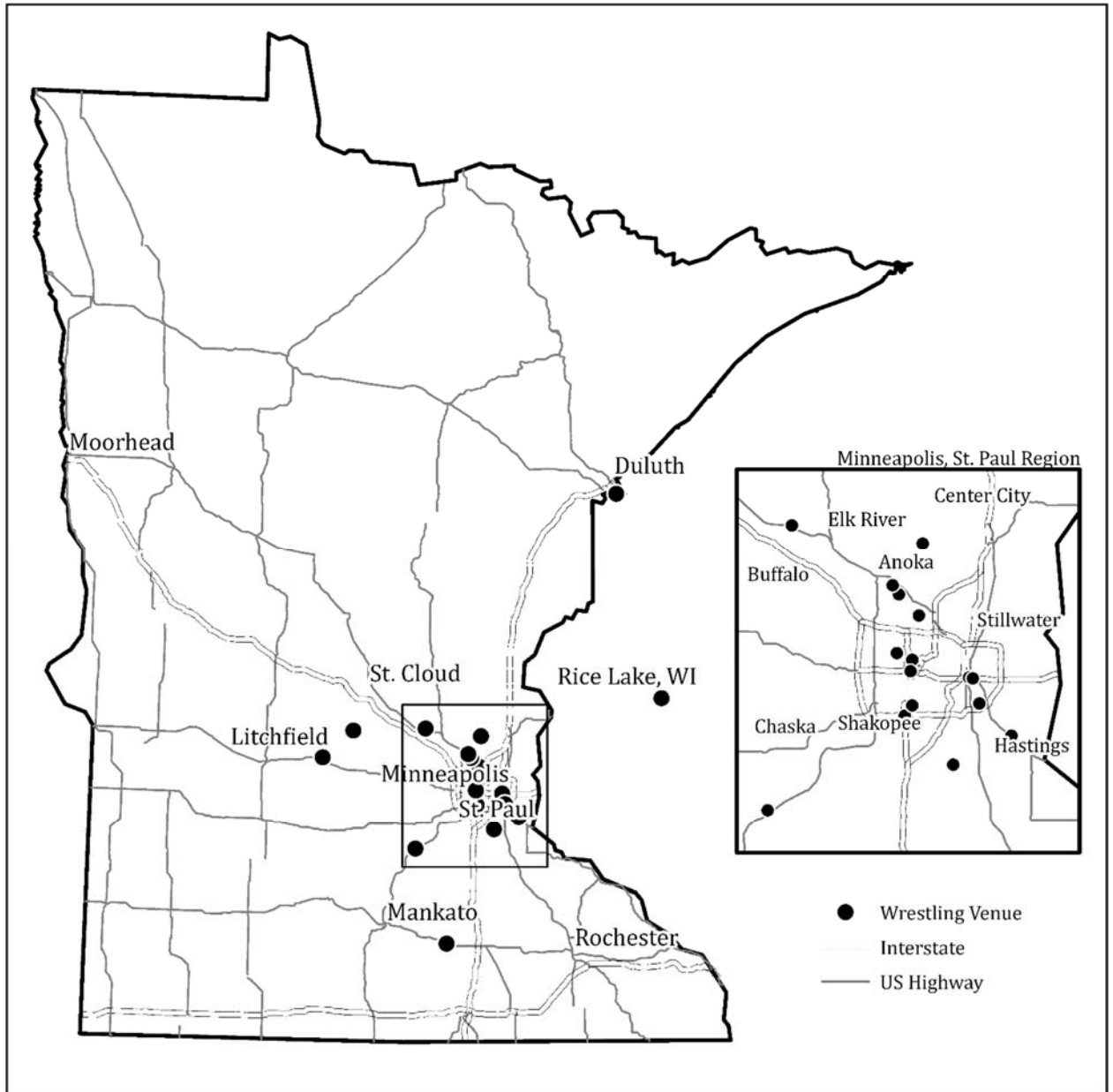
Map One: Location of venues within 200 miles of the Twin Cities area, with inset to see spatial distribution within the Twin Cities metro area more clearly.
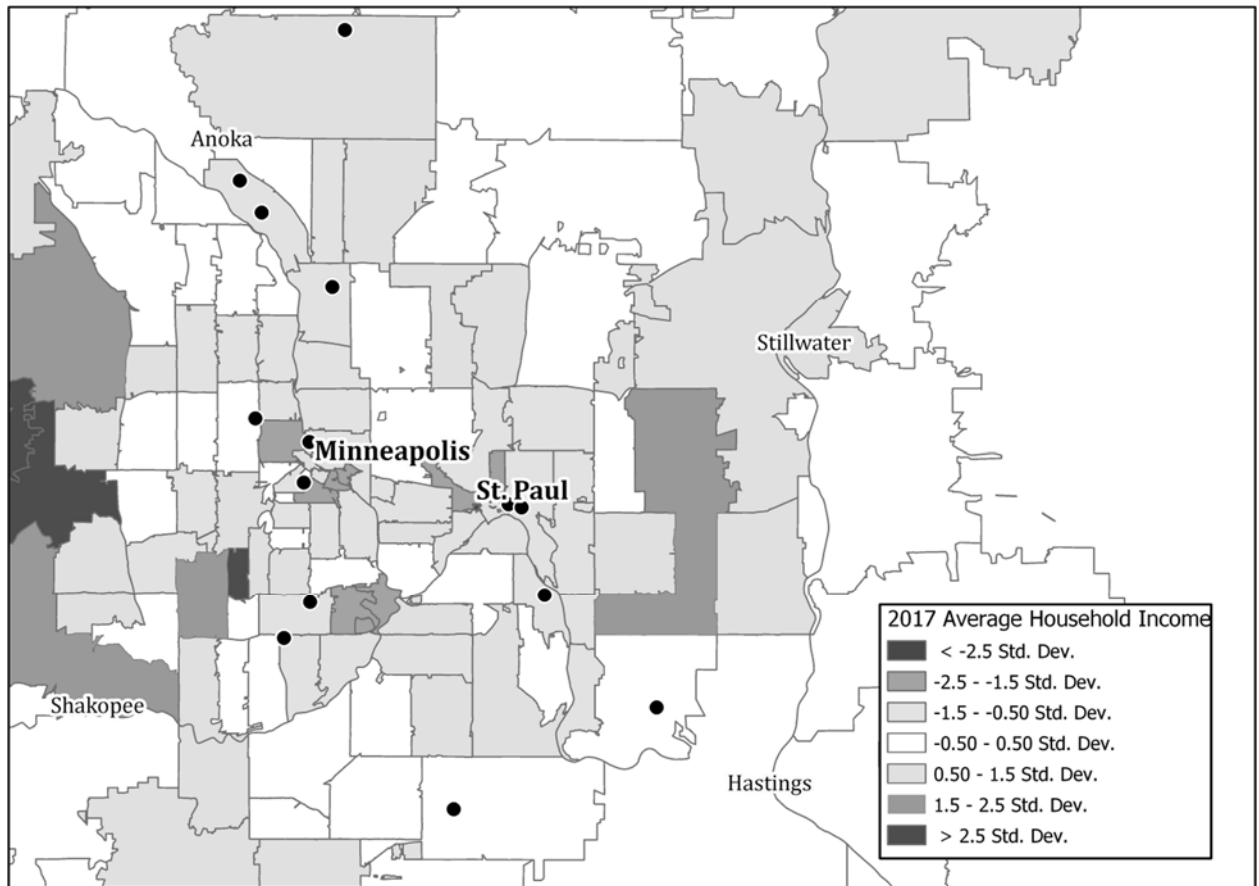
Map Two: Income ranges of location of venues within 100 miles of the Twin Cities

Mapping Regional Professional Wrestling: Tommy "Spider-Baby" Saturday

GIS mapping of the Minnesota independent wrestling circuit lets us trace the visibility of individual wrestlers, too. A leading figure in the Twin Cities market is Terrance Griep. Dwight Hobbes featured Griep in the *TC Daily Planet,* where he calls Griep "an actor-athlete" who "rassles on the Midwest Pro Wrestling circuit as heel character, Tommy 'the SpiderBaby' Saturday." Hobbes praises Griep's celebrity in the gay community, noting that "The International Gay

Outdoors Organization named Terrance one of the Nine Toughest Gay Guys in America."

Notably, Griep does not perform his homosexuality stereotypically in the ring; he is not an obviously gay caricature, in the way that homosexuality has been performed in the ring in the past. Early gay wrestlers have been closeted in their personal life, while straight wrestlers have played with gay stereotypes in their professional persona before as "heel" characters (or bad guys) whom the crowd generally cheers against. The late Gorgeous George and Adorable Adrian Adonis were two of the most famous examples, routinely booed not just for what they did in the ring, but in the ways that their presence in the ring challenged the norms for masculine identity that the heroic "face" wrestlers would restore when they pinned the heels to the mat.

Nonetheless, Griep is clear in his media persona and his stage presence that he is gay, without "flaming" or playing within stereotypes. Fans who perceive his homosexuality generally respond well. Griep explains: "Most people find 'out gay man' and 'pro wrestler' the most incongruent aspects of my person. I think everybody is a bundle of contradictions, but mine—if they really are contradictions—are swathed in spandex and big talk, so they stand out." (Hobbes) As Griep describes it, older generations of stereotypes of wrestlers were booed for who they were, as gay characters challenging the norms of masculinity. Today's fans recognize that he's a "heel" who happens to be gay, and so they boo what he does, not who he is.

We have attempted to assess the impact of Griep's work as a wrestler. As recorded by *PWTorch*, Griep (and his alter-ego, Spider-Baby) has been wrestling as openly out since November 2003, a premiere covered by *Out Magazine*. As Griep tells the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, he wrestles anywhere from one to three times a week (Hobbes). Using GIS technology, we mapped the frequency of his performances within 200 miles of the Twin Cities over a two-year period (2015-2016). Map Three illustrates that Griep performs most often in the population centers of St. Paul and Minneapolis, because those population centers have the greatest demand and so the most frequent appearance of the periodic market. Yet Griep's character, with its performance of an alternative masculinity, has a far and frequent reach. We use graduated circles to the number of shows with Spider-Baby held at each location; the larger the circle, the more often Spider-Baby appeared at the venue in a two-year period. Map Three's inset shows us the

fourteen venues within the Twin Cities metro area; the larger map includes venues up to two hours away.
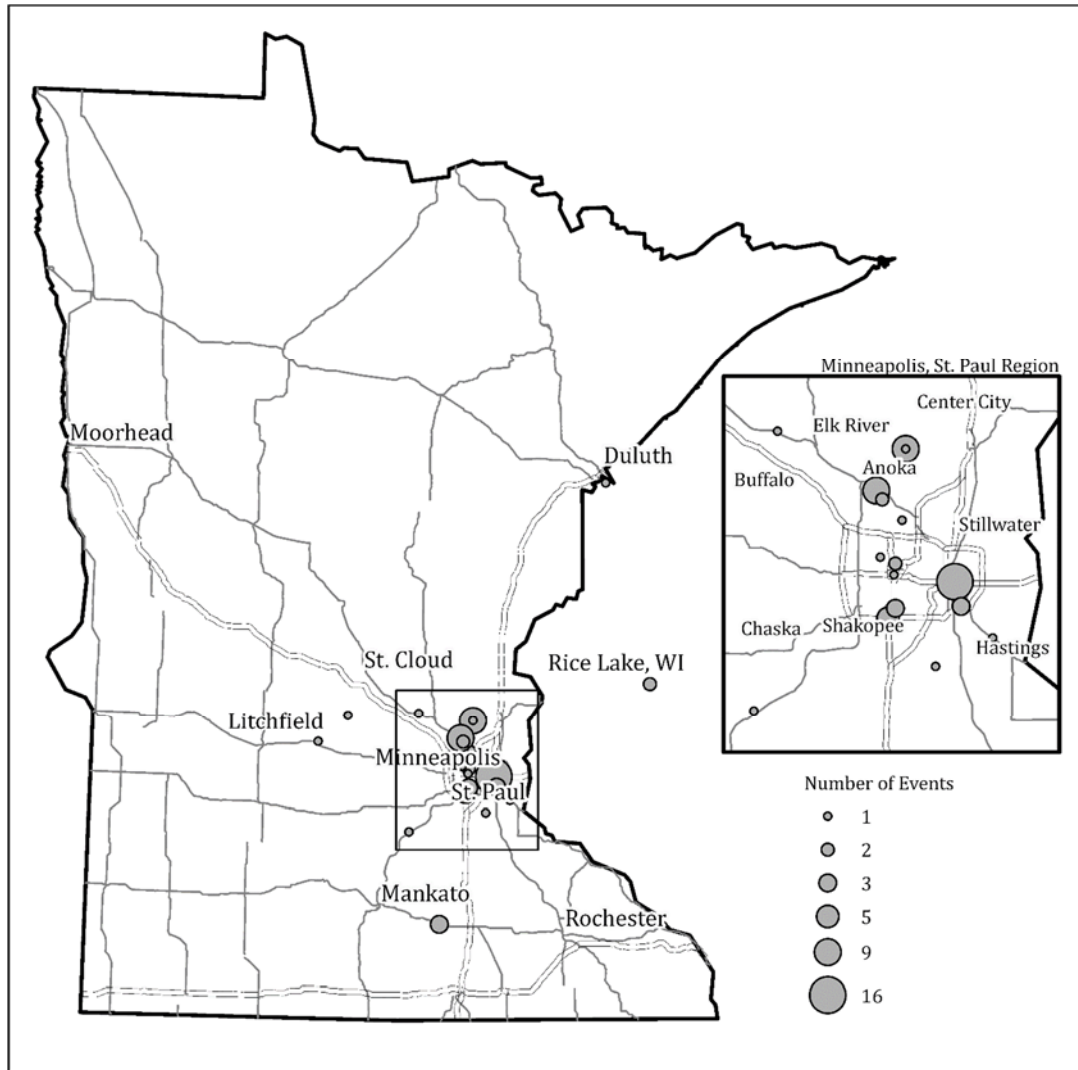
Map Three: Frequency of Performances of Tommy "Spider Baby" Saturday (Terrance Griep) within 200 miles of the Twin Cities

We can measure Griep's significance by the sheer number of his appearances, by the committed energy of his fans, and by the depth of his presence in other media. Griep performs on average nearly weekly in the Minnesota independent wrestling circuit, introducing his character to fans in the wilds of western

Wisconsin as well as the urban center. Fans love his work. One fan gave Griep a custom action figure representing his "Spider-Baby" alter ego (see Figure One).

Figure One: Action figure of Tommy "Spider-Baby" Griep (Figure and photo by Dale Pople, by permission of the subject).

Griep reaches out to his fans in other media, outside the ring. Spider-Baby is a recurring villain in a comic book, *The Champions*, published by Heroic Comics. The characters in the *Champions* comic book universe have been published more or less continuously since the 1980s. While they are by no means as popular as the characters we recognize in the Marvel and DC universes, they have a dedicated fan base, and Spider-Baby is one of their villains of note. As in the ring, the comic book character is a gay heel.

Further, Griep's character maintains a presence online. In addition to his personal page, which includes photographs with his mother, always beaming with pride, as well as an email list for his dedicated fans, Griep uses his online presence to engage in activism. Griep has participated in the "It Gets Better" social media movement. Initiated in 2010 by author Dan Savage, "It Gets Better" is a series of testimonial videos designed to help gay youth move through suicidal

ideas by hearing the survival stories of elders. Griep's video has received more than five thousand views, a remarkable success for a man whose fanbase gets together in groups of a few dozen to a few hundred in VFW halls on weekends. A still from the video is reproduced in figure two below.

Figure Two: Still of Tommy Spider-Baby Saturday in his "It Gets Better" video, by permission of Terrance Griep.

We'd like to pause here to compare the Terry Funk epigraph that started this essay with this "It Gets Better" video. We opened this essay with the image of a pro wrestler staring his competition down, looking hard into the camera to tell the audience that he was bringing the heat into the ring. The televised promo video was a performance of antagonism and competition, promising pain for the audience's pleasure, as a genre. For more than fifty years, wrestlers made eye contact with a television camera to promise hypermasculine violence as a spectacle. When Collette Arrand turns Funk's language into poetry, she is reading the text against the grain.

Here, however, in the tiny Midwestern market of independent wrestling, a professional wrestler is telling a different kind of story into the YouTube camera. Here is a gay man talking about "something near and dear" to his heart: failing to live up to the expectations set by his families when he discovered he was gay. He talks about "bullying myself," turning the hypermasculinity of his culture against himself. The traditional wrestler glares into the camera, with "Mean" Gene Okerlund at his side, reveling in the culture of masculine bullying. Griep speaks from the heart about internalizing that culture and planning his own suicide to escape it.

As he worked out the time and the moment of his death, in a graveyard, he found the headstone of an eight-year-old boy. Spider-Baby contemplates all the things that he had experienced that that eight-year-old could not, and he turns from his plans for self-harm toward what he will be able to experience moving forward. What he experiences is success. He's a wrestler, so he engages in some tough talk about his championship matches and about the unlikeliness of any bully to even come near him now.

The difference between Funk's promo talk and Griep's turn in front of the camera is striking. Funk *enacts* a culture of hypermasculine violence. Griep *critiques* it. But unlike the authors of this essay, critiquing it from our armchairs, Griep critiques it from within. Moreover, in enacting that critique from within, he is cracking open what is possible for masculinity in professional wrestling. Pickup within the wrestling media (e.g. fan publications like *PWTorch*), within gay media (e.g. *Out Magazine*), within local media (e.g. *Twin Cities Daily Planet*) and beyond demonstrates that Griep is beginning to make change inside and outside the wrestling community.

Conclusion

The trajectory of professional wrestling research sees scholars keeping their eyes primarily on the mass-media wrestling. We see this fixation as problematic for two reasons. First, ratings on mass-media wrestling are dropping: as Alfred Konuwa notes, "WWE's viewership keeps falling with no bottom established," and potentially, with those ratings will decline mass-media wrestling's cultural significance. Research in the 1990s could speak to the significance of mass-media wrestling due to its popularity; those justifications will become more fragile as

ratings decline. Second, scholars with their eyes fixed on wrestling as a mass medium run the risk of missing what is unique and powerful about independent wrestling circuits. By focusing on the big budget, mass-medium, scholars run the risk of mistaking criticism of McDonald's for criticism of cuisine, of mistaking criticism of the new Star Wars movie for criticism of cinema, of mistaking criticism of the Hunger Games novels for criticism of literature. Independent wrestling is low-budget, with low-audience numbers, but potentially significant as a site of cultural work.

In this essay, we have established a theoretical frame for analyzing independent wrestling as periodic markets. An independent wrestling periodic market can be richly populated with competing promotions and dozens of events—as many events and performances of wrestling culture as are typically seen within a year's worth of national televised programming. We have mapped the spaces of those performances, noting their consonance with economic data for national wrestling fandom. The fans of independent wrestling come from the same economic strata that fans of national wrestling come from.

Looking deeper, then, into the Minneapolis-Saint Paul independent wrestling market, we traced the impact of one hard-working wrestler, performing across the periodic market on a nearly-weekly basis. Terrance Griep, wrestling as Tommy "Spider-Baby" Saturday, has performed a new kind of masculinity within the culture of professional wrestling. Judged by the frequency of his performances, he is welcomed within the independent wrestling community. Judged by fan creations like his action figure, by the success of his online and print media appearances, and by his pickup in both wrestling and other media, Griep is finding an audience for his critique of the culture of hypermasculinity of professional wrestling.

Considering other hyperlocal fan efforts, like Collette Arrand's poetry in *You Have to Deal with Me Breathing*, Griep is not alone in the work of transforming masculinity. Scholars should attend to cultural laborers in independent wrestling like these.

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The Unbeatable Monster and the Horror of Professional Wrestling

TIMOTHY BAVLNKA

> "I'm going to rip John Cena apart at SummerSlam. I'm going to leave him in a pile of blood, and urine, and vomit." – Brock Lesnar

On August 17, 2014, Brock Lesnar competed against John Cena for the WWE World Heavyweight Championship at WWE's SummerSlam, their second biggest annual event after WrestleMania. This match would prove to be the beginning of Brock Lesnar's current reign in the WWE, having left and returned several times during his career due to contract negotiations or to pursue other interests. Lesnar's win against WWE's biggest hero is unsurprising, but how the WWE presented this victory to the fans was, as this presentation was markedly different from traditional professional wrestling booking. While Lesnar and Cena wrestled each other previously, the promotional package before this match helped audiences feel the uniqueness of this bout. Cena presents himself as valorous, assuring his fans that he will not give up and will keep the WWE championship on his proud shoulders. Lesnar nonchalantly informs the audience of his assured victory. The video promotional package before the match sets the tone for what is ahead—a hero battling a returning foe.

However, the reality of the match provided a starkly one-sided physical performance by Brock Lesnar, dominating the then-current WWE champion. In the fictional world of the WWE, Lesnar is presented as something *different*— fiercely aggressive, physically superior, and possessing a life of experience outside of professional wrestling. This difference builds Lesnar as an outside force within the fictional reality of the WWE. As such, Lesnar becomes an abnormal entity within the performance of this SummerSlam match. He becomes a monstrous figure within the known-narrative space of the WWE's canon. By embodying the monster archetype in with the WWE, Lesnar communicates how the horror genre can exist within a narrative television property, in which storytelling is propelled by fictional performance of physical combat. Through the

manipulation of genre and the introduction of the monster character type to professional wrestling, a stark tension emerges between the traditional dualism of good versus bad moralities, allowing for a complexity that the traditional notions of storylines and expected diegetic realities do not. While some characters are often referred to as "monsters" by the commentary team, the goal of this essay is to examine an approach to studying monstrousness that can allow for horror to be present in professional wrestling.

As professional wrestling depends on its characters, establishing how a character embodies monstrousness is important. Wrestling fandom has established a character type known as a monster (as opposed to heels or faces). Popular website "TV Tropes" describes this character type as: "He's as strong as he is fast, as tough as he is agile, he's savage and is likely from Parts Unknown. He's a monster!" which embellishes the notion of toughness to "convince the audience this guy is abnormal" ("Wrestling Monster"). This character type is important for the further understanding of wrestling and horror because of its positionality to previously established morality constructs. As Henry Jenkins III notes, "wrestling operates within a dualistic universe: each participant is either a good guy or a villain" (40). If monsters are to represent the abnormal, and the "disturbance of natural order," then they must exist outside of this duality. Folklorist David Gilmore discusses monsters as "embody[ing] all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination" (1). As wrestling is a physical performance of fictional storytelling, the monster in wrestling maintains its status of an "imaginary being...that are usually represented in fiction, art, and folklore" (6). This essay's main analysis considers this monstrousness by examining Brock Lesnar's August 2014 *SummerSlam* match against John Cena, primarily to understand how the content of the match emphasizes Lesnar's construction as a monster.

Genre and the WWE

The WWE exists as a multi-format entertainment company. The WWE's primary television shows, *Raw* and *SmackDown Live*, air live on the USA cable network every Monday and Tuesday. Storylines within these programs culminate in larger television events, traditionally broadcast on pay-per-view, but now also streamed live on WWE's Netflix-esque subscription network. The WWE as a television property exists in both these forms (weekly shows and special live events),

allowing also for the narratives between these events to interact. The WWE's genre (and wrestling in general) depends entirely on the context of the presentation. While it is always a physical performance, it can vary between underdog stories, slapstick comedy, or any variety of potential subgenres. As a television property, it shares the qualities of other fictional programming—a regular set of characters, a serialized storyline, and episodic format, among others (see Castleberry in this volume for more on television studies and professional wrestling).

Professional wrestling is not a televised sport, but rather a form of fictional entertainment. As such, its genre can be discussed similarly to other television programming. Jason Mittell builds a framework for discussing genre on television that is contextual, as he states, "an ongoing multifaceted practice" that relies on specific contexts of presentation and consumption (*Genre and Television*, xii). These contexts fashion an ongoing negotiation between the framing of the show in a scheduling block, intended markets, episode content, and audience engagement. Therefore, the context for television genre is "constantly in flux" (xiv). According to Mittell, genre cannot be considered in a pre-categorized way, but rather in how it is "formed through intertextual relationships between texts" (13). The programming of the WWE and its genre varies considerably, even within the same episode or event. Certain characters can provide comedic relief, while others allow for entertainment more geared toward children, or engage in grittier narratives for older audiences.

When discussing professional wrestling in a general sense, Heather Levi suggests that it "is a liminal genre, one that is closely connected with the category of 'sport,' but cannot be contained by it" (5). Rather than giving a definitive working of wrestling's genre (or potential genre), Levi insists that professional wrestling "occupies a space somewhere between sport, ritual, and theater and is thus capable of drawing its power from all of those sources" (6). Levi is describing wrestling's genre through its physical spectacle and traditional form of display to the public in a live setting. Rather than contextual, where genre works with established norms and traditions, Levi's discussion of genre in wrestling is essentially blank. Professional wrestling can take elements from a variety of genres or performance styles, allowing for a multifaceted presentation of narrative for the audience. This open discourse of the wrestling genre allows for Mittell's contextual understanding. By combining Levi's idea of genre blankness with Mittell's contextualized TV genre analysis, audiences can consider how wrestling

becomes any genre at any given time. Wrestling's traditional narrative space presents genre in the context of: the characters and their moralities; performers and their individual physical styles; the show or event; types of matches and work rate; (blurred and revised) histories of characters; career rivalries; companies and their specific narratives and markets; audiences (at live events, watching live on television, or through streaming services); and others. It has the "capacity to signify" any number of potential genres (Levi 6).

Understanding the generic application of horror to wrestling requires an understanding of how horror works as a structural system. Rather than assuming a genre through the shared set of aesthetics or themes, an analysis of horror's rules provides a way of looking at a media text. Noel Carroll differentiates horror from science fiction or "tales of terror" by noting that the genre centers on the confrontation between humanity's known reality and a different, abnormal reality. The horror exists in the narrative tensions between these confrontations. Further differentiating between these relatable genres, Carroll establishes horror as a genre in which "the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances in the natural order" (16). Monsters, in whatever form they appear, represent a tangible experience between knowable and unknowable, creating a tension between the paradoxical representation of the natural and the abnormal. While paradoxical narratives are not necessarily horrific in and of themselves, Tzvetan Todorov describes this experience of paradoxical realities in horror as "the fantastic" when he writes:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know…there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses…or else the even has indeed taken places, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty…The fantastic is that hesitation experience by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

Horror represents the ability for the impossible to paradoxically exist alongside reality in a horrific way. Further, these confrontations create an affective response of tension, a hesitation of consideration at the possibilities and potentialities exhibited by the presentation of paradoxes. This tension exists narratively through

the conflict within the text and among audience reception, where successful horror can conjure an (often negative) emotional response.

Horror and the WWE

With a horror genre framework in mind, combined with how Mittell and Levi talk about contextuality, the "blankness" of professional wrestling serves as a space where horror occurs. Before an in-depth analysis of who or what constitutes horror in wrestling, it is important to take some time to consider what does not fit within this system. In this discussion, monsters are not the performers' real-life personae, but rather the fictional characters that they play within the diegetic space of professional wrestling, although sometimes these boundaries are porous, allowing for real-life events to cross into the fiction of the WWE. Professional wrestling is often character driven with its storytelling, allowing for a wide variety of characters to exist within its history. As faces (morally good) and heels (morally bad) are prominent, characters aesthetically linked to horror films have been around in wrestling for quite some time.

Often borrowing from horror films, wrestlers used these aesthetics to create more effective heel characters. For instance, wrestler Kevin Sullivan used the media panic of heavy metal music and its associated Satanic panic to create a "Prince of Darkness" persona ("Kevin Sullivan"). In Japan, American wrestlers on tour occasionally dressed deliberately as horror movie villains; Leatherface serves as a prominent example, blatantly copying the look from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Kreikenbohm). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the WWE (then the WWF) had three characters collectively known as The Brood, who were portrayed as actual vampires. Recently, the WWE has featured characters collectively known as The Wyatt Family, a swamp cult that follows and serves the charismatic leader Bray Wyatt. While these characters (and many others) share similar aesthetics with other horror texts, their use helps drive an opposing morality to the face/hero characters. For Jenkins, this is a way to help a male audience embrace the melodrama of wrestling, as it shares the "conventions within those forms of entertainment that 'real men' do embrace" (36). Instead of focusing on the shared aesthetics of horror, Levi maintains that a wrestler's character means "cultivating and displaying a wrestler's body, living as the embodiment of a particular kind of physical power" (14). Therefore, in terms of

monstrousness, horror and wrestling must be a display of physicality and the embodiment of "abnormal" power as well.

In *Complex TV,* Mittell discusses Bryan Cranston and the role of Walter White on *Breaking Bad*. In part, Bryan Cranston's previous work—namely as a comedic actor and sitcom father—influenced how the audience originally interpreted the character of Walter White. Cranston's previous roles and outside persona added to the character of an "everyday schlub" (Mittell, *Complex TV,* 152). This positioned the audience to have certain expectations that could be toyed with by *Breaking Bad* showrunner Vince Gilligan, allowing for complex character development throughout the course of the series. This intertextuality of character serves an important basis for understanding how the monster works in professional wrestling. It is common for a wrestler to change morality or even personas over the course of a career.

Because there is an importance of an outside intertextuality, a monster represents something different within the specific context of wrestling. The monster embodies horror's "particular kind of physical power" in how they represent an abnormal entity within the normative narrative of professional wrestling (Levi 14). Often, these wrestlers are coming in with an outside cultural cachet—mostly from another professional sport like football, or from more "real" fighting (UFC or other MMA promotions). If the monster is a physical embodiment of the narrative tension between expected reality and the representation of horror, then in wrestling the monster is a performer who must be the abnormal performative entity: someone working within the industry of professional wrestling, but with an established outside intertextuality.

Because of this intertextual sense of performativity, one that shifts away from the history and narrative expectation of professional wrestling and muddies it with sport and fighting, there now exists a tension between the established reality of wrestling and an abnormal, outside construct. This narrative tension of the monster can be explained further through Steven Shaviro's notion of sincerity, which "implies a sense of consistency in the way that a being acts and presents itself" (91). Shaviro writes about how Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's breakthrough in the film industry comes with the trappings of his background in pro wrestling. His film performance (in the case of the drama *Southland Tales*) is jarring because of his paratextual persona and career. This concept of sincerity adds to narrative tension because of "the diffuseness and discomfort of this character, together with its difference form the usual screen persona…they are

just *presented,* and transformed into spectacle, in their full messiness and intractability" (Shaviro 91). Applying this logic of horror narratives and character personae, the monster becomes a figure in pro wrestling with an inescapable background outside of the industry.

More so, because of this persona, the monster figure's sincerity (consistency as a monster and authoritative, intertextual athlete) contrasts established performativity (the constantly developing narrative of professional wrestling) and emphasizes the tension between opposing narrative realities. While Mittell discusses how the background of an actor can be the cause for narrative development, Shaviro emphasizes this idea with the notion of sincerity, alluding to an inescapability of one's intertextuality, regardless of complexity of the text's narrative. Continuing with Carroll's definition of horror in relation to wrestling's monster, they become abnormal performative entities within wrestling's expected narrative structure. They are often unbeatable, presented as "stronger," or somehow more legitimate than others. The pro-wrestling monster provides the tension between performativity and sincerity because of their abnormality. They maintain a continued monstrousness, clashing with those who do (or can) change within wrestling's narrative form, implying a rift in the very structure of wrestling's storytelling and diegesis.

The Beast: Brock Lesnar

Within the fiction of a wrestling text, the monster allows for a character to have aspects that would not be normally present, such as the easy defeat of the hero, their unexpected athleticism, size and strength, and their seeming undefeatability. For Gilmore, this is because "terrible monsters are impressive exactly because they break the rules and do what humans can only imagine and dream of. Since they observe no limits, respect no boundaries, and attack and kill without compunction, monsters are also the spirit that says 'yes'—to all that is forbidden" (12). By existing outside of the traditional duality of wrestling's storytelling, and occupying a body capable of seemingly impossible physical feats, the pro-wrestling monster can escape the expected narrative structures of professional wrestling. Former champion collegiate wrestler, NFL player, UFC fighter, and current (at the time of this writing) WWE Universal Champion Brock Lesnar almost singularly embodies these characteristics.

Two years after winning the 2000 NCAA Division I Heavyweight Championship in collegiate wrestling for the University of Minnesota, Brock Lesnar signed a development contract with the WWE. After accomplishing an impressive number of victories, and with only a few years in the company, Lesnar left the WWE behind for the first time (Sullivan, Pantaleo, and Greenberg 51). Lesnar served a brief stint in the NFL with the Minnesota Vikings, as well as wrestling overseas for the New Japan Pro Wrestling organization (see Belfeuil in this volume for more on the history this organization). Lesnar then turned to mixed martial arts, becoming a champion in UFC. In 2009, discovering that he had diverticulitis, Lesnar retired from the UFC to undergo treatment (Babcock). Following a successful recovery, with competitive fighting out of the picture, Lesnar returned to the WWE as a "part-time performer" to lower physical risk. Lesnar became the highest-paid performer in the WWE, earning $12 million in 2016 and working fewer days than most other wrestlers (Smith).

The PPV series SummerSlam offers WWE's second biggest live event of the year. The 2014 main event between Lesnar and Cena served as a highly marketed way to bring attention to this event. It was the beginning of Lesnar's most recent employment by the WWE, and it set up a high-profile standard for his future performances. The promotional package before the match highlights both performers. Lesnar is famous for previously defeating legendary wrestlers such as Triple H and The Undertaker in other notable matches, as well as those noted for their strength or size, such as "The World's Strongest Man" Mark Henry and "The World's Largest Athlete" The Big Show. As the company's most popular hero, Cena was, at the time, the holder of the WWE's most desired title: the WWE World Heavyweight Championship. As Lesnar declares in the promo, "Everything that has been put in front of Brock Lesnar, I have conquered, I have defeated." Cena retorts with "There is one thing Brock Lesnar will not do: win. Because he does not deserve the title."

To begin the match, Brock Lesnar's entrance music plays and he enters the stage for his walk towards the ring, accompanied by his manager and primary mouthpiece, Paul Heyman. Audible boos can be heard from the audience. Once Lesnar is in the ring, John Cena's music plays. He enters the arena wearing the championship belt. He receives a mixed reaction from the crowd, as he is beloved by younger fans but bemoaned by older ones. After their introductions, the bell rings and the match officially begins. After a brief physical exchange between the two performers, Lesnar hoists Cena onto his shoulders, swings him through the

air, and slams Cena onto his face; this maneuver is known as the "F5" and is considered Lesnar's finishing move. It is highly unusual to see a finishing move within the first 30 seconds of the match, let alone the first actual move done between performers. The commentators are shocked, noting how they are only "about 30 seconds into this match and it's almost over!"

The crowd's excitement builds as fans chant "Let's go Brock!" paired with the familiar dual-cheer of "Let's go Cena!"/"Cena sucks!" Lesnar grabs Cena with the latter's back firmly against the former's chest. Lesnar throws Cena backwards over his head—the first of many German suplexes in the match, followed immediately by another. Cena tries to swing a flurry of punches and misses, dazed from being thrown. A lone child's voice in the crowd can be heard clearly on the ringside camera's microphones cheering "Let's go Cena!" Lesnar suplexes Cena again, and follows with knees to the ribs. Commentator John "Bradshaw" Layfield exclaims, "Who can come back from this? You've got a freaking monster standing over ya!" Lesnar follows this with four more German suplexes, each dumping Cena on the back of his shoulders, neck, and head. Lesnar attempts a nonchalant pin, which Cena kicks out of. Lesnar performs two more German suplexes. Cena, in a flurry of adrenaline, grabs Lesnar and hits him with his own finishing move, "The Attitude Adjustment." However, Lesnar bolts up immediately and laughs at Cena's attempt. Lesnar toys with Cena, yelling at the referee to check if Cena wants to quit the match. Lesnar then grabs Cena and hits him with a series of four German suplexes, without letting go. After the release, Lesnar immediately grabs Cena for three more. With a final F5, Lesnar successfully pins Cena. Main commentator Michael Cole solemnly declares, "It wasn't even close." Brock walks up the ramp to the stage exit holding his newly won title, and the event ends with John Cena lying in the middle of the ring with members of the medical staff attending to him.

Many interesting things occur within this 15-minute match. For instance, Lesnar's one-sided dominance of the main WWE hero is highly unlikely. Cena has more title reigns than all the current working wrestlers and is regarded as one of the company's top performers. His moral alignment as a "face" (and perhaps the most moral wrestler within the WWE) would typically position him as capable of standing up against the attempts of a heel and winning a match no matter the odds. However, as established, Lesnar is neither a "heel" nor a "face." He escapes this duality and breaks the rules of WWE's narrative. For WWE fans, this is a shocking match, as it is unexpected within a narrative tradition. As previously

noted, Lesnar using his finishing move immediately in the match is highly uncommon, thus adding to his ability to break the standards otherwise held by a traditional wrestling performer. Cena's finishing move, meanwhile, had no effect on Lesnar, establishing this monster's imperviousness to Cena's physicality (and by extension his morality). Monsters hold this ability, as they challenge "the very foundation of our known world" (Gilmore 189). The "known world," in this case, is that of the WWE's narrative diegesis. Of note is the remark from commentator Layfield, declaring Lesnar's monstrousness. This establishes Lesnar's position for the WWE fanbase. His physical performance may have been jarringly dominating for the audience, but being called a monster adds to his character development and explains this dominance.

This character framing of Brock Lesnar continues throughout WWE's subsequent programming and adds to his monstrous persona. At WWE's *SummerSlam 2016*, Lesnar faced the returning Randy Orton, another major figure in the WWE Universe. The ending was the result of a referee stoppage rather than a traditional pin. This happened because Lesnar repeatedly elbowed Randy Orton in the head, gashing his scalp open and causing him to bleed profusely. As a monster, Lesnar defies the traditional expectations of a wrestling match, incapacitating his opponent rather than beating him by pin fall. This type of ending and the presence of blood are both rather uncommon in a contemporary WWE match.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this match is what happened backstage after its conclusion and was reported on by the press. Fellow performer Chris Jericho, after witnessing the result of the match, confronted Lesnar backstage, and a heated argument occurred between the two performers, which was broken up by WWE owner/showrunner, Vince McMahon (Meltzer). This blending between narrative fiction and professional reality occurs because of Lesnar's believability as a monster. The horrific tension between the knowable diegetic narrative and the monstrous-unknown of Lesnar's persona is strong enough that even fellow performers are shocked by events in the ring. This is due to the monster's ability to transition between these narrative spaces, as "the monster demarcates not only between the real and the unreal, but between the permitted and the forbidden" (Gilmore 192). In this context, the real and the unreal are the narrative of the WWE and Lesnar's textuality. The permitted is represented by the consensual and previously established choreographed physical performance, and the forbidden by the "actual fight" ending, resulting in blood. Though WWE has openly claimed

that this was the mutually agreed upon ending for the match, it does little to discredit Lesnar's character.

Conclusion

The monster in professional wrestling serves a multifaceted function. The monster adds complexity to an otherwise traditional narrative style. By having a character work outside of a dualistic system of morality, they are not limited with what characters they can interact with. Standard pairing would limit heroes to wrestle villains (and vice versa), but a monster can work outside of that limitation. Their presence manipulates the genre of the event, allowing an audience to experience uncertain tensions between expectation and uncertainty. While working in a structural system of horror, this provides an anxiety that elevates the consumption of the spectacle. While wrestling storytelling often includes surprises, this narrative format provides a space for the unknown to interact with reality of the fiction. As a form of entertainment whose fiction/reality is often called into question, the monster character adds a sense of authenticity. The performer's intertextuality allows for an outside history to be added to the character, providing an element of legitimacy to the presentation of the physical spectacle, and even allowing for a form of hybridity to the program's style.

Other monsters exist in different wrestling promotions and companies. For example, *Lucha Underground*, a more gritty and cinematic wrestling show that airs on the El Rey cable network, features a cross between the Mexican "lucha libre" style of professional wrestling with American independent wrestling. Though introduced beyond the camera's frame in the first episode of the series, "The Monster" Matanza Cueto is not seen by the audience until the ninth episode of the second season in a battle royal episode featuring the bulk of the performers all in one match. The final performer to come to the ring is Matanza, who proceeds to handily beat every luchador present and win the show's main championship title. Matanza is framed as actually murderous. He represents the monster archetype, unfazed by the style of lucha libre and the show's narrative; instead of a successful physical attack, other wrestlers often literally bounce off his body.

While Brock Lesnar is not the only monster in professional wrestling, his prominence within the most wildly viewed wrestling programming allows for a

highly visible and culturally engaging text. His actions provide the audience with a paradoxical reality within their fictional spectacle—an intertextual and "authentic" athlete wrestling against physically skilled, but ultimately choreographed, performers. As a construct of horror, the monster allows for a narrative engagement between an expected fictional reality and an unknowable possibility. By existing outside of a traditionally morally dualistic style of storytelling, Brock Lesnar and other monsters develop a complexity for professional wrestling audiences where the realities of physical combat bleed seamlessly into the presentation of physical spectacle.

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Redneck Rebel, The Governor, and The Syrian Sheik: Small Town Wrestling in the Poor White South

DAN MATHEWSON

On a sultry late-August afternoon in upstate South Carolina, a small crowd of approximately 200 has assembled in the sunbaked parking lot of a nondescript strip plaza just off the Interstate highway to watch the professional wrestlers of a local wrestling organization bodyslam and superkick each other in a six-match card. The show culminates with a main event between the beloved Confederate-battle-flag-festooned hero "Redneck Rebel" and his despised foe Johnny Danger. Nearly everyone in the crowd is white; they belong to the southern demographic historians sometimes call "poor white southerners" (see Flynt), but which others more commonly deride as "white trash," "trailer trash," or "redneck." A festive, communal atmosphere accompanies the mayhem in the ring: children have their faces painted at a small booth; volunteers grill hot dogs for the crowd; local firemen hand out fire safety literature; and a local preacher delivers an evangelistic sermon-and-altar call from the center of the wrestling ring immediately before the main event.

Over the years, I have attended numerous local live wrestling shows like this one in towns and small communities across North and South Carolina. The venues are usually small and plain; the wrestlers are almost always locals with varying degrees of wrestling talent; and the crowd is almost entirely composed of a single social class: poor whites. This small-town world of professional wrestling thrives throughout the South. If we follow Harold Hinds' definition of popular culture as "those aspects of culture…which are widely spread…and/or consumed by significant numbers of people" ("Sine Qua Non"), then small town wrestling is, without a doubt, a form of poor white southern popular culture.[1]

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[1] Hinds further defines popular culture as something that has trans-regional appeal (Hinds, *How to Make* 376–77)—a delineation more difficult to square with my argument in this paper since I intend to focus on a single region, the South. I also recognize that there are other useful ways

As widespread as local, live wrestling is within its own cultural milieu, it flies under the radar of the American mainstream: you will not find these wrestling shows on television; they are not covered often in the major news outlets; and, unless you happen to see a makeshift sign by the side of the road, you will be hard pressed to find advertisements for the live shows. Nor will you hear much discussion of this thriving form of poor white southern culture in academic literature. Only two articles in the journal *Southern Cultures* explicitly focus on small town wrestling in the South: a 2005 photographic essay of local wrestling around Nashville (Shay); and a 1997 article about the southern influence on big time professional wrestling—an article that, despite its many insightful observations, problematically conflates the local live wrestling that thrives among the South's poor whites with the high profile stage of the World Wrestling Federation (now Entertainment) and the now-defunct World Championship Wrestling (Kyriakoudes and Coclanis).[2]

The disjunction between the prevalence of this form of what might be called "white trash" popular culture and its almost complete absence in both mass media outlets and in the academic literature forms the backbone of my argument in this paper. It is not simply that a form of popular culture—small town wrestling in the South—begs for scholarly analysis; it is, rather, that in virtually all mainstream circles, there is a failure to even identify this form of professional wrestling as popular culture, per se. Moreover, this failure to "see" poor white southern culture and to engage it on its own cultural terms fits a much broader pattern exhibited throughout American history of the marginalization and lack of engagement with the white underclass.

In what follows, I will attempt to show how a thoughtful consideration of the role and function professional wrestling in the South would represent a serious engagement with this oft-marginalized community on its own cultural terms. The first step in this analysis is simply to "see" what is there—namely, to describe the prevalence of small-town professional wrestling throughout the region. This

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that scholars have defined "popular culture" (see Storey 5–14), including one, discussed below, that distinguishes popular from folk culture.

[2] The southern historians Pete Daniel (224) and Wayne Flynt (115) also make passing references to this form of professional wrestling in poor white southern culture.

description will then form the basis for some observations about fruitful future lines of academic inquiry on the role and function of professional wrestling in the South.[3]

Southern Indie Wrestling

The variety of small-town professional wrestling under consideration in this paper is more properly called "independent" or "indie" wrestling, and it has similarities to and differences from the much better-known world of mainstream wrestling represented mainly by the WWE. Both mainstream and indie wrestling share certain distinctive features that one expects of the professional wrestling genre: scripted faux-fights between in-character performers; stylized wrestling moves and sequences that form a kind of wrestling vernacular (e.g. bodyslam, suplex, clothesline, piledriver, and so forth); and dramatic storylines featuring a high degree of interaction between the wrestlers and the crowd. Where mainstream and indie wrestling diverge is in the scale of the respective productions, the relative skill level of the wrestlers, and the size of the audience reached.

On the one side is mainstream wrestling, the product of a billion-dollar corporate entity that employs a large stable of the most physically gifted in-ring performers. Mainstream wrestling reaches a mass global audience through a combination of weekly televised wrestling programming, a relentless touring schedule of live shows in major sporting venues around the globe, and an online subscription-based streaming service ("Key Performance Indicators"). At the opposite end of the spectrum are most of the indie wrestling organizations that

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[3] I want to acknowledge here the imperfect and incomplete nature of the analysis presented below. I am basing my observations on over a decade of work on small-town southern wrestling— attending numerous shows from a variety of promotions throughout the Carolinas (mostly); copious formal interviews and casual conversations with wrestlers, promoters, and fans; and hours upon hours mainly on YouTube and Facebook learning about wrestling promotions throughout the region. I approach this topic as a scholar, a fan, and an insider, having functioned briefly as a promoter, booker, and wrestler myself. Though my analysis is incomplete and may, at times, lack the nuance that could be provided in a longer piece, it is written to address a deficit of substantive scholarship in this area, and to hopefully provide suggestions for future work on this topic.

operate exclusively at the local level, each one running periodic live shows to small crowds in the single town, village, or small region in which the organization is located. The local indies feature mainly local wrestlers with varying degrees of experience and talent, and generally neither wrestlers nor indie promotions are known very far outside their home geographic areas. What these promotions lack in scale, however, they make up for in quantity: hundreds of these small, local, independently operated wrestling organizations exist scattered throughout North America.

In between mainstream wrestling and local indie wrestling are what might be described as high-level indies—that is, promotions that are a clear step up from the local indies, with a larger geographic footprint and fan base, with a far greater online presence, and with rosters of talented wresters often culled from the local indies (e.g., EVOLVE, Pro Wrestling Guerilla, Shimmer Woman Athletes, Combat Zone Wrestling, PROGRESS, *Lucha Underground*). At the highest level are certain indie promotions that verge on the mainstream in terms of their visibility, fan base, and global reach (e.g., *Impact Wrestling*, Ring of Honor, New Japan Pro-Wrestling).

The focus of this paper is not on mainstream or high-level indie wrestling, but on the southern local indies, which are abundant in the region—though, in the absence of any systematic studies of local indies, it is impossible to specify with any degree of precision how many actually exist. Anecdotal evidence from both scholarly and popular sources, however, suggests that local indie wrestling occupies a distinctive cultural niche in the region, and that the abundance of local indie promotions forms a distinguishing cultural feature of the South (see, e.g., The Carpetbagger; Daniel; Flynt; Kyriakoudes and Coclanis; Shay). The local indie wrestling activity near my home in Charlotte, NC illustrates this point: by my count, within a roughly two-hour drive from my home, eighteen local indie wrestling promotions currently host periodic wrestling shows (e.g., American Pro Wrestling, Carolina Wrestling Showcase, Exodus Wrestling Alliance, Eastern Wrestling Federation, New Life Wrestling, New Millennial Championship Wrestling, Palmetto Championship Wrestling, Trans-South Wrestling, WrestleForce, UltraWrestle, Xtreme World Wrestling, etc.).

While local indie promotions might be abundant in the region, they are not equally distributed throughout all sectors of southern society. Overall, local indie wrestling in the South is predominantly, though not exclusively, a feature of poor white culture. Southern indie shows tend to be held in lower-income

neighborhoods in small, unassuming venues that are functionally adequate but often in need of minor repair (e.g., National Guard Armories, Boys and Girls Clubs, school or church gymnasiums). Show infrastructure tends to be minimal and makeshift: homemade signs indicating ticket prices; entrance fees collected by volunteers who sit behind collapsible tables; an older wrestling ring with a faded canvas; and an aging sound system. The crowds tend to be overwhelmingly white and tend to display socioeconomic markers typically associated with lower-income communities: everything from higher rates of obesity and poor oral health, to a higher percentage of cigarette smokers, to well-worn and faded clothes, and late model vehicles in the parking lot.

Class divisions in society, however, turn on much more than economic factors, like income levels and relative wealth, or on labor or consumption levels. As Tracy Thompson argues, while wealth clearly "has something to do with class distinction," in actuality class "is a complex mixture of accent…family education, church affiliation and attendance, personal morals, manners, and prison record" (191). Sean McCloud, relying of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, reminds us that class is also about "how we move our bodies, how we use them, and what we put on and into them. […] [Class] reveals itself in our most ingrained habits of mind and body" (2). Social class, moreover, pertains to the boundaries we draw between ourselves and others, and to social practices that are "embodied in our collective practices, our shared activities, and our social institutions" (2).

This fuller understanding of class as a set of embodied and enacted social practices, rather than merely a description of economic indicators, opens an array of possibilities for the examination of professional wrestling as a distinctive form of popular culture among the South's poor whites. For as scholars have long argued—as far back as Roland Barthes' seminal 1957 essay—professional wrestling is a mode of performative storytelling in which wrestlers enact personae and perform in dramas that "conform to the image which the public has of the great legendary themes of its mythology" (31). Similarly, Henry Jenkins III, writing about the 1990s-era WWF, analyzes wrestling as a form of male melodrama that enacts the myths, values, and everyday experiences of blue collar crowds.

More relevant to the analysis of southern indie wrestling, in a recent New York Times "op-doc," the South Carolina-based indie wrestler "Cauliflower" Brown argues that wrestling ought to be appreciated not as a "fake sport" but "as a form of storytelling" that enacts the struggles and hardships of the crowds

gathered around the ring: low paying jobs; being swindled by faceless bureaucracies; being made to feel small, powerless, and worthless (Grant).While he does not specifically invoke class categories, Brown names some of the everyday realities of poor white southerners that he and the other wrestlers enact in the ring as dramas of oppression, marginalization, and cathartic resistance.

The Folklore of Southern Indie Wrestling

One potentially fruitful line of scholarly inquiry that follows from "Cauliflower" Brown's argument is to examine southern indie wrestling as a form southern folklore. Peter Narváez and Martin Laba define folklore as "performance which is transmitted and communicated by the sensory media of living, small group encounters" leading to "a high degree of performer-audience interaction" (311), which perfectly describes the standard small-town southern indie wrestling show. Popular culture, by contrast, "refers…to cultural events which are transmitted by technological media and communicated in mass societal contexts" (311)—a definition that readily applies to mainstream professional wrestling. For Narváez and Laba, folk culture and popular culture exist on a continuum whereby a cultural element might shift from one pole to the other. This insight into the relationship between folk and popular culture provides a fresh angle to examine professional wrestling's historical development from the so-called "Territory Era" (1930s to 1980s, approximately) to the present.[4] Briefly, during the early decades of the Territory Era, wrestling was a predominantly folk culture that, by mid-century, slowly began to shift toward the popular culture end of the continuum. By the close of the 1980s, as the old wrestling territories increasingly gave way to a single mass media wrestling juggernaut, the WWF/E, wrestling had primarily become a form of popular culture. In this analysis, indie wrestling, which emerged in response to wrestling's transition to the realm of popular culture, represented the intentional effort to keep the old folk form of professional wrestling alive.

Though scholars such as Scott Beekman (73–145) and David Shoemaker (38–46) have examined the role of the mass media, particularly broadcast television, in

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[4] For a fuller account of this history, see Beekman 51–145.

transforming professional wrestling from the fringes to the center of the mainstream entertainment industry (or in Narváez and Laba's conception, into the realm of popular culture), opportunities abound for studying the folk aspects of both Territory Era wrestling and current-day independent wrestling. One rich line of inquiry focuses specifically on the ways in which the actual folk performances, particularly the characters (or "gimmicks") the wrestlers embody, enact key class distinctions. For example, among all the southern indie shows that I have seen (mostly in the Carolinas, but also Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee), the most reviled heels almost always present themselves either as racial, ethnic, or, far less frequently, religious outsiders who pose a threat to the white community, or as classist superiors who superciliously flout their social privilege over the "white trash" crowd. The following are specific examples of both categories of heels; I have seen them all wrestle in various indie promotions in the Carolinas.

An example of the first heel category is "The Syrian Sheik." Dressing like an extra in *Lawrence of Arabia*, he is a copy of some of the Middle Eastern caricatures who have appeared in mainstream wrestling (e.g., The Sheik, The Iron Sheik, Mohammad Hassan, Ariya Daivari). The only main difference is that "The Syrian Sheik" carries an oversized Syrian flag to the ring and often speaks to the crowd about his national origins. The wrestler clearly is a symbol for one of the heated social and political issues for many in the crowd: the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the region, and the specter of Islamic encroachment on what is broadly thought of as Christian territory. Another example of the threatening outsider is "Supreme," an African-American wrestler who intentionally plays off the region's troubling racial history by embodying some of the predominant racial stereotypes about black men. "Supreme" is aggressive and angry, and blames his myriad economic and social problems on the "crackers" sitting around the ring.

An example of a classist heel is "The Governor," a wrestling manager who comes to the ring in a posh smoking jacket and with a pipe in his mouth. Through his effete mannerisms and speech patterns—and with the utter disdain he has for the assembled crowd—"The Governor" enacts the role of the unscrupulous elected official, whose unearned privilege oppresses and harms. Another example of the classist heel category is "Stud Stable," a team of loud-mouth, condescending wrestlers, led by a fast-talking Boss Hogg-looking manager who flings money around to buy up all the wrestling talent. "Stud Stable" expresses its disdain for the audience by specifically invoking the economic disparities that exist between them, the profligate wrestlers, and the poor white trash crowd.

Without fail, all the heel wrestlers, both the threatening outsiders and the classist sophisticates, express condescension over the crowd by playing off the most hackneyed and demeaning stereotypes of poor white southerners as nothing but white trash. For example, prior to all his matches, classist heel "American G.I." stands in the center of the ring with the microphone in hand and addresses the crowd with this opening line: "Listen here all you Dorito eating, beer drinking, food stamp cashing rednecks." He then goes on to castigate the fans for being lazy, jobless, Bible-thumpers. While "American G.I." directs his condescension generally at the entire crowd, others routinely direct their belittling mockery at specific fans that are singled out as prime examples of the poor white trash crowd: one with drab, ill-fitting clothes is humiliated for his presumed poverty; one who stumbles through an attempted jeer is humiliated as an uneducated imbecile. I once saw classist heel Chris "Thunder" Anderson focus his derision on a single mentally handicapped man in the front row; the wrestler repeatedly exited the ring during his match to go over to the fan and cruelly mimic his facial gestures and verbal utterances in an exaggerated and grotesque parody.

As Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray argue, white trash stereotypes have long been used to "solidify for the middle and upper classes a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority" (1); they are a way, as Tracy Thompson memorably phrases it, for others "to [tell] the world that even given the fifty-yard head start of being born with a white skin, the person in question had still never managed to amount to a hill of beans" (191–2). Such white trash stereotypes enable the heel wrestlers to position themselves as haughty outsiders who mischaracterize and misapprehend an entire community, and then demean this community based on the mischaracterization. This process not only represents the standard way poor white southerners have been represented throughout history; it is also a sure-fire way for a heel wrestler to catch heat from the crowd.

Yet the cultural outsider heel has a specific role to play within the story world of southern indie wrestling: as outsiders who demean and oppress, they function as foils to the babyface (good guy) wrestlers who stand as the proud and defiant members of the in-group, an insider status they signal primarily through their visual self-presentation. In contrast to the heels, who present themselves as culturally "strange," the most popular babyface wrestlers in virtually all the southern indie shows I have attended tend to present themselves in a remarkably similar manner: they are completely normal, completely average; they look just

like everyone else in the crowd. Their wrestling attire, for example, often resembles the clothes most of the fans wear, i.e. plain and lacking the showiness and ostentation of the heels—commonly a well-worn t-shirt, and basic wrestling trunks and boots. Babyfaces usually have facial hair and tattoos on their arms, as do many of the men in the crowd. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it is extremely common for babyface wrestlers to display the Confederate battle flag either on their hats, t-shirts, or trunks, or by carrying the flag to the ring ("Redneck Rebel," whom I described at the start of this paper, not only displays the flag in all these ways, he also has the flag tattooed on his chest). Many fans display this symbol too, and it is also common for the flag to hang on the wall of the wrestling venue. In fact, more than any other signifier, the Confederate battle flag functions as a marker of the in-group. In many ways, it operates as the Durkheimian totem of this particular community: it is the community's collective sense of itself projected onto a material symbol, which the community then venerates as a kind of sacred power (Durkheim).

As defenders of this community and representatives of this sacred power, the babyface wrestlers project a rugged, rough-around-the-edges, confident demeanor. When they speak, they are the voice of the people, expressing with conviction their community's pride, determination, and wild refusal to submit to the belittling condescension of the heels. The fans respond with wild enthusiasm; everyone roots for babyfaces to give the heels a good old-fashioned whupping.

The image of in-group identity that emerges in such beloved babyface wrestlers is a kind of populist, unfettered independence. They are the personification of the historian Jack Temple Kirby's countercultural poor white: rugged and rebellious, prizing above all else the right to self-determination, self-sufficiency, and independence. According to Kirby, this image of the countercultural poor white traces back to the Antebellum period and the tension created when "anticapitalist" poor whites clung to their traditional patterns of existence in the face increasingly powerful industrialists whose pro-market business interests were furthered by governmental policies (33–56). Forced into the southern frontier regions, these countercultural communities maintained their traditional patterns as long as they could, but by the mid-20th century the only remaining pockets of such self-sustaining white communities were in the Appalachian highlands and in the Ozarks. The rest had been drawn into the labor market out of sheer necessity, forming a large class of economically stressed laborers who had lost "the white dream of independence through modest material

requirements and resourceful versatility" (48). Nevertheless, claims Kirby, "the dream lives on particularly among the contemporary rural poor, and among men called 'rednecks,' who may live in the country, the working-class suburbs, or the sprawling new cities themselves" (48).

While some scholars have traced this theme of countercultural independence in other characteristic parts of "redneck" culture such as country music, NASCAR, and hunting (Daniel; Ownby, "Manhood, Memory"; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*; Rybacki and Rybacki), opportunity abounds for a fuller treatment than I have just sketched of the themes of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and independence in southern indie wrestling, and for how these themes connect to the lived experiences of poor white folk from the middle of the 20th century to the present.

Violence in Southern Professional Wrestling

The previous suggestions for future scholarly study focus on the folk storytelling aspects of southern indie wrestling, connecting the themes that emerge therein to the broader historical and cultural context of the poor white South. A final suggested line of inquiry contextualizes southern indie wrestling against a related cultural backdrop, namely the historical penchant in the South for violence and violent forms of entertainment (Daniel 50–71).

Though much violence associated with the South historically revolved around issues of race (e.g. slavery, whitecapping, lynching, race riots, and so forth), other kinds of non- (or not obviously-) race-based violence were characteristic of the region throughout its history, such as violent confrontations between neighbors and friends or violent forms of leisure and entertainment like cock fighting, hunting, and the early days of stock car racing (Daniel 172–93; Ownby, *Subduing Satan* 21–37). Particularly relevant for modern indie wrestling is the extremely popular form of bloody and brutal hand-to-hand grappling, known as "gouging" or "rough-and-tumble," that was extremely popular in the southern frontier regions in the 18th and 19th centuries, so much so that it developed into one of the region's first spectator sports (Kyriakoudes and Coclanis 277).

The goal of gouging was not simply to best one's opponent, but to maim him by plucking out an eye, for example, or biting off an ear. Elliot Gorn traces the origin of gouging to the combination of harsh economic conditions and deep

kinship ties that prevailed in the southern backcountry. In these places, "[t]he touchstone of masculinity was unflinching toughness, not chivalry, duty, or piety. Violent sports … were appropriate for men whose lives were hard, whose futures were unpredictable, and whose opportunities were limited" (36). In the 19th century, rough-and-tumble evolved into the less violent, but still quite brutal "catch-as-catch-can" wrestling, which, itself was one of the historical predecessors of modern day professional wrestling (Beekman 6, 20, 35–50; Hewitt).

Traces of the brutality of the southern frontier's "rough-and-tumble" survive in the distinctly southern form of professional wrestling, colloquially known as southern-style "rasslin'," that developed in the last half of the 20th century. A so-called "stiff" style, southern rasslin' tends toward the gritty realism of an actual brawl with lots of punches, kicks, and bloodied foreheads—and very few aerial maneuvers, which take away from the "realism" of the match (Shoemaker 45–6). Much more work needs to be done to understand wrestling as a violent form of poor white southern entertainment against this broader cultural penchant for violence in southern culture throughout its history, and then to understand how the violence of rasslin' intersects with the class distinctions discussed above.

Conclusion

My argument is for scholars to pay serious attention to southern indie wrestling as an important form of popular culture among the region's poor whites. The current lack of scholarship on this specific topic parallels a much broader pattern within the academic literature on the South, namely the relative dearth of scholarly studies on the culture and history of poor white southerners in general. As John Hayes convincingly argues, the narrative of the southern history and culture that dominated academic circles since the 1960s is the story of race: of white domination and entrenched power structures and black resistance to the status quo ("Hard, Hard Religion"; "Recovering"). So much scholarly analysis of the South has focused, understandably, on race that issues of class have been severely under examined. Aside from scholars like Robert Coles, Jack Temple Kirby, Wayne Flynt, and now a newer generation of scholars (Hartigan; Hayes, *Hard, Hard Religion*; Isenberg; Wray), precious few have told the story of class divisions in the South, or of poor white southern culture and history. This relative gap in

scholarly literature is why Isenberg could quite reasonably subtitle her recently published history of poor whites in America a "400 Year *Untold* History" (emphasis mine).

From this broader perspective on scholarship on the South, the inattention to southern indie professional wrestling simply mirrors this relative inattention in scholarly literature to the history and culture of poor white southerners. Giving serious attention to one of the distinctive forms of popular culture among the South's poor whites is to encounter that particular demographic on its own terms, rather than filtered through the distorted "white trash" (or similar) caricatures that have circulated throughout much of the nation's history. In so doing, one discovers southern small-town wrestling functions as an important form of southern folk culture wherein the region's poor whites express many of the important markers of in-group distinction through their performances of the everyday realities of this oft-neglected social class.

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The Importance of New Japan Professional Wrestling and Professional Wrestling in Japan: A Fan's Perspective

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In the world of professional wrestling, there are peak times and down times. This observation covers the whole genre as well as certain companies. Currently, in early 2018, New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) is experiencing a peak time and not really showing any signs of stopping. It may be hard to tell because some believe that professional wrestling begins and ends with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), but that is not true. NJPW has been around since 1972 and offers fans a great deal of things that are both like and unlike what the WWE offers. In this paper, I discuss some of the reasons why I, as a fan, feel NJPW deserves a wider audience. For example, The Bullet Club offers members of the English-speaking audience a way to enter the product. NJPW also has a wide array of tournaments that not only spotlight their homegrown talent, but International talent as well. They also employ some tremendous wrestlers and give them compelling stories. I discuss these reasons, as well as the history of NJPW, to provide insight into a promotion that may be less well-known to mainstream wrestling fans residing in the United States.

The History of NJPW

NJPW was founded in 1972 by Antonio Inoki. Inoki may be known by American audiences as the man who controversially fought Muhammad Ali to a draw in a boxer-versus-wrestler bout in 1976. Inoki emphasized what he called Strong Style wrestling, which features a wide array of martial arts style strikes and submission holds. Strong Style has been used to great effect by American wrestlers such as CM Punk, Daniel Bryan, and Samoa Joe to name a few. While some of the characters featured in NJPW over the years may appear outlandish, like The Great Muta, their storylines are generally more grounded. The stories are told mainly

through the in-ring action, with some advancement also made during pre- and post-match press conferences. The action is also shot well and easy to follow. WWE has recently adopted a shaky cam style whenever strikes are made, and this can make the action difficult to follow. NJPW slowly rebuilt its brand after being acquired by Bushiroad in 2012. In 2015, NJPW launched their Internet streaming site, njpwworld.com, to allow worldwide audiences to watch live and on-demand shows, including archived shows.

The Bullet Club

NJPW routinely brought in "gaijin," or non-Japanese, wrestlers such as Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, The Steiner Brothers, Vader, Stan Hansen, and most recently a returning Chris Jericho. In modern times, no bigger wrestling stable exists than the Bullet Club, comprised almost entirely of gaijin wrestlers. The stable came together in 2013 when Prince Devitt (now known as Finn Bálor in the WWE) turned heel on his Apollo 55 partner, Ryusuke Taguchi. Devitt, Karl Anderson, Tama Tonga, and Bad Luck Fale are considered the founding fathers of the Bullet Club, essentially an updated version of the WCW faction the New World Order (NWO) and the WWE faction Degeneration-X (DX). Both these factions existed in the late 1990s. The NWO came first and originally featured Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, and Hulk Hogan. This trio grew throughout the years to include "Macho Man" Randy Savage, Lex Luger, The Giant (aka Paul Wight, who later performed in WWE as The Big Show), Scott Steiner, and many others. DX was the WWE's response to the NWO and originally featured Shawn Michaels, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, and Chyna. This group also expanded with the addition of X-Pac (aka the 1-2-3 Kid and later Syxx, a former member of the NWO) and the New Age Outlaws, "Bad Ass" Billy Gunn and "The Road Dogg" Jesse James. Bullet Club appropriated the same "Too-Sweet" hand gesture and crotch chop taunt used by both previous groups. Since their formation, the Bullet Club featured a rotating cast of members that included AJ Styles, Kenny Omega, The Young Bucks (Matt and Nick Jackson), Doc Gallows, Marty Scurll, Adam Cole, and Cody Rhodes. After Devitt left for WWE, AJ Styles maintained the status quo. That all changed when Styles left and Omega assumed leadership, at which point the group became more of a presence in popular culture.

If you are not familiar with Omega, his character is informed by references to video games. On occasion, after defeating an opponent, he will use their finisher in matches. This is an homage to the video game character Mega Man, who gained his opponents' signature weapons upon defeating them. After removing AJ Styles from the group, Omega sometimes used the Styles Clash finisher. Omega calls his own finisher the One-Winged Angel, a reference to Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy 7*. He also calls his knee-strikes the V-Trigger in homage to the Street Fighter video game series. In addition, Omega is a featured character in the *Tiger Mask W* anime.

Omega and The Young Bucks produced a YouTube series called *Being the Elite*. The trio call themselves The Elite and exist as a sub-group within Bullet Club. The Young Bucks are particularly cocky. In most episodes of *Being the Elite*, they brag about how much money they pull in from merchandise sales. On Twitter, they joke about how they are "killing the business" because some of the perceived old-guard of wrestling, such as Jim Cornette, dislike their antics. In addition to the core trio, episodes of *Being the Elite* also feature other Bullet Club members and their interactions with fans and each other. This channel has run storylines that not only affect NJPW, but also the American wrestling company Ring of Honor (ROH). They recently ran a storyline in which the departing-for-WWE Adam Cole was kicked out of the group for poisoning Nick Jackson. The story of Jackson's poisoning occurred on an episode of *Being the Elite*, but Cole was not kicked out of Bullet Club until the 2017 ROH event, *War of the Worlds*. The epilogue to this is Cole's "character" being killed off in an episode that took place before he departed ROH and NJPW for WWE's NXT.

It was also during Omega's leadership that Bullet Club merchandise found its way to Hot Topic stores across the United States. In 2017, Hot Topic inked a deal with Pro Wrestling Tees to sell NJPW merchandise worldwide (Pritchard). To my knowledge, this is the first time that Hot Topic has carried non-WWE wrestling merchandise since the Monday Night War era.[1] *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* has also reported that Bullet Club merchandise was the top-seller for Hot Topic in November 2017 (Varble). Bullet Club-related merchandise is usually the top

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[1] Hot Topic did sell WCW merchandise, such as NWO t-shirts, in the 1990s, as seen on this flashback blog post by Matt: http://dinosaurdracula.com/blog/deadsites-hot-topic-1998.

seller on ProWrestlingTees.com, which sells shirts from many independent wrestlers and organizations.

The In-Ring Action

If the Bullet Club brings you in as a fan, please stay for the wrestling as well. NJPW's storylines are largely driven by in-ring action, making it different from the WWE, where wrestlers regularly interact backstage or cut 20-minute promos. NJPW produces tournaments every year that start, advance, or resolve their storylines. In this essay, I discuss the World Tag League tournament, Best of the Super-Juniors tournament, and finally the G1 Climax. All three tournaments follow a round robin structure with the competitors put into two blocks, Block A and Block B. There is a point system of two points for a win, one for a draw, and zero for a loss. Whoever accumulates the most points in Block A and Block B competes in the finals.

The World Tag League tournament focuses on NJPW's tag team division. It debuted in 1980 but was not always called the World Tag League. It used to be known as the Super Grade Tag League from 1991 to 1998 and then the G1 Tag League from 1999 to 2011. The tournament usually takes place in autumn, and the winner gets a shot at the tag team championship during the annual Wrestle Kingdom event held every year on January 4th. Admittedly the tag team division is not as robust as the heavyweight and junior divisions. Often, the company brings in makeshift tag teams, or teams from outside of NJPW. Former Bullet Club members and current WWE superstars Karl Anderson and Luke "Doc" Gallows won the tournament in 2013, and Anderson has won with two different partners as well.

The Best of the Super Juniors (BOSJ) began in 1988 and has traditionally served to spotlight the Junior-Heavyweight division. It usually takes place in the spring. If the winner does not already hold the Junior-Heavyweight champion, then they earn the opportunity to challenge for that title at the Dominion event in the summer. This tournament also spotlights international talent as many wrestlers are brought in from other promotions. ROH, Dragon Gate, DDT Pro-Wrestling, Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre, and Pro Wrestling NOAH have all sent representatives to compete in this prestigious tournament. Jushin "Thunder" Liger is probably the wrestler most synonymous with the BOSJ tournament, having won

three and competed in many of them since the beginning, though he retired from the tournament in 2017 due to the grueling nature of the schedule. By bowing out of future tournaments, Liger thereby made way for up-and-coming talent. Indeed, several other wrestlers want to compete in the tournament or would like to be invited back. The matches are often very fast-paced. The opening matches often last 10 to 15 minutes and showcase the best of each competitor's offense, much of which is high-flying in nature.

BOSJ sparked some mild controversy in 2016 when Will Ospreay battled Ricochet in an extremely athletic contest. Both men are known for their quick, high-flying offense, which was on full display during the encounter. Some wrestlers from the old-guard, most notably Vader, thought the match was simply an acrobatics exhibition and told no story. Others, like Steve Austin, praised it as phenomenal. In the end the match sparked much debate and many GIF-worthy moments. In 2017, Ospreay and Ricochet faced one another in a rematch that was every bit as good as their previous encounter. Even better, it expanded on the original match since each man knew what to expect from the other. It was an instance of telling a story via their prior match rather than a promo.

Before changing the name to the G1 Climax in 1991, NJPW founder Inoki held the record for most tournaments won at a total of 10. It is unlikely that anyone will break that record, but a few men have won multiple tournaments. The 2012 tournament marked the first time that the winner could go on to challenge the Heavyweight champion at Wrestle Kingdom. The champion could also compete in the tournament to earn the right to pick their challenger. Omega is the only non-Japanese wrestler to win the tournament since it was renamed as the G1. He won in 2016 shortly after becoming leader of the Bullet Club and making his way from the Junior division to the Heavyweight division. He would also go on to defend the contract he won before finally challenging, and ultimately losing to, champion Kazuchika Okada.

Important Japanese Wrestlers

Okada has been the face of the company since 2016. He picked up the torch at *Wrestle Kingdom 10* when he defeated his rival, Hiroshi Tanahashi. NJPW still features Tanahashi prominently, but Okada is now considered the face of the federation. Okada's character is that of an over-confident, slightly spoiled rich kid

who knows he has the backing of the company. He was initially presented as a heel, but after an emotional loss to Tanahashi at *Wrestle Kingdom 9*, the crowd started to sympathize with him. He still does slightly heelish or disrespectful things in his matches, but ultimately his skill and his finisher allow him to prevail over his opponents. The Rainmaker, a ripcord short-arm lariat, is a dominant finisher that has put down many other wrestlers. 2017 emerged as Okada's toughest but most critically acclaimed year to date. He started the year by facing Omega in an incredible six-star match, as rated by Dave Meltzer of *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*. The two have incredible chemistry, and later that same year they wrestled each other again to a 60-minute draw. Meltzer rated that match 6.75 stars. Okada and Omega faced off in another six-star match when they met in the G1 tournament. During the tournament, Okada only suffered losses against Omega and EVIL. Okada wrestled the sadistic Minoru Suzuki to a draw in another acclaimed contest that ended up earning 4.75 stars.

Okada's title defense against Katsuyori Shibata was a five-star contest and an incredibly emotional encounter. This was Shibata's first shot the Heavyweight title in quite some time. He threw everything he had into dethroning Okada but came up short. This match is also thought to be Shibata's last match as he developed health issues immediately afterward. Okada's run at the top has been compared to Ric Flair's during his prime (Dubey). It helps that Okada only defends the title periodically rather than every night, making the the defenses feel special. When not defending the title, Okada often competes in tag-team matches in which he does not have to wrestle for nearly an hour. Also of note, Okada is not yet 30 years old but has already surpassed Tanahashi in total days that he has held the title. He also surpassed Shinya Hashimoto's legendary 489-day run. If Okada is in the main event, then you are guaranteed to see something special.

NJPW runs quite a few redemption storylines, but the one featuring Tetsuya Naito is one of the most compelling. In 2013, Naito won the G1 tournament and was set to face the champion, Okada, in the main event. However, NJPW got cold feet after the two demonstrated mediocre chemistry. Instead, the federation let the fans vote on whether Naito and Okada would main event or if Shinsuke Nakamura and Tanahashi would go on last for the Intercontinental title. Fans choose Nakamura and Tanahashi. This was unprecedented for NJPW and it is unlikely that the WWE would ever let their fans have this level of control with a Wrestlemania main event.

Naito temporarily left the company after coming up short against Okada, but returned to NJPW a changed man. After a brief stint in CMLL, Naito returned as the leader of Los Ingobernables de Japon. Naito became incredibly disrespectful toward NJPW at this point. He briefly captured the Heavyweight championship from Okada before dropping it back to him. During his brief reign, Naito treated the title belt like a piece of garbage, throwing it into the ring before his matches and leaving it there for staff to retrieve. He did the same thing to the Intercontinental title, which he dented by throwing it at the ring posts. Initially jeered upon his return, Naito's unorthodox behavior led to the crowd cheering for him.

In some ways, Naito's post-return behavior recalls the rise of Stone Cold Steve Austin. Naito is the opposite of what the crowd would expect of a babyface. He spits in his opponents' faces and makes bizarre demands during his championship reigns. He has been driven by the fact that he was ousted from the main event at Wrestle Kingdom. He would earn a bit of redemption by headlining *Wrestle Kingdom 12* with Okada. Naito fell short of winning the title from Okada, but his story simply involved headlining the event.

Conclusion

NJPW employs an amazing roster of talent, which they utilize well by holding tournaments and running shows that have a big fight feel. The Bullet Club and their antics are a great entry point for those who may find the language barrier daunting. Once you get past that you have incredible characters and in-ring action that will no doubt hold your attention.

These days it is much easier to watch NJPW thanks to their online streaming service NJPW World eliminating the need for tape trading or "knowing a guy who knows a guy." In 2017, the promotion held two summer shows in Los Angeles to crown a United States Champion. Omega won the tournament and the shows were so successful that the company plans to hold more U.S. shows in 2018. Wrestling fans can help the promotion expand even further by checking out *Being the Elite* on YouTube, as well as NJPW's own channel. The company has also started subtitling promos in English, making it much easier to follow the storylines. Those who give NJPW a chance will not be disappointed.

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Twitter, Facebook, and Professional Wrestling: Indie Wrestler Perspectives on the Importance of Social Media

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When most people hear the words "professional wrestling," they tend to think of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), possibly the most well-known and high-profile wrestling promotion of all time (at least in the United States, though the company has made footholds in several international markets). Yet an entire world of pro wrestling exists beyond the confines of Vince McMahon's massive "sports entertainment" empire. This is the world of independent or indie (alternately "indie") wrestling, a term often applied to smaller independently-operated regional professional wrestling promotions (for more see Heppen and Beard; Mathewson; and Roberts and Sevieri, all in this volume). Examples include AAW (Berwyn, IL), Bar Wrestling (Baldwin Park, CA), Beyond Wrestling (Worcester, MA), and Ring of Honor (Bristol, PA). Independent wrestling has exploded in recent years, thanks in large part to the influence of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

While preparing this special edition of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*, we reached out to indie wrestlers and promoters and asked them how social media has changed the wrestling landscape. We received responses from the following individuals:

1. Actor, podcaster, and indie wrestling legend Colt Cabana, host of the popular *Art of Wrestling* podcast, and fixture of dozens of indie wrestling promotions, including AAW, Chikara Pro, Pro Wrestling Guerilla, Ring of Honor, and more.

2. High-flying indie sensation and self-proclaimed "Leader of the Pack" Stephen Wolf, a staple of such indie promotions as AAW, Glory Pro, Impact Wrestling, and Funky Munky Wrestling.

3. Hard-working indie wrestler Greg Skipper (aka Mr. Excellent), known to fans of CZW, Ground Breaking Wrestling, Xcite Wrestling, and Maryland Championship Wrestling.

4. AAW promoter Mike Petkovich, an essential member of the thriving Chicago indie wrestling scene.

They each told us about how social media has helped indie wrestling become more popular than ever in the 21st century, as well as how new communication technologies have impacted both their careers and the professional wrestling industry. Their comments are collected below without editorializing or theorizing to present their perspectives on social media and professional wrestling.

How Would You Describe the Landscape of Professional Wrestling Today?

Colt Cabana (CC): This is such a broad question that it's hard to answer. Wrestling will always be the red-headed stepchild of pop culture. Even when it's the hottest, coolest thing, it's never really given the respect it truly deserves by mainstream media. There always seems to be a chuckle behind pro wrestling's back. The wrestlers and performers aren't always in love with that notion, but we love our industry and what we do, so we don't let it bother us too much.

Stephen Wolf (SW): Professional wrestling is at an all-time high right now. People are making a living not only from the WWE but in the independent scene as well, and it's crazy to me how many different companies there are.

Image 1: Stephen Wolf (Image courtesy of Stephen Wolf)

Greg Skipper (GS): I think the landscape of the industry has mirrored the changes in society to some degrees. Wrestling fans are consumers and consumers want what they want right now. They search out the information on their favorite performers via the numerous social media platforms and feel more connected with the athletes on a more personal level than ever before. Business is on the upswing considering that so many products are available to be viewed instantaneously.

Mike Petkovich (MP): Busier than ever. There is more pro wrestling to consume than ever before.

What Role Does Social Media Play in Professional Wrestling Today?

CC: I think it's parallel to the role it plays in any other mainstream [media]. When used correctly and wisely, it raises the profile of the individuals and the genre.

SW: Social media is the biggest way to market yourself and get your name out there for fans and promoters alike. As well as being in contact with everything that's going on in the wrestling world.

GS: Just as I had mentioned in the previous question, social media allows fans to be more involved and personal with the wrestlers than ever before. They can follow, "like," and engage with performers, which couldn't be done in the 80s and 90s. From the perspective of the wrestler, it allows us to use social media platforms to promote ourselves and create drawing power to promotions and drive consumers to purchase our merchandise as a secondary avenue of income.

MP: Social media has opened the world to so many promotions. You can literally find content from all over the world. Not only can you find the promotions and their content, you can interact with them because of social media.

How Has Social Media Changed Professional Wrestling?

CC: For one, it's given so much more access to the fans. The performers are much more than just people you occasionally see at a show or see for 5-20 minutes on your television screen. Social media has made wrestlers three-dimensional. Fans can now not only decide who their favorite wrestlers are from their performance, but they can also see if they like who they are as people. I think this is really important because it's an avenue of that performer's personality that maybe wasn't able to shine in one aspect, but social media has allowed different ways to be presented.

SW: Social media has been a great and terrible thing. It's great because, like I said earlier, it's a great way to branch out and connect with fans. But on the same token it makes it a lot easier for fans to find your personal information. As wrestlers we love our fans but we also love our privacy as well.

Image 2: Mr. Excellent (Image courtesy of Greg Skipper)

GS: It has changed the industry in many ways. Marketing and merchandising are just other words for follows and likes. It's made storytelling more difficult in the grand scheme of things as the fans can easily investigate our friends to see if "Wrestler A really hates Wrestler B." It's opened the performers up to easy criticism. Pre-social media you would have to actually say these things to the wrestlers. Would they? No. They didn't want to feel the wrath of someone 6'4", 285 lbs. Now, behind the computer screen and with a few hashtags, fans can say anything they want. That's the negative. The positive side of that is if you can control your social media profile, you can really drive followers to creating buzz about you. And there are tons of independent wrestling promoters that will book talent with that all important "buzz." So, in that aspect, social media creates more opportunities for the performer.

MP: It has made everything accessible to the consumer. You can now interact with promotions, wrestlers, and merchandise companies from all over the world. It adds a personal touch and gives the fan something more than just watching a match on TV.

How Important Is Social Media for Your Career and in What Ways?

CC: It's another extension of who you are. It's also important because it's that very individual who's using it. In modern wrestling we see a writing team or someone else helping build a personality for a wrestler. Social media takes all those crutches away and shows what that specific person is all about and if they can use it for their career.

SW: In a nutshell, it's the best way for people to see who you (or your character) do/stand for. Also, it makes it a smoother process for people to find you and who you are.

GS: As it relates to my career it's important in several ways. The most important is marketing. Creating a brand and likeability about myself that makes people want to support me and whichever promotions that are booking me. If a promotion can see that I have fans tweeting about me, they are more likely to put some steam behind me in that promotion. Further up the card usually equates to

more money in my pocket. Another way I find it important, at least for me, is to keep a pulse on the wrestling fan base. As a wrestler, I'm a salesman. I need to know what my customers are buying. If I can utilize social media to follow what they are interested in, what they like about certain other performers, trends, etc., I can utilize that and adapt it to my own character thus making me even more appealing and keeping the fans yearning for what I'm selling (which will probably equate to increased merchandise sales as well).

MP: Social media is our access to the fans that support the AAW product away from the venues. It means everything to us.

How Does Social Media Impact the Notion of Kayfabe?

CC: In the 1920s, the book *Fall Guys* was written as a tell-all exposé on pro wrestling. They didn't have Twitter then. Some people can use Twitter to do that and some can't. It's just an easier and faster way to expose whatever someone wants to expose.

SW: We, as wrestlers, try to maintain kayfabe as much as possible. On our character Twitter pages/Instagrams we post about how much we hate Bad Guy #1 because he beat up our buddy Good Guy #2, but on a personal Facebook page you'll see Bad Guy #1, Good Guy #2, and myself hanging out watching sports (Go Cavs). So social media really does take a toll on keeping private and public lives separate.

GS: In short, it destroys what was left from the advent of the internet. I find it increasingly difficult to "work the fans" using social media. It can be done, but it's becoming ever more difficult. It takes a strict commitment to do so. I try to promote stories that I'm involved in thru social media but not to an excess. I treat this like I'm a true athlete that's brought in to perform and treat it like a real competition. Whether I like the guy or not, I'm brought in and my mindset is "If I make these people believe that I'm trying to win because it benefits me in any way (perhaps financially), they will not care if myself and my opponent are Facebook friends."

MP: It has taken the idea of kayfabe from black and white to this huge gray area. Sami Callihan is the perfect example of this. There isn't a whole lot of good in Sami Callihan in AAW, but because he is so active on social media and so accessible, people respect his hustle, talent, and effort. He gets cheered just as much as he gets booed. Social media has made it hard to have a true "bad guy" in pro wrestling.

If You Could Change One Thing About Social Media and Professional Wrestling, What Would You Change, and Why?

CC: I don't like how some wrestlers tweet. That's subjective though, just like wrestling. So, I wouldn't change anything. People will use it the same way that people wrestle. Fans will follow those wrestlers or not depending on what they like about the social media they consume.

SW: If I would have to change anything about the connection it would be that fans stay away from the personal accounts of wrestlers. I love my fans, but I want you guys to know Stephen Wolf, not Stephen (insert last name). That's why a lot of wrestlers (myself included) have fan pages set up for fans to follow us on. Tweet, comment, and double tap all of your favorite wrestlers' material and support them 100%. Just don't be discouraged if they don't add you as a friend. Facebook is personal, and personal material should stay just that.

GS: Wow. This is a tough question. I think the only thing I would change is the level of transparency between the business and the viewing public. If we could go back in time and change how we, the wrestlers, treat these platforms and utilize them to the fullest as a new, ever expansive platform to tell stories, promote ourselves, and the places we will be performing without giving away the "reality" of the situation, we truly could have rebuilt the business and kayfabe could be alive and well again. Don't get me wrong. I really think as the technology progresses, if we as wrestlers continue to adapt, we will find ways to use what is out there to tell our stories and build our brands. Adapt or be forgotten.

MP: I honestly don't think I would change anything. I'm sure there are some wrestling purists out there that will argue with me but look at what it has done for AAW. Social media has exposed our product to fans across the world and made us a household name. Social media has allowed us to find and use the best talent on the planet for our fans.

Future Directions on Social Media and Professional Wrestling

The comments collected here suggest different directions for research on social media and professional wrestling. First, increased scrutiny should be paid to the various ways in which professional wrestling has adopted social media as the means to manage the relationship between wrestlers, promoters, and fans, particularly on the independent circuit. For instance, social media allows indie wrestlers and smaller promotions to build an audience without the assistance of the WWE's massive marketing machine. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media have granted indie wrestlers and promoters the ability to connect with audiences and therefore thrive. Indeed, indie wrestling's "acrobatic moves and daredevil stunts are tailor-made for the age of YouTube and GIFs, while streaming services such as New Japan World, Fite and Twitch have made it easier than ever to binge on wrestling" (Zimmerman). In addition, these sites have granted fans increased access to their favorite wrestlers, but especially those who perform on the indie circuit and use social media to aggressively build their own brands. As such, fans sometimes develop a more intense relationship to these performers and characters due to what sometimes seems like a more intimate form of interaction. All this becomes particularly important when considering that professional wrestlers are often characterized as independent contractors, both within the WWE but especially on the indie circuit. Self-promotion and building relationships with promoters and fans can help performers land gigs. Social media provides space for such branding work, and therefore its impact on indie wrestling deserves further consideration.

At the same time, the WWE routinely encourages interaction during its live shows through hashtags and tweet scrolls, as well as having their wrestlers (known as Superstars) engage with fans through a variety of social media sites. For instance, the WWE recently unveiled the Mixed Match Challenge, a tag team tournament featuring intergender pairings competing for charity that airs

exclusively on Facebook Watch (Oestriecher), and the company urges fans (aka the WWE Universe) to interact with the Superstars during the bouts via Facebook's commenting feature. Interactions such as these serve two primary functions. First, they allow the WWE to advance transmedia storylines across multiple media platforms (for example, wrestlers can taunt one another on Twitter, and commentators can mention these interactions while calling the in-ring action). In addition, these interactions can sometimes allow fans a previously-unheard-of peek behind the kayfabe curtain and grant them a glimpse of the personalities that exist behind the characters. Conversely, by demonstrating their true personalities, some wrestlers can break free from the strict oversight exercised by Vince McMahon and WWE Creative and thereby get "over" with the members of the WWE Universe—see Zack Ryder as just one example (Aitken). Thus, it becomes vital to consider how social media serve to shape and reshape the most powerful pro-wrestling (or "sports entertainment" in Vince McMachon's preferred lingo) promotion in the world.

In addition, some wrestlers use social media to build their own personal brands and promote other projects—sometimes kayfabe, sometimes not, but perhaps always as part of a larger performance. For example, during his run with Impact Wrestling (formerly NWA TNA: Total Nonstop Action), Matt Hardy used social media to develop the Broken Universe, and now uses his various platforms to recreate this narrative for the WWE. Meanwhile, Xavier Woods created a new platform for himself via his YouTube channel, *Up Up Down Down* (*UUDD*), which gave him and the rest of the New Day (as well as other members of the WWE roster) increased visibility and allowed them to get over with fans (as evidenced by the *UUDD* signs appearing in the crowds at WWE shows, and the fact that the WWE now sells officially-licensed *UUDD* merchandise). Tomasso Ciampa also used social media during his NXT run to advance his feud with Johnny Gargano and develop his Blackheart persona (which in turn became his new Twitter handle, replacing his previous identity as Project Ciampa). These examples all serve to illustrate that social media have become an integral part of the wrestling landscape in the 21st century, and demonstrate the need to explore, examine, and interrogate the various ways they have changed the face of pro wrestling and sports entertainment.

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Introduction: Sexual Assault Awareness Month

NORMA JONES

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. In light of #metoo and #timesup, we are seeing that sexual assault, abuse, and harassment are extremely complex and pervasive issues, crossing many boundaries including gender and race.

While some may be engaging with this issue in more abstract and theoretical ways, I am hoping to push our boundaries by leaving our comfort zones/confines of academia and addressing it from both survivor and investigator standpoints.

We start with an interview with Jenna Quinn, survivor, author, and national recognized speaker/advocate. In 2009, she lent her name to nation's first child sexual abuse prevention/education law named after survivor. Then, Bernadette Makowski, research specialist for the Campus Sexual Assault Victims Unit of the New York State Police and Sarah Green, Title IX Investigator, address issues of gender-based violence in higher education. Together, Jenna, Bernadette, and Sarah give us insight into current issues, prevention, and ways to provide better help.

From there, in her in her view, Jenna pointed out that sexual abuse is "a silent epidemic." The crimes are severely underreported. Jenna added, "silence and shame are the predator's best friends."

With this in mind, I asked for anonymous testimonies. I hope that empowering and legitimizing voices may help some to break that silence and cycle of shame. I am extremely thankful and humbled that brave survivors are willing to share their stories.

The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview
JENNA QUINN

ABOUT JENNA

Jenna Quinn is a child sexual abuse survivor, author, TED speaker, and the namesake of Jenna's Law. In 2009, Jenna's Law was the first child sexual abuse prevention education law that passed in the United States named after a survivor. It requires that each school district adopt and implement a prevention policy that educates students and school staff on how to recognize and report child sexual abuse. Now, over half the country has duplicated portions of Jenna's Law.

With a Masters Degree in Communications, she is a sought-after speaker who has traveled nationwide, educating and sharing her inspiring story with legislatures, law-enforcement, abuse-prevention groups, schools, communities of faith, nonprofit organizations, and the general public for over twelve years. As a survivor who benefited from the services of the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), Jenna has worked with over 70 CAC's across the country and educated communities about the CAC's important work. She is the National Spokesperson for Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe and has participated in both local and national radio, television, and news programs, dedicating her life to preventing child sexual abuse through education and legislation.

For more about Jenna, please visit her site at www.JennaQuinn.org

After your abuser was found guilty and sentenced, a columnist from the *Dallas Morning News* contacted you. During your interview with him, what made you decide, as a teenager and survivor, to not remain anonymous?

 The last piece of the interview was of me encouraging other survivors to speak up, speak out, and get help. I also reminded survivors that it wasn't their fault and told them they had nothing to be ashamed of. The columnist then stated that he didn't have any other questions, cleared his throat, and then confidently reassured me that he would not publish my name in the paper. The paper always concealed the names of sexual assault victims.

    As soon as he made that comment something supernaturally rose up inside of me as a shy seventeen-year old and I shouted, "No!" I had spent too many years as a voiceless victim and it felt wrong to keep my name anonymous. How could I ask other survivors to speak up and come forward when I was too ashamed to be named myself? My goal was to lead by example, clearly stating that "we" as a community of strong survivors had nothing to be ashamed of.

Jenna's Law in Texas (HB 1041) is the first child sexual abuse prevention/education law passed in the U.S., that was named after a survivor. The law mandates K-12 prevention training on the symptoms of child abuse for educators and body safety for students. How has the law been helpful in helping students, teachers, parents, and staff better detect signs of child sexual abuse?

With the crime of child sexual abuse, over 90% of the time a child is abused by someone they know and trust. We can't teach stranger danger without also teaching acquaintance danger.

Darkness to Light's research on Jenna's law showed that after educators were trained, they were about four times more likely to report abuse versus their pre-training careers. And students are finally getting the prevention education so desperately needed this day and age. Among the many programs used in Texas, one student program alone, called Kids Count Players, has trained over 100,000 students in North Texas. Since 2009, I've heard countless stories of how Jenna's Law has helped children find their voice and make an outcry. Education is the foundation of prevention, as 95% of sexual abuse is preventable through education (Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute). Jenna's Law provides this education. When children and adults are educated about the crime, taught safety strategies on how to prevent, taught who is safe to tell, and how to report, a victimized child is more likely to get the help they need. As long as we view this as a crime in our society, we need to be teaching how to prevent it. Because when we don't address this issue, we feed the deadly silence this crime thrives on.

What do you want schools, parents, teachers, and staff to know, to better help children being abused?

There are several facilitator based prevention programs available that schools can use to teach children safety. It only takes moments to empower a child's voice, but it can takes years, or even a lifetime for them to get their voices back. As adults, we cannot choose the route of personal comfort or self-protection over the responsibility of providing a safe environment for children. If you are looking for a program to use at your school, Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe **is** a research-based program for pre-K-12th

grade. Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe helps children and teens learn the skills to prevent or interrupt cycles of neglect, bullying, and child abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual. The program uses an ecological approach to prevention education by providing materials to engage parents and caregivers, teachers, school administrators, and community stakeholders. To learn about the program, visit them at: https://www.childhelp.org/subs/childhelp-speak-up-be-safe/

In 2017, you published your memoir, *Pure in Heart*, to help raise awareness and as a prevention training tool. What do you want readers to take away from your book?

There are several takeaways from the book. I've given an extensive list of warning signs a child may display if they have been sexually abuse, as well as listing out National Resources for survivor help and education for Jenna's Law programs in the back of the book. Equally important, is the encouragement offered for children and families who have encountered this crime. There is hope and healing in the midst of this awful crime and it's never too late to get help. Many survivors feel alone in their personal struggles to overcome the pain. I address those struggles and am transparent with my journey through the healing process. I strongly believe this is a topic that should always be addressed through the lens of honesty and hope.

In *Pure in Heart*, finding your voice seemed to be an important theme. What advice do you have for those still shackled by shame and unable to find their voice?

In Silence, shame is allowed to grow. Shame keeps us from turning to other sources of help, like people and their belief system, and that's exactly what a perpetrator wants.

Silence and shame are the predator's best friends. And what is kept in secret has power over you. That's why we can't heal what we don't reveal, on an individual level and as a society. I would encourage other survivors to get help by first telling someone they can trust to take action on their behalf to get them help. Secondly, find a good counselor to speak with. The healing process is not linear, and everyone's process is different, but the first step in that process is honesty with the abuse, because denial with this crime is toxic.

What is next for you?

My hope to get prevention education into all communities is a direct result from my experience as a survivor. We've made a lot of progress since I first spoke out in 2004, but I feel there is still much more work to be done with prevention education and legislation. It's not just schools that need policies in place to protect children, but all organizations and agencies that provide services to children. I feel this work is lifelong. It's been a joy to be a part of seeing hope, healing, education, and empowerment grow all across the U.S.

In this issue, we are asking for testimonies. How might these testimonies be helpful for those sharing their stories and those reading them?

The American Medical Association has labeled sexual abuse a "silent epidemic." This crime is different from other crimes because it's one of the most underreported ones. There are many factors that play into why it's a silent crime, but I am limited within this interview in explaining those factors. In short, this crime thrives on silence, shame, and isolation. And isolation is very dangerous because it can eventually lead to hopelessness. Many survivors feel they are alone in their experiences, however there are an estimated 42 million survivors in American alone. Shared experiences create a sense of community, acceptance, and empowerment. When we see that we are not an island, trapped or alone in our experiences, we find a sense of hope. And through many voices of hope we can ignite this movement to further break the silence

The Popular Culture Studies Journal Interview SARAH GREEN & BERNADETTE MARKOWSKI

ABOUT SARAH

Sarah Green has worked with colleges as a Title IX Investigator and/or Coordinator for several years. She earned her J.D. from American University Washington College of Law in 2003, and her B.A. Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Maryland in 1999.

ABOUT BERNADETTE

Bernadette Markowski has been an employee of the New York State Police since October of 2016 and is currently serving as the Research Specialist for the Campus Sexual Assault Victims Unit. Previously she spent over 7 years with the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of New York where, as part of her capacity as an assistant, worked with victims of federal crimes. Ms. Markowski obtained her bachelor's degree from The Sage Colleges as a major in Crime and Justice Policy and is currently on the cusp of finishing a double master's program at the Sage Graduate College in both Forensic Mental Health and Counseling and Community Psychology. Among several projects she is working on, Ms. Markowski is collaborating with other researchers in the field to determine valuable educational resources to integrate into high school curriculum.

In 2015, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed "Enough Is Enough" into law. At the time, it was one of the more aggressive policies regarding issues of sexual assault higher education campuses. What did the implementation look like at the state, campus, and more local levels?

Sarah: From a legal standpoint, the Implementation of 129-B codified the 2010 guidance of the Office for Civil Rights issued Dear Colleague Letter and subsequent publications. It took the Federal guidance further in implementing a "yes means yes" standard instead of a "no means no" standard. This changed the vernacular of college Title IX training sessions, because New York schools needed to make sure that students clearly understood what "affirmative consent" or "yes means yes" means. It will take a few years to see if this is changing the way that students view sexual relationships.

Bernadette: One of many changes at the state level, the Enough Is Enough legislation created the Campus Sexual Assault Victims Unit under the New York State Police. Our unit is responsible for training and educating the numerous responders to sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking victims on college campuses. We also lead collaborative efforts to create a support structure among community members at the campus and local levels including Title IX coordinators, victim advocates, local police, university police and others.

How does the law differ with respect to other states? Specifically, most higher education campuses have their own regulations. Why does a state law matter?

Bernadette: New York is unique from other states in that the Enough Is Enough legislation is pioneering legislation regarding accountability. The Enough Is Enough legislation requires all college campuses to report incidents including sexual assault and stalking, among others, to the New York State Education Department. They are also required to report complaints against the college. This is important because regardless if the federal Department of Education guidelines change, this does not affect the requirements in New York. The colleges are still responsible or "on the hook" and accountable outside of their campus. The legislation also forces colleges to update and adhere to their own campus policies because there is oversight. In my opinion, one of the most important and unique pieces of the legislation is the inclusion of an amnesty policy. Part of our mission as the Campus Sexual Assault Victims Unit is to facilitate the frequency of individuals to come forward and report. Having an amnesty policy encourages these individuals to come forward without fear of punishment for other behaviors such as being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Sarah: Let me add that New York and California have the toughest sexual assault laws in the country. Meaning that if students want to go to schools in these states they must be taught about what the laws mean and how they can affect their college career. It also puts an impetus on all colleges in the state (both public and private) to have uniform polices when it comes to gender and gender-based discrimination. State laws, when in conflict with Federal Law, can be challenged in the courts. Also, if colleges are not implementing the law uniformly, their decisions in their administrative hearings can be challenged, in the courts as well.

At the higher education level, what are existing administrators doing well? What advice do you have for administrators that could be helpful in better serving campuses?

Sarah: Administrators are taking their responsibilities seriously regarding sexual assault and gender discrimination on college campuses. I would tell administrators that they should keep creating meaningful sexual assault prevention programming that is available to students throughout the academic year, and not just a small program given at orientation.

Bernadette: I agree that training is key. Since the inception of the Enough Is Enough legislation, for colleges and universities, not only has the focus been on the reporting aspect of certain crimes, but it has also specifically delegated state funds to the training and education of college administrators, and the students themselves. I believe that education is the key to prevention. Colleges are beginning to understand that the better training they can get for their administrators and students, the more effective prevention strategies will become. We have heard from students that sometimes a clarification of specific behaviors helps them to understand what is acceptable, and what should be reported. The more trainings we can provide, the more students and administrators we will be able to reach and educate.

We are seeing that some instructors are trying to incorporate sexual assault awareness and prevention at the classroom level. What advice do you have for these instructors in terms of best practices?

Bernadette: I'm an advocate for teachers reinforcing prevention education. We can't always reach all incoming students at a level that they will be active listeners. Often times, sexual assault prevention education is covered during an orientation that covers many other topics and in a room of hundreds of students. If students can get awareness training on a personal level in their classrooms, we are much more likely to reach them more effectively. There are many trainings every month throughout the state, as well as our unit that can provide training upon request. My best advice to those instructors trying to incorporate awareness and prevention at the classroom level would be to reach out to the resources that are available in your neighborhood for the tools to help make yourself most effective. Having someone from the community come into your classroom would also help to bridge the gap and create awareness of local assistance.

Sarah: More specifically, if individual instructors want to talk about sexual assault prevention, they should consult with experts on how to do it in a way that is trauma informed. Also, they should try to make it relevant to the topics that they are covering in class. I always recommend that faculty and staff preface any training with a trauma warning so that students know that a triggering topic might be addressed. I also advise faculty and staff to put the name of the Title IX coordinator and their notice of non-discrimination on their syllabus.

Testimonies

ANONYMOUS

Unfiltered anonymous testimonies from survivors, each sharing their stories with us.

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When I was seven, I visited my family over the summer. We were playing hide and seek when my cousin (who was four years older than me) and I were paired to be the seekers. While we counted. he started to touch me in inappropriate places and pulled both of our pants. every summer I went this happened. I didn't say anything out of fear that I wouldn't get to go on vacation.

***

I've had three different men who hurt me. The first time was when I was eight. My parents were separated, and we were invited by my uncle to come live with him and my aunt. My mother would've done anything to get my father back, so she moved us in with a known pedophile to be close to him. The abuse continued until I was eleven. When discovered, my parents told him if he went to counseling they wouldn't report him. It never stopped.

　　My father was the next one. At sixteen when I was maturing I felt like my dad was looking at my body. I took to wearing baggy clothes when I was home. He seemed to hate me I think because of what happened with my uncle. I know I was raped by him, but I don't remember much about what. I have cut off all contact with him and my mom.

The third was my first husband. He was afraid I was going to leave him, so he started raping me and would poke holes in to the condoms in hopes I would get pregnant and stay with him. When I finally did leave him, I did try and prosecute but was told by the DA that my case was a waste of time.

The advice I would give, don't allow this to define you. Find a good therapist and support group, that helped most of all. But don't let ANYONE tell you must forgive them! You don't have to forgive but deal with your anger so you can move on.

***

I was raped by 2 guys who broke into my house when I was 18 years old, I knew both of the guys. I reported because I refused to be controlled in that way. One of the guys received 5 years in prison, the other received 45 years. I prefer to say I'm a part of the #IWILL group instead of #metoo. I will not let being a victim control me, I will make a difference.

Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL REVIEWS

Introduction

When embarking on this themed edition of the journal I was immediately reminded of meeting Jake Roberts AKA "Jake the Snake" when I was a kid. He was dating a friend's mom and it was the first time I learned anything about the world of professional wrestling. In all honesty, I wasn't a big fan in the beginning, but, man, my brother sure was. In time, I became more intrigued by the theatrics and characters of this loud and "violent" world. As an adult it has been a long time since I have returned to watching wresting, but when *GLOW* showed up on Netflix I was instantly a fan. Powerful women, each playing big and vibrant characters, not to forget the hair and outfits. Needless to say, I am pretty excited for this issue. Not only are we able to highlight this unique part of popular culture, but it also provides a perfect stage to kick off our bigger, bolder reviews section.

Expanding reviews to include movies, shows, games, and other types of texts has allowed us to dive even deeper into how popular culture is framing and shaping society. Focusing specifically on the topic of wrestling the following section includes reviews of nearly every imaginable category. It includes two shows, the Netflix original series *GLOW* as well as the WWE Network's special *Women's Royal Rumble Match*. Continuing with a theme of the women of wrestling is the film *Mamachas del Ring*. Putting the player themselves into the ring is the video game *WWE 2K18*. And finally, changing media from screen to speakers is the review of the podcast *The Jim Cornette Experience* which

specifically focuses on our special issue topic. The variety and insight these reviews have brought are worthy of praise and I want to extend a special thank you to CarrieLynn D. Reinhard, Garret Castleberry, and Christopher J. Olson on all their work on overseeing these reviews.

In addition to the audio, visual, and immersive experiences, we have also continued to include the reviews of the books offering insight on a variety of topics, including the ways one might wrestle with how we are defined in a technological world. Or how politicians wrestle with science; and especially in the current political climate the battle between science and politics can sometimes looks pretty similar to a good old-fashioned WWE tables, ladders, and chair match. The section also includes reviews on the unique backstories and histories of superheroes; as well as how bringing in the comics where many of these heroes live into the classroom can offer an interesting pedagogical tool if used correctly. Finally, with all this excitement one might need a refreshment. What better way to follow up a wrestling match than with an ice-cold review of beer culture?

So, sit back, relax, and let the reviews begin.

Malynnda A. Johnson
Indiana State University

Cheney-Lippold, John. *We are Data: Algorithms and the Making of our Digital Selves*. New York UP, 2017.

According to Google, I am a mid-40s man who loves folk music. Facebook notes that I love soccer, in need of a new sofa. Both companies and countless others generate revenue by identifying customer attributes and selling advertising space targeting those specific demographics to companies seeking. No longer do advertisers want to find people who are mid-30s, or soccer-loving, or folk fans; instead, they want the targeted

combination of all three. As John Cheney-Lippold shows in his thought-provoking book *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves,* this application of data has profound implications for how we are categorized, controlled, and monitored both by the governmental and private entities.

In chapter one, Cheney-Lippold examines the idea of big data, or the data that is gathered by "an algorithmic production of knowledge that is regarded as more true" (Cheney-Lippold 57). Through automated algorithms, Big Data is transformed from being *too big* to be useful into manageable chunks that are categorized and analyzed for trends. Cheney-Lippold applies Terranova's work in networked identities and powers to apply a label of a person as a "dividual," rather than individual. A dividual is a "microstate data that Google uses to make our algorithmic, macrostate templates" (27). In short, it is the identity that is created just from our data, not from our flesh-and-blood person.

Next, we learn that these algorithmic, dividual identities, whether or not they are actually factual representations of one's self, "regulate us in many different, and much less visible ways" (Cheney-Lippold 100). One's dividuality encompasses all of the data points generated by your digital life, and plots them against a standard representation of age, gender, and characteristic attributes through a process that inherently enforces hegemonic norms, as the system may not have enough data points to discern a given set of patterns based on ethnicity, race, and gender identity. As a result, you as a dividual are a one-dimensional that slowly evolves over time as more and more data points develop and create a new definition of what it means to be an age, a gender, or a race. The dividuality created for a real identity evolves, even though the core identity remains the same. But is that truth irrelevant? Although we have the ability to "locate ourselves as a subject" and declare our personal attributes, that ability "is rendered functionally useless" in a world of

digital advertisement (Cheney-Lippold 146). The label that is applied to us becomes an abstract concept based on the data points that support it.

However, an algorithmic identity also has practical implications. In an age of digital surveillance, one's citizenship could be determined by what Cheney-Lippold labels *jus algoritmi*. Unlike traditional citizenship, *jus algorithm* is constantly "reevaluated according to users' datafied behaviors" (158). One day you could be a citizen, deserving of the rights and privileges thereof, and the next day you become a foreign national. This determination also affects the lens through which you see your online life. For example, social media companies "[rank] every last one of your…friends with a numerical appraisal based on" their algorithmically determined value in your life (180-181). Among other consequences, this could easily result in your social media feed having one predominant theme, as the algorithm removes diverse opinions from your view. Is it any wonder that politics seems to have become more polarized in the age of social media?

Finally, in the fourth chapter, Cheney-Lippold explores the issue of privacy within the greater context of an algorithmically-negotiated identity. His thesis is clear: the traditional right to privacy may be the right to left alone and ignored, but in a datafied age, being left alone could have deleterious consequences. He dedicated the book to one such man, Mark Hemmings, who died after an emergency operator's algorithm determined incorrectly he did not need emergency care. Hemmings' death "wasn't about Hemmings at all— it was about his data," which is as striking as it is frightening (243). Although rarely life-and-death, the pervasive surveillance that has become the norm "controls what our worlds look like, it controls whom we talk to, and it most definitely controls what who 'we' are means" (225-226). There are solutions, should we choose to embrace them, which he explores through a wide array of theorists and practitioners, ranging from cypherpunk hacktivists to legal theorists Julie Cohen and Jisuk Woo. Although the specific actions differ, the result is

the same: Cheney-Lippold encourages us to understand our privacy as it has been transformed by the power structures at work between our own data-driven dividuality the corporate and governmental entities with vested interest in uncovering our dividuality. Then, and only then, can we take active measures to reclaim our "breathing space to be" (245).

Cheney-Lippold concludes by pointing the future. The algorithms of the future are likely just as opaque as those today, and the subtle controls that these algorithms have over our daily and digital lives will only increase. However, there remains hope, and that hope is for the citizens and scholars alike to take back agency by acknowledging that these power structures exist and asking the questions necessary to make conscientious decisions: Who wields that power, how, and to what end? Only then can we make educated decisions about where and under what circumstances our data is used.

In *We Are Data*, Cheney-Lippold weaves together both anecdotes drawn from the latest news, and theory devised by the most brilliant minds examine the topic of algorithmic identity and repercussions thereof in a deft, engaging way. It's a perfect volume for scholars who aren't technicians to get an overview of the issues in the field; there is no need to shy away from it because it covers a technical subject, as he does not focus on the technical aspects. The layman may find some of the detailed explanations to be excessive, but that will likely result in the book having re-read value, as there will be more to absorb each time it's read.

Elise Taylor
Northeastern Illinois University

Gavaler, Chris. *On the Origins of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to* Action Comics *No. 1*. U of Iowa P, 2016.

When Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created the Man of Steel, their most obvious inspirations came from the forerunners of superheroes, such as the masked vigilante the Lone Ranger, the heroic-adventurer Doc Savage, and the noble primitive Tarzan. But what inspired the creation of these superhero forerunners?

According to Chris Gavaler's book *On the Origins of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to* Action Comics *No. 1*, the cultural roots of superheroes extends deep into the cultural currents of the "long" 19th nineteenth century, a period of literary history that runs from the beginning of the French Revolution (1789) to the start of World War I (1914).

Gavaler contends that superheroes were created from the usual suspects from the long 19th century, such as Napoleon, Darwin, and Nietzsche, as well as some rather unusual suspects, like Edgar Allan Poe, Jane Austen, and the Ku Klux Klan. Gavaler's central thesis is that early superhero comic book writers from the 1930s drew upon a range of cultural influences that not only came from pulp vigilantes and popular adventurers, but also from the cultural zeitgeist derived from the long 19th century.

Over eight chapters, Gavaler surveys these influences. One reoccurring theme is the problematic role of the vigilante within the creation of the superhero. Superheroes exist within a problematic relationship with the greater society, since their actions can conflict with societal norms promoting lawful behavior. By acting outside of the law, superheroes can easily lose their moral compass.

Gavaler also explores the nature of goodness, which is another reoccurring theme discussed at length in Chapter 1. Gavaler temporarily bypasses the long 19th century to examine the struggle of good versus evil

through the religious origins of goodness. He explores the roles of Jesus, God, and Satan in our understanding of the human desire to want to do "good."

Chapter 2 explores the way that a superhero defies social norms by being a revolutionary through their unsanctioned vigilante activity. Connecting Napoleon and historical pre-Napoleons (Robin Hood, Guy Fawkes, and Paul Revere) to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Gray Champion" and Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Gavaler asserts that all of these heroes try "to liberate us by transcending the ordinary limits of human ability" (235).

Chapter 3 discusses the role of the monstrous within superheroes. Drawing on fictional monsters (Goethe's Faust, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Polidori's *Vampyre: A Tale*, and Poe's "Mesmeric Revelation"), folkloric monsters (Spring-Heeled Jack) and historical influences on monsters (Harry Houdini), Gavaler discusses how each source successfully uses and masters their powers without being undone by their powers.

Chapter 4 investigates the connection of the Western genre to superheroes, specifically focusing on the incorrect stereotype of the "Indian savage" in Robert M. Bird's *Nick of the Woods* and the gun-slinging cowboy in Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. He also shows how Wister's hero is similar to John Carter, the hero in Edgar Rice Burroughs' Martian books. Gavaler states that an "often forgotten fact about the superhero's frontier past: after migrating west, the South jumped to Outer Space" (118-119).

Chapter 5 shows the connection of superheroes to evolution and eugenics. Gavaler exposes the Victorians fear of retrogression, a reverse evolution of humanity back into bestiality. Victorians also used evolution as a way to justify the continuation of the social hierarchy through social Darwinism, asserting that aristocrats are naturally noble. These sentiments explain why early superheroes and their forerunners, such as millionaire

Bruce Wayne (Batman) and Lord Greystoke (Tarzan), came from the ranks of the aristocracy.

Chapter 6 delves into the precarious ways that power and goodness are connected to superheroes. Gavaler asserts that superheroes fall into two categories: a Gyges (an ordinary man who happens onto great power which he ends up abusing for his own benefit) or a Raskolnikov (a great man who, in using his powers for his own benefit, learns to curb his power through laws to become more ordinary). Heroes can act out of misguided reasons by misreading the power and goodness dichotomy. Gavaler then discusses the ways that Thomas F. Dixon's *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* contributed to the creation of superheroes through the Clansman possessing the vigilante desire to right racial wrongs.

Chapter 7 flirts with superhero romance and intimacy. Starting with a discussion of Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*, Gavaler discusses the ways that "a superhero's most intimate act is unmasking" (204) is demonstrated in the sex lives of The Scarlet Pimpernel and Zorro. He ends by connecting DC comics to the soft porn industry and its influence on the sexual hang-ups of superheroes, such as Superman's unfulfilled relationship with Lois Lane.

Gavaler concludes his discussion of superheroes in chapter 8 by exploring the "two-world superhero formula" that appears in a multitude of fantasy and science fiction sources. He also connects the role that science fiction plays within the origin of superheroes, focusing specifically on Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon.

Gavaler's thesis is groundbreaking because few scholars have placed the cultural influences for superheroes so deep into the 19th nineteenth century. This makes the book an important and ambitious work that uses a dizzying amount of scholarship to demonstrate the varied cultural influences on superheroes.

However, Gavaler's stylistic choices in this volume sometime get in the way of him fully expressing these ideas. Gavaler can be oblique in his analysis, making the reader have to work to figure out the intellectual fascia connecting his points. Gavaler also indulges in personal digressions that may be considered inappropriate to the topic. Such digressions added little to his argument and call into question his ethos.

Despite these problems, Gavaler is one of the first scholars to provide superheroes deeper cultural roots, as such this book offers fellow comic scholars much to ponder. Siegel and Shuster would be amazed that the pedigree of Superman, who first appeared in *Action Comics* No. 1, has roots deep into the long 19th century.

Alan Jozwiak
University of Cincinnati/Chatfield College

Levitan, Dave. *Not a Scientist: How Politicians Mistake, Misrepresent, and Utterly Mangle Science.* W.W. Norton & Company, 2017.

Science is a fundamental building block of human civilization. In spite of this, it is not well understood by the general public, either as a specific process or a general concept. As a result, science is vulnerable to abuse and distortion, particularly for political purposes. Dave Levitan's *Not a Scientist: How Politicians Mistake, Misrepresent, and Utterly Mangle Science*, presents a well-written and timely discussion of this trend, especially in the age of "fake news", where it has become increasingly more difficult to distinguish between objective truth and deceptive propaganda.

Levitan's book is a thorough and well-researched guidebook for debunking anti-scientific rhetoric. Each chapter focuses on one specific rhetorical move employed in politics to distort scientific principles and accomplishments. Each technique is then applied to real-world examples of politicians employing it in a public forum, namely interviews or speeches. This structure allows for concise and detailed analysis, giving each topic the time it deserves without bogging down the book with too much information.

In his foreword, Levitan explains that the book makes no mention of Donald Trump, as it predates his election, but does make note of Trump's unique rhetorical technique: "The Firehose", meaning an endless stream of errors (xi). In his introduction, Levitan traces the title's origin to a 1980 speech by Ronald Reagan, in which he said he was "not a scientist" but (incorrectly) stated that volcanoes create more pollution than humans (1) In Chapter One, Levitan defines "The Oversimplification" as "strong, definitive claims" that ignore the nuances of a scientific topic (11). Chapter Two explains "The Cherry-Pick" as selectively pulling out information to suit one's agenda while ignoring the "larger body of evidence" (29). Chapter Three, "The Butter-Up and Undercut", explains how politicians undermining scientific research under the guise of praise (46). Chapter Four, "The Demonizer", describes a tactic that takes a "difficult and usually scary" concept and links it to an unrelated and unpopular politicized issue (60). Chapter Five, "Blame the Blogger", discusses politicians citing information from dubious sources, under the assumption that the audience won't bother to fact check their statements (74). In Chapter Six, the "Ridicule and Dismiss", Levitan explains how pundits make a complex topic sound so ludicrous that the audience dismisses it as absurd (99).

In Chapter Seven, "The Literal Nitpick", Levitan explains how a focus on the "very specific definition of words used" is used to minimize fallout of incorrect statements (112). Chapter Eight, "The Credit Snatch",

describes when politicians claiming a scientific accomplishment happened under their watch, ignoring larger social processes that lead to such developments (124-125). Chapter Nine, "The Certain Uncertainty", the author explains how pundits claim that fields of study without "utter, complete, 100 per cent proof" are invalid and thus shouldn't be pursued (139). Chapter Ten, "The Blind-Eye to Follow-Up", explains reliance on "outdated, improved-on or outright debunked" information can be used for political purposes (156). In Chapter Eleven, "The Lost in Translation", Levitan explains that information can be distorted as it travels through the political grapevine (175). In Chapter Twelve, "The Straight-Up Fabrication", Levitan explains the nature of claims with no basis in science or reality whatsoever (186). Levitan concludes his book on "The Conspicuous Silence", in which politicians simply ignore major scientific concerns, thus implying they are inconsequential, and reminds the reader to always be on the lookout for bogus scientific claims (201).

Though this book is both of high quality and social importance, there are two issues that are not flaws but omissions. First, in his counterattacks on politically charged pseudoscience, Levitan makes no reference to Creationism, a pseudoscience whose proponents often employ techniques very similar to those listed in this book. Second, Levitan focuses almost exclusively on Republican and conservative politicians, with only casual references to the unscientific ideas promoted by Democratic and liberal pundits. While there is considerable evidence that right-wingers in general make more noise in terms of anti-science rhetoric that is no reason to ignore the intellectual faux pas of the Left.

To clarify, the use of the term "Creationism" refers to Young Earth creationism, meaning a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis (Paxton). According to a 2010 Gallup poll, approximately thirty-eight percent of Americans believed that humans were created in their present form within the last ten thousand years, in line with the Biblical account of Creation (Althouse). Though no longer accepted in the realm of

mainstream scientific institutions, Creationism nonetheless has a strong political presence in American society, and thus its exclusion from this book is surprising. As for left-leaning anti-science, a 2011 survey found that forty-one percent of Democrats believe in Young Earth Creationism and eighty-one percent believed in global warming, compared to fifty-eight percent and forty-nine percent respectively for their Republican counterparts (Shermer, "The Liberals' War on Science"). While Republicans clearly hold the majority in both instances, that still leaves a significant proportion of Democrats who reject science in the exact same manner. In his introduction, Levitan claims that his focus on conservative anti-science is not a "partisan statement", which makes the lack of focus on its liberal counterpart even more puzzling (7).

Overall, despite these two missteps, Levitan's *Not a Scientist* is a potent wake-up call on the lackluster state of American science education, and serves as an excellent how-to guide for debunking rhetoric that butchers science for the sake of political expediency.

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Janak, Edward, and Ludovic A. Sourdot, editors, *Educating Through Popular Culture: You're Not Cool Just Because You Teach with Comics*. Lexington Books. 2017.

Educating Through Popular Culture edited by Edward Janak and Ludovic A. Sourdot, is a compilation of practitioner-driven pieces by various authors, with expertise in fields such as education, literature, multimedia, and film. The fourteen chapters examine studying and utilizing popular culture through a diverse set of mediums, with particular emphasis on the visual (media and comics) and the auditory (hip-hop and jazz). The book's contributors argue the validity in examining popular culture as a pedagogical tool and challenge how popular culture has, in the past, been dismissed as having no place in the classroom. In effect, the book fills a void left by previous works; the various chapters legitimize popular culture as a teaching tool and as a way to understand diverse cultures. One may be especially drawn to the concept of "hooking" students with popular culture; an idea that weaves throughout this book because it provides educators with a way of viewing multimedia literacies not as an add-on to curriculum but as integral to everything we teach.

The book is divided into five parts, with each providing fourteen perspectives focusing on different facets of how popular culture and pedagogy intersect. "Part I: Looking Behind" focuses on the use of comic books in the secondary classroom not only as a support for instruction, but also as the anchor, or main, text itself. The three chapters in this section span from analyzing the contemporary representation of Asian American culture in comics, to chronicling the Civil Rights Era through the graphic novel Walk, to providing students the opportunity to create comics as a testing and learning tool. The clear takeaway of these chapters is that comic books enhance and edify secondary pedagogy.

"Part II: Looking Around" examines how popular culture can aid university-level faculty in teaching with popular culture in a meaning way.

The authors offer insightful methods on how various types of popular culture can augment students' visual literacy, composition/writing skills, and sociocultural awareness. As a collective, their insights contribute not only to other faculty but to scholarship on popular culture and pedagogy as a whole. In "Part III: Looking Globally," two chapters explore the international impact of U.S. television programs such as Bones and The Big Bang Theory on Saudi and Australian classrooms, analyzing their influence on cultural understanding and the perception of mental health.

University teacher preparation programs are the focus of "Part IV: Looking Ahead." The three chapters skillfully describe how, and why, to use popular culture to instruct preservice teachers on such disparate topics as the concept of critical pedagogy, the importance of teacher advocacy, and educational philosophy. Written for academics currently teaching undergraduate education classes, this section provides excellent suggestions for specific implementation. Finally, the three chapters in "Part V: Looking Theoretically" provide ideas for preservice teachers to develop a personal philosophy of education. It also includes a discussion of gender roles within popular film (i.e. Daddy Day Care) and jazz culture.

Overall, each part of the book is well-connected and provides readers with insight into how to bring popular culture into the classroom authentically. Through each chapter, it is made clear to the readers that popular culture has a place in the classroom, whether it be elementary, secondary, or at the university level. The authors of this text effectively argue for the multiple usages of popular culture and its expansive nature. They celebrate the ubiquity of popular culture as connective and edifying, something with which we could not agree more.

The significance of this book is that it encourages educators to capitalize on students' interests while simultaneously satisfying students' academic needs. Educating Through Popular Culture demystifies the binaries (theory/practice, dominance/resistance) of education and provides new frameworks for learning. In some chapters, the educator has a step-

by-step outline for implementation, making such chapters highly practical. In others, however, there is a lack of specific, implementable instruction, which weakens our ability to replicate the lesson. As advocated by the editors, popular culture texts "shape culture and are shaped by culture" (247); adding popular culture into the curriculum is an unstoppable and beneficial trend. Because this text adeptly provides pedagogical methodologies for practitioners, educators are sure to be more than "cool" when they teach with comics and a plethora of other popular culture tools.

Danielle Klein, Shufang (Amanda) Yang,
Alexis Egan, & Julie Parrish
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Tyma, Adam W. *Beer Culture in Theory and Practice: Understanding Craft Beer Culture in the United States*. Lexington Books, 2017.

Beer Culture in Theory and Practice is an insightful collection of essays demonstrating various methods for analyzing beer and the communicative behavior— culture— surrounding it. Throughout this assemblage of scholarly writings, beer and beer culture is situated as a "symbol within a larger rhetorical vision" (10) that fosters opportunity for fellowship and relationship. Each essay articulates beer as a cultural device through which relationship and identity expression (e.g. language, fashion) may be experienced. Beer drinking aficionados, and those interested in pop culture texts may appreciate this straight-forth, six-chapter expose of beer history, beer making, and the *being-ness* associated with beer drinking. A brief overview of the book chapters will be provided along with concluding thoughts about the useful of this compilation.

Chapter One explores homebrewing clubs through the lens of Symbolic Convergence and seeks to understand how congregating about beer-making encourages the formation of community and culture. The writer denotes the past and current communal experience of homebrewing as an activity predominantly enjoyed by "white, college-educated, upper middle-class, married or partnered men between the ages of thirty and forty-nine" (4). This significant contextualization of homebrewing's dominant population explicates how homebrewing clubs form community despite their obvious marginalizing tendencies.

Beer is the "thing" that allows connection across socially constructed boundaries. Beer-themed communication amid those producing and consuming beer in shared spaces (e.g. bars, homes) helps to co-create a shared reality. It is important to note the nuances of brew-making and tasting include a specialize language, comprised of terminology and phrases that indicate one's in-group knowledge and inclusion within beer culture. Yet, despite the ability to generate community insider-outsider limitations, "beer is the great social equalizer—appreciation for beer crosses ages, genders, political beliefs, and stimulates animated conversation" (11).

Chapter Two interrogates the social position of women within beer culture via the author's critical examination of her own experiences within beer-drinking spaces. This autoethnographic analysis locates women as a "muted group" or "co-culture" group within an inherently male environment. For an exchange of messages about beer, females benefit from the presence of men as communication liaisons within mixed gendered beer cultural spaces. Essentially, a woman's opinion and expertise may go un-solicited and ignored by men— unless she holds a position of authority (e.g. behind the bar) within the space. The author contends that only within female dominated spaces, wherein women hold power positions behind the scenes, exists room for an *other*— non-White males.

Chapter Three utilizes narrative analysis to examine the use of nostalgia in advertisement of beer. As a methodological approach, narrative analysis allows for the discovery of truth within the themes of individual stories told by beer drinkers. Qualitative exploration of nostalgia centered beer promotion, and consumer reaction is atypical for marketing research. Thus, this chapter offers more depth of understanding regarding nostalgia as a specific marketing strategy. Nostalgia, as noted within the chapter, relies on the collective emotion shared by consumers to create loyalty to specific beer brands. Various types of nostalgia (e.g. geographic nostalgia, personal nostalgia, simple nostalgia) are explicated for their relevancy to the analysis. Details of how nostalgia functions as a rhetorical tool that fosters relationship and motivates behavioral practices such as purchasing and drinking specific beer brands is illuminated. Perhaps, most significantly, it is argued that nostalgia for nostalgia's sake does not effectively influence beer consumers if the product is not perceived as authentic or high quality. While evoking feelings and memories of the past has potential to persuade, beer brands will not survive if they fail to demonstrate consistency between its messaging and product.

Chapter Four describes how one may find writing inspiration from their personal interests. Accordingly, the writer describes how a love of beer created purpose in a personal hobby/interest. Readers are encouraged to pursue personal and professional writing endeavors (and perhaps scholarship) that coincide with their special interests. In doing so, one may find motivation to launch and continue a path of exploration.

The fifth chapter applies the theoretical concepts of Identification, Social Identity, and Social Balance to find why individuals desire employment at craft breweries and understand how brewers cultivate positive relationships among new employees. As noted, craft beer culture is centered around relationship building. This is largely because the craft beer industry perceives all breweries to be a part of a larger unit, seeking

to promote awareness and increased amount of high quality beer. Frankly, all breweries need to flourish for the greater good of the industry. Not surprisingly, some seek employment with craft breweries to experience belonging and enactment of their sense of self. Perhaps it is the affinity for beer and beer culture that makes working at a brewery alluring. Nonetheless, positive identification with craft beer and it facets encourages the process of socialization— acquiring and accepting an organization's practices. This is crucial for brewers who want employees to maintain and improve the company's identity. Therefore, socialization at the time of employment is critical.

The final chapter considers how microbrewers utilize the act of naming their product as a means of distinguishing one brewery from another. Naming is a significant rhetorical performance that permit separation and connection. To clarify, naming minimizes confusion among breweries. Yet, it helps consumers to identify with and establish loyalty with their brand of choice.

In conclusion, Tyma offers varied approaches towards understanding a specific aspect of American culture, beer culture. Indeed, beer is a casual beverage. However, it is a significant artifact that shapes realities and spaces. Beer exist within communicative borders worthy of exploration. This collection of essays with *Beer Culture in Theory and Practice*, helps to make these boundaries clearer and more concrete. Furthermore, the book offers fresh insight into the world of beer, pushing it beyond its relaxed nature, and positioning it as a key element within social behavior. Those astute in communication scholarship may appreciate the exploration of beer as a marginal and contemporary text through which theory and theoretical frameworks can be applied to further understanding of communicative acts. Meanwhile, beer enthusiasts, or one simply interested in expanding their understanding of beer may find their palette satisfied.

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Chow, Broderick, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, editors,
Performance and Professional Wrestling. Routledge, 2017.

Hot off the presses and hailing from the hallowed halls of Routledge,
weighing in at a hefty nineteen chapters, managed by Broderick Chow,
Eero Laine, and Claire Warden, it's *Performance and Professional
Wrestling*, the latest volume in a slowly emerging and exciting new area of
academic exploration. Its predecessors (the authors carefully place this
work within the scholarship of Sharon Mazer, R. Tyson Smith, and
Nicholas Sammond) all serve as inspiration in various ways for this
volume's heretofore unique approach to sports entertainment: a reading of
the "sport" through the lens of performance studies. As the editors note:
"professional wrestling is first a live performance" (2), a cooperative
interplay of two participants whose antics serve to develop a story with
believable characters and perils for the entertainment of a paying or
viewing audience. The anthology's aim "to uncover the place of pro
wrestling studies in the dynamic intellectual space of modern academia"
(6) is successfully achieved.

Successful academic collections are usually marked by the range of
subject matter that they cover while still maintaining a fealty to the
guiding principles and analytical focus determined by the editors. *PPW*
makes some excellent choices with respect to both contributors and their
contributions. Drawing from academics in such diverse areas as
journalism, texts and technology, global and transcultural studies,
literature, anthropology, theatre, and including a former pro wrestler
turned academic, the roster of talent assembled here assures both a variety
of perspectives and critical approaches. The variety in no way
compromises the overall effect; each contribution manages to use a
performative piece or "angle" from a wrestling match as a basis for
analysis. Such examples range from racially charged beatings of African
American wrestlers (Charles Hughes' chapter) to the over-the-top, almost

parodic, antics of Exotic Adrian Street, a legitimately tough wrestler who parlayed an outrageously flamboyant persona into regional stardom in the United States (Stephen Greer's chapter). In these two examples we see the focus coming in to sharp relief with respect to the interaction of performance and audience, with both performances designed to incite different sorts of passions. It's not an accident that Adrian Street, for example, become a marketable star in the Southern states: his performative persona ran against the grain of regional and chronological attitudes toward traditional masculinity. Nor was it an accident that Cowboy Bill Watts, the promoter behind the staged beatings of black wrestlers, parlayed this action into having the first recognized African-American promotional champion (Junkyard Dog) because he was astute enough to see the need for having such a champion given the audiences that frequented his promotion's matches. With its eye on how a performance is constructed and the importance of the audience within the "play," the analysis done with performance studies makes such readings possible.

Thankfully, the editors attempted to take a global perspective, both in drawing from their contributors and in addressing wrestling from different parts of the world. Lucha libre receives two excellent chapters: Heather Levi's incisive analysis of its cultural politics, and the eye-opening examination of its relationship with burlesque by Nina Hoechtl. The latter is particularly noteworthy for its close reading of actual matches within the confines of Lucha VaVoom, a Mexico-based promotion that unites a Mexican cultural artifact with the decidedly American burlesque. But the global approach doesn't stop there: British wrestling and wrestlers, flag desecration, and the world-wide presence of WWE all get their due. There's also a good show of inclusivity; gender, queerness, race, body studies, and even video games get their due in the collection.

The authors have made a valiant effort in this area, but my one observation is that maybe they haven't gone far enough. Japanese

wrestling, for example, receives little attention, and its matches are marked by spectacular displays of music and audience excitement. New WWE stars Shinsuke Nakamura and Asuka both bring advanced levels of theatricality to their performances, and each represents a different avenue for investigating how their representative styles signal a transcultural sharing of Japanese and American performances. Ditto for the performances of expatriot wrestlers in Japanese or other promotions. For example, there's currently an American wrestler who is playing a Trump-supporting character in a Mexican promotion. Wrestling has become a global phenomenon, so maybe studies of the reception of WWE in other countries might be in order. Studies of wrestling in other countries beyond the high-profile places mentioned here is also something to ponder. Ditto for considerations of the WWE's movement into embracing a more global roster by opening up tryouts to wrestlers from countries outside the traditional supply chain. WWE also recently had a champion hailing from India; maybe the operative word is recent but the volume does inspire thought about what isn't included, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. If anything; the volume certainly inspires academic wrestlemaniacs to fill in the absences with exciting new work of their own.

The text does an excellent job of making performance studies accessible without reducing the intricacies of the analytics or their applications to unchallenging levels. There's enough back-up material available on the internet to illustrate what the authors analyze, thus making research activities for the students possible as well. Applications to rhetoric courses exist (e.g. the chapter on the art of the promo is an excellent case in point), especially ones that examine the nexus between performance and rhetorical theory/practice. The text functions well in specialized contexts (e.g. global/US popular culture), and, of course in its target areas of performance studies. It's a must have for any new courses that focus on rhetoric from a cultural studies perspective. So, really, this text marks the new standard for seminality in the body of wrestling

scholarship. It will be referenced by the next generation of students and scholars who move into this exciting area of cultural studies and performance.

Chow, Laine, and Warden have gifted wrestling studies with a significant and important new text, whose absences only speak to the potential that the discipline holds for new and exciting work. The critical framework is well defined and guides the book into surprising areas that are a delight to encounter. The writing is universally sound, the research is of high quality, and the individual contributors represent either exciting new emergent minds or thoughtful and provocative established scholars. It's a must read, if for no other reason that it develops a highly viable critical frame that not only starts discussions, but encourages and welcomes participation by new voices.

Further reading: *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*, Heather Levi, Duke University Press, 2008; *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*, Nicholas Sammond (Ed.), Duke University Press, 2005.

<div align="center">J. Rocky Colavito
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Matysik, Larry. *Drawing Heat the Hard Way: How Wrestling Really Works*. ECW, 2009.

The first chapter in *Drawing Heat the Hard Way: How Wrestling Really Works* is titled "Is It Real?" It is a question wrestling fans and participants have learned to brush off, but Larry Matysik makes his response the central conceit of his book, which explores the history, the people, and the ideology of professional wrestling. *Drawing Heat* is not a scholarly examination of wrestling, nor is it strictly biographical. Rather, it is a

reflective and detailed look at the realities of what makes wrestling an attraction of almost universal appeal.

Matysik's credentials should afford his voice an important place in the burgeoning area of pro-wrestling studies. At 16, Matysik began his wrestling career under legendary promoter Sam Muchnick in the St. Louis wrestling territory in 1963. He worked for several promotions since the 1960s, including what was then known as the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from 1984-1993, and served as everything from a publicist and office manager to booker and announcer. A sort of jack-of-all-trades in the wrestling world, Matysik draws on his 50 years of experience in the pro-wrestling business to give readers a more nuanced look at how the business side of professional wrestling operates and how it has evolved since the heyday of regional territories.

In the first few chapters, Matysik looks at the historical development of the wrestling business, paying specific attention to the last days of the territory system and the ways that Vincent Kennedy McMahon grew the WWF from a regional promotion to a national, and eventually global, corporate entity. Having been privy to much of the behind-closed-doors meetings and conversations during this transitional period, Matysik offers insights and stories that WWE-produced documentaries never mention. One of the more interesting and obscure facts is that Muchnick would have been behind the first nationally broadcast professional wrestling show in the late 1970s had a satellite not disappeared one week before the show was to air. These types of stories are relayed throughout *Drawing Heat,* and offer a more robust and objective history of the "the business" than is normally available.

However, Matysik attempts to relate more than just history here. In chapters three through five he calls attention to the wrestlers themselves, emphasizing the hard work and real consequences of the profession. Chapter three, "Locking Up with the Dream," explores the realities of what it takes to become a wrestler at any level, and then the arduousness

of the job—the travel, the politics, the physical toll—that occurs once those rare few who can make a living from it find their spots. In chapter four, "Dismay," Matysik speaks earnestly about the epidemic of drug use and early deaths that have become all too common in the past two decades. Finally, chapter five, "How Independent is Independent?," examines the legal classifications of wrestlers, particularly those in the WWE, as independent contractors and the implications this employment gray area has on the bottom-line of both the performers and the companies that employ them.

The next few chapters discuss the art of wrestling, both in front of and behind the curtain. Chapter six focuses on the idea of the "work," a term in wrestling that means "getting people to believe or to do something, by hook or by crook," as Matysik writes (99). More than just an examination of the performance, this chapter shows the ways in which manipulation factors into every tier of the business, as everyone seems to work everyone else, but also explains the ways in which "working" requires high levels of trust and respect. Chapters seven and eight are wonderfully detailed pieces about the often underappreciated and misunderstood art of booking—the act of putting together an event, or several events, to tell compelling and carefully-paced stories that pique the public's interests and results in high box office gross. The importance of wrestling announcers and commentators is the focus of chapter eight.

The next chapters step outside of the arena and discuss the development of wrestling journalism, specifically the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, and the role of fans as the "lifeblood" of the business. Chapter twelve speculates on the future of professional wrestling, considering the potential effects of a shift in power dynamics, specifically internally in WWE.

Therein lies the one major issue with *Drawing Heat*: it is nine years old. Shifts in culture and technology in the relatively short time since the book's publication have seen major changes in the way viewers engage

with and consume wrestling. With the rapid advent of streaming services allowing not just WWE but even local independent promotions to make their products available for viewing any time anywhere, Matysik's brief mentioning of WWE's forgotten *WWE 24/7* cable channel is almost humorous, and his lengthier discussions of since-concluded lawsuits leave some of the more recent history incomplete. None of this is the author's fault, it is just the reality of an ever-evolving business.

The dated nature of some of the book's references should not undermine the value it can bring to those looking to build a foundation of knowledge for their study of the "sport of kings." Matysik communicates an understanding of professional wrestling's appeal as a boundless and boundary-less attraction that is far more real than its predetermined nature suggests. He has written a book that is at once accessible, informative, and stimulating, regardless of the reader's level of fandom or intellectual interest. Rich with first-hand history and detailed understanding of professional wrestling as both an artform and a business, *Drawing Heat the Hard Way* offers readers of any level of interest a thoughtful and in-depth explanation of how professional wrestling works from the inside out.

Further reading: *Have a Nice Day: A Tale of Blood and Sweatsocks*, Mick Foley, Harper Entertainment, 2000; *Accepted: How the First Gay Superstar Changed WWE*, Pat Patterson, ECW Press, 2016.

Eric Kennedy
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Flahive, Liz, and Carly Mensch, creators. *GLOW*. Netflix, 2017.

The Netflix original series *GLOW* takes an in-depth look at the personal and professional lives of women trying to reinvent themselves as

professional wrestlers. *GLOW* is a nod to the real-life, ladies-only wrestling promotion the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling (or G.L.O.W.) that existed in the mid- to late-1980s. *GLOW* includes colorful characters, strong women, and over-the top comedic performances, reminiscent of the original *GLOW* series which began in 1986 and ended in 1989. The Netflix edition is created and executive-produced by Jenji Kohan, who created other influential series such as *Weeds* and *Orange is the New Black*. In the ten-episode inaugural season of *GLOW*, Ruth Wilder, played by Alison Brie, is a struggling actress tired of auditioning for stale female roles. A casting agent shares the news of a casting call for "unconventional women." The women auditioning are much like Ruth: Hollywood outsiders who are racially and visually diverse. Leading the casting call for "unconventional women" is Sam Sylvia (Marc Maron), a former B-movie director attempting to put together something never before done. This group of twelve misfit actresses, models, party girls and loners are selected by Sylvia to fill the G.L.O.W. roster. Included in the final roster is Debbie, played by Betty Gilpin. Debbie is Ruth's former best friend, a soap-opera actress turned stay-at-home mom. Unbeknownst to Debbie, Ruth has been sleeping with her husband. Provoked by her husband's infidelity, Debbie confronts Ruth on set, earning her place because of the ensuing catfight.

Rounding out the cast with Brie and Gilpin, the women of *GLOW* are diverse enough that anyone can find their own favorite. Each of the Gorgeous Ladies are uniquely entertaining. These women embrace their own personal struggles to create their in-ring identities. Carmen "Machu Picchu" Wade (Britney Young) comes from an all-male wrestling dynasty and craves an opportunity to enter the squared circle herself. Her dad, Goliath Jackson, discourages Carmen, claiming that wrestling is "not for women." Gayle Rankin takes on the feral role of Sheila the She-Wolf. Consumed by her role, Sheila eats and sleeps like a wolf, and when provoked leaves a dead squirrel in Ruth's bed. Tamee, an African-

American (played by former wrestler Kia Stevens, who competed under the names Awesome Kong and Karma), brands herself the "Welfare Queen" even though she is the mother of a Stanford medical student.

GLOW is about finding your voice and not letting yourself be restricted to society's expectations of women. Thanks to Netflix and other streaming media, countless shows now star women of all ages, shapes, sizes, and ethnicity. *GLOW* has a running commentary about women in Hollywood, underlining what has changed and what has resisted change since the mid-1980s. The women of *GLOW* are frank, funny, and honest. They confront the stereotypes and limitations given to them by society.

The characters are resilient, confident, and insistent. For example, Sheila wore her wolf-esque outfit, or some variation of her outfit every day for 5 years. In a very emotionally satisfying moment, Sheila explains, "it's not a costume, it's just *me*. And what I do in the morning, what I put on, what I wear… it's not for you. It's for me". In that moment, in that statement, anyone who has struggled with self-esteem or confidence cheered. This is who she is, and she does not need anyone's approval. The show has stories of family for fans of professional wrestling. The character of Carmen is the daughter of a wrestling dynasty reminiscent to the Hart Foundation and the Rhodes, Orton, or Anoa'i families. Carmen did not have her father's support to pursue wrestling; he ultimately compared women in wrestling to midget wrestling, a sideshow. Carmen's brothers later took the opportunity to groom their sister in the sport. Pro-wrestling scholars will find Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) spectacle of suffering, defeat, and justice in the women of *GLOW*. Debbie suffers the humiliation of her best friend sleeping with her husband. Having lost her career to have a child she feels the defeat of being out of work, at odds in her home life and at a loss of her best friend, Ruth. In true wrestling glory, Debbie achieves justice in the ring by becoming the face for the crowd to cheer for, and Ruth becomes the heel.

GLOW provides a narrative that any woman can recognize themselves in. Each of the stories told in *GLOW* are pure and beautiful. Aside from the impressive amounts of Aqua Net hairspray and glitter, *GLOW* can connect with a wide audience of casual fans to die hard fanatics.

Further viewing: *Lucha Underground*, Mark Burnett, Robert Rodriguez, Eric van Wagenen, Anthony Jensen, and Chris DeJoseph, El Rey Network, 2014-present; *Tiger Mask W*, Toshiaki Komura*, 2016-2017.

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Mamachas del Ring. Directed by Betty M. Park, My Tragic Uncle Productions, 2009.

Mamachas del Ring [*Women of the Ring*] focuses on women wrestlers in La Paz, Bolivia. Sometimes called the "Cholitas Luchadoras" or "Cholitas Cachascanistas," these women wrestle in exhibition events wearing layered and brightly-colored pollera skirts, which are closely associated with women of indigenous origin in the city.

The film opens with a vignette near Plaza San Francisco, a busy public square in downtown La Paz. Viewers are thrown into a conversation in which a middle-aged man tells the *luchadora* [wrestler] known as Carmen Rosa[1] that she is "selling [her]self like a prostitute." She responds by throwing him to the ground and demanding "What kind of prostitute?"[2] as she chokes him. The film then quickly transitions to a shot of Carmen in the wrestling ring, pinning another luchadora dressed in a pollera. She

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[1]All references to luchadoras reflect their in-ring names, not given names.

[2]All translations are those of the film.

shakes her opponent's head using the distinctive long braids worn by most women who identify as a "mujer de pollera" [women of the pollera skirt] (see Tapia Arce). We then return to Plaza San Francisco where Carmen still has the man pinned to the stone pavement. She yells at him in her indigenous language, telling him that she is Aymara. As Carmen walks away, she explains to the camera, "He thinks because we're women, we're weak. But he is totally wrong. He insulted me saying that I am not Aymaran (sic.), that I'm selling myself, but that's not the case." Despite the decontextualized scenes, this opening quickly introduces viewers to major considerations for the luchadoras of Bolivia: the intersections between indigenous identity, exhibition wrestling, and public discourses of what indigenous women should be.

The film centers around a conflict in which Carmen, and her fellow luchadoras Yolanda and Julia, confront wrestling promoter Juan Mamani. Mamani leads the group Titanes del Ring [Titans of the Ring], with whom the luchadoras had wrestled for some time. However, Mamani cut Julia and another wrestler called Martha from the program. Carmen and Yolanda confronted him, insisting that either all four would be included or all would leave. Mamani refused their demand and Carmen, Julia, and Yolanda left the group, while Martha begged to be kept on. The factions continue to battle as the luchadoras seek to use venues controlled by Mamani, in addition to seeking respect as both legitimate wrestlers and authentic indigenous women.

The film includes spectacular scenes of the wrestling matches themselves. These scenes are played out both through live action footage as well as matches recreated through Claymation. We see a Claymation version of the argument between the luchadoras and Mamani, as well as impressively crafted depictions of flips, holds, bleeding foreheads, and audience applause. These portrayals lack the fluidity of beautifully filmed footage of the pollera fanning out as the luchadoras flip in the ring, but in return allow the viewer to concentrate on other aspects of the narrative.

The film also offers various glimpses of Carmen Rosa selling electrical parts on the sidewalk near the plaza. For those familiar with Bolivia, this demonstrates Carmen's authenticity as a mujer de pollera, long known for their importance as marketwomen. We also see her in her home, running errands, and interacting with her family and other wrestlers, effectively allowing glimpses into her life beyond the ring.

In portraying these quotidian scenes, as well as the conflict with Mamani, the film admirably goes beyond superficial discourses of empowerment, which stands in contrast to numerous journalistic accounts of the luchadoras that highlight their subjectivity as indigenous women at the expense of portraying them as individuals (Haynes 286). These accounts are filled with references to folk dancing and religious festivals, effectively highlighting performative aspects of indigeneity. Others similarly frame them as quintessential indigenous women who are "physically strong from manual labour but long considered powerless and subservient" (Carroll and Schipani). These journalists concentrate on the ways wrestling may be read as "an unlikely feminist phenomenon" (Carroll and Schipani), which has provided new social mobility for women like Carmen, Julia, and Yolanda. These discourses highlight empowerment but equally turn the luchadoras into caricatures and downplay the true political power to which they might aspire. The luchadoras themselves may engage with strategic essentialism (Spivak 110) by highlighting certain characteristics of mujeres de pollera in the ring—as all wrestlers must do to make their characters legible; however, journalists focusing on those features, and downplaying individual considerations, undercut the luchadoras' political potential. *Mamachas del Ring*, conversely, treats the luchadoras as complex subjects who negotiate their identities as wrestlers in different and not always clear-cut ways. This orientation makes the film a valuable contribution to understanding wrestling beyond the in-ring spectacle, exploring the ways wrestlers

understand the sacrifices and benefits of their involvement in wrestling, as well as its impact on their self-concepts and even social positionings.

Yet this focus also calls into question the politics of representation that accompany the use of Claymation. On the one hand, it allows for portrayal of in-ring physical confrontation in ways that do not reduce it to "violence porn" (see Monsiváis). At the same time, it draws the audience in and adds a childlike quality. Though previous scenes have portrayed the luchadoras as individuals with lives outside the ring, the cartoonish nature of Claymation may perpetuate a more superficial vision of the luchadoras. This cinematic device might lead viewers to consider if it is possible to present the subject in a way that explores the spectacle and even aspects of strategic essentialism without further spectacularizing and essentializing.

Regardless of one's stance on this politics of representation, the film contributes in valuable ways to understanding the specific phenomenon, and more broadly to considerations of indigenous women's engagements with popular culture, cosmopolitanism, and globalization. It also represents an important addition to the growing body of media that allows viewers to see different global forms of exhibition wrestling, thus contributing to understandings of the breadth and variety of ways wrestling has developed in various global locations.

Further viewing: GLOW: The Story of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling, Brett Whitcomb, 2012; Card Subject to Change: Pro Wrestling's Underground, Tim Disbrow, 2010.

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WWE 2K18, World Wrestling Entertainment, 2K Sports, various editions, platforms, 2017.

As Roland Barthes suggested in his seminal essay on professional wrestling, "the wrestler's function is not to win but to perform exactly the gestures expected of him" (4). The act of professional wrestling is both athletic and theatrical, a violent dance between two mutually trusting performers working to entertain the audience and hit story beats. Translating this to the zero-sum realm of video games poses unique challenges: what does it mean for a wrestling game to be "real" and how can a game engine replicate it? For the sake of simplicity, many wrestling games have emphasized combat while also offering extensive character creation tools.[3] *WWE 2K18*[4] attempts to split the difference between competitive game and collaborative storytelling tool—failing and succeeding in many of the same ways as the parent product.

 WWE 2K18, released in October 2018 by 2K Sports and developed by Yuke's, is the latest annualized installment in the *WWE2K* series and is available on the PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch platforms. Players choose from an expansive roster of over 200 wrestlers and take their combatant into the match of their choice, using their character's unique moves and abilities to lower their opponent's stamina meter enough to pin, submit, or knock them out. The showboating spectacle of wrestling is present throughout: players can taunt, use illegal weapons, and build up momentum to unleash finishing moves with a button press. While the goal remains to defeat one's opponent, the game

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[3] Some enterprising players use these materials to put on "shows" of their own to stream online to other fans, complete with original characters, narrative, and commentary.

[4] For the purposes of this review, the game was played on both the PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch.

parcels out in-game currency based on a five-star match rating scale, awarding points for reversals, dramatic near-falls, and special moves. If the player puts on a good show, even a losing effort is rewarded—as Barthes suggests, this is the expectation of the wrestler.

Those with a creative bent can book their own weekly shows and feuds in the open-ended Universe mode or use a relatively robust set of tools to make their own wrestlers, championships, and match types. This user-created content can then be uploaded and shared with other players: the servers are full of superheroes, video game characters, and wrestlers from other promotions. The MyPlayer mode offers a more personalized role-playing experience in which players can take their created wrestlers from trainee to world champion. In this mode, players can choose how they engage in weekly programs—will they run in on a foe's match, cut a promo, or ask for a title shot?—but the awkward open environments and seemingly arbitrary wrestler interactions make it an occasionally tedious exercise. Combined with the, at times, archaic animations and visuals, the counter-intuitive grappling and submission systems, and the overreliance on split-second reversals, the game can be as frustrating as it is encouraging of the players' creative spirit.

That tension carries over to the limitations put on the player in terms of the characters they can use in these performative actions. To put a finer point on it, the game reinforces some of the same gender segregation demonstrated in actual WWE programming by replicating its real-life ban on intergender competition. The company's status as a publicly traded entity and shift to more advertiser-friendly programming has made combat encounters between male and female performers largely non-existent—perhaps due to a desire not to be seen as promoting domestic violence. Regardless of motivation, the women are segregated into their own division and still largely remain secondary to the male competitors despite recent efforts to further promote their work –despite women being on a more equal playing field in most independent wrestling promotions.

Theoretically unshackled by the limitations placed on televised content and with creativity as a selling point, *WWE 2K18* reproduces this status quo (likely as a requirement of the license). The player can create their own feuds and storylines and anoint whichever champions they want, but if they want to have a female wrestler challenge for a male-only title, the game will not allow it without use of unauthorized glitches and modifications. Selecting a female character automatically "greys out" male wrestlers on the select screen and vice versa, making it so they cannot be placed in the same match, and making the mixed-tag format crucial to one of the company's new programming initiatives impossible to replicate. Perhaps most importantly, created female wrestlers cannot be used in the MyPlayer mode, meaning a major part of the game is simply removed based on the character's gender. The female experience in the game is therefore limited and ultimately secondary compared to what male characters can do, arguably exacerbating the gender segregation of the real-life product.

Lev Manovich suggests interactive media like video games are characterized by using an interface to navigate a database and create individualized narratives; but, such freedom extends only as far as the options programmed into that database. In the fictionalized space of WWE (and the games it inspires), there should theoretically be no reason female competitors could not do battle with their male counterparts. Indeed, the scripted programming and video games that provide the closest analogues to the WWE product feature no shortage of female heroes on a level playing field. Instead, by replicating these limitations, the game arguably serves only to reinforce paternalistic sexism while other games in the genre (notably the recent *Fire Pro Wrestling World* by Spike Chunsoft, available on Steam) allow fans to create any matchups they want.

Barthes concludes his classic essay discussing the mythological nature of wrestling and its idealized form of nature and justice. In a world where women are taking greater control of their lives and stories, it is perhaps

past time for the largest purveyor of these grand mythological narratives to follow suit, even if only in a virtual performance.

Further playing: *WCW/nWo Revenge*, THQ, 1998; *WWF No Mercy*, THQ, 2000.

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The rise of the podcasting industry has led to an explosion of wrestling related digital media, with many influential and money-drawing wrestlers, announcers, and executives such as Steve Austin, Jim Ross, and Eric Bischoff hosting wrestling themed podcasts. Of this array, *The Jim Cornette Experience* (*JCE*) stands out as vital toward facilitating a greater understanding of the art form that is professional wrestling. Jim Cornette, legendary manager of The Midnight Express (Bobby Eaton and Dennis Condrey/Stan Lane), offers twice weekly podcasts: *JCE* and *Jim Cornette's Drive-Thru*. Since 2013, and over the span of more than 200

episodes, *JCE* has separated itself from its podcasting peers for its ability to make news, its additions to the historical knowledge of the wrestling business, and its ability to keep kayfabe alive.

    JCE features few guests aside from co-host Brian Last and the occasional appearance by wrestling personalities such as Kenny "Starmaker" Bolin, Bruce Pritchard, "Tennessee Stud" Robert Fuller, and "The Universal Hearthrob" Austin Idol. While firmly acknowledging the death of kayfabe, *JCE* still walks a fine line between work and shoot, with obviously worked attacks on both Bolin and Idol appearing with open looks behind the curtain with Pritchard and Fuller. At the same time, Cornette's willingness to speak his mind and to not back down in the face of criticism has reinvigorated his presence in the industry while growing his fan base, whom he proudly refers to as his "Cult of Cornette." *JCE*'s greatest claim to fame stems from a 2017 challenge made by Cornette to former WWF/WCW/TNA writer Vince Russo to meet at an undisclosed location for a fight. In an act of legitimate legal maneuvering, Russo in turn secured an Emergency Protection Order in the state of Indiana against Cornette. In kind, Cornette soon began selling autographed copies of the order with 50% of the revenue from each one sold going to the WHAS Crusade for Children, which fundraises for special needs children in Kentucky and Southern Indiana.

    Aside from threatening violence, just as wrestlers have for generations, *JCE* serves up a smorgasbord of topics ranging from American politics to reviews of contemporary wrestling matches. However, the real gem of *JCE* is Cornette's detailed and surprisingly quantitative discussions of his time as a photographer, manager, creative committee member, and booker in the Continental, Mid-South, World Class, and Mid-Atlantic territories, as well as in World Championship Wrestling, Smoky Mountain Wrestling, the World Wrestling Federation, Ohio Valley Wrestling, Total Nonstop Action, and Ring of Honor. For scholars interested in the business side of professional wrestling, *JCE* is a wealth of data, as Cornette kept

meticulous notes on payoffs, houses, and cards for the entirety of his career. His records are a treasure trove of information, as professional wrestling, despite being a fundamental American industry, has never been one to archive its most vital seminal data. His records and insights into specific periods of time (such as late 1980's Mid-Atlantic/World Championship Wrestling) are among the most authoritative available, as Cornette has both the records and memories necessary to fully understand the end of the territories. Additionally, his knowledge as a wrestling historian and willingness to answer listener questions on *Jim Cornette's Drive-Thru* helps keep the folk tradition of wrestling knowledge alive, as the industry long encrypted its most vital data by refusing to write anything down, lest the marks get their hands on it.

For fans of today's wrestling product, *JCE* may prove difficult to enjoy, as the focus of the wrestling content leans toward the territory days. At the same time, Cornette regularly critiques current wrestlers like The Young Bucks, Kenny Omega, and Joey Ryan without restraint, decries the overuse of high spots as "flippy-floppy" wrestling, and refers to the industry's most popular heel stable (New Japan Pro Wrestling's Bullet Club*)* as the "Ballet Club." This sort of commentary maintains Cornette's relevance in the industry even though he has not worked full time for a major promotion since 2012. Younger wrestlers and wrestling fans, however, might feel that sort of commentary only proves his irrelevance due to his unwillingness to accept that wrestling as evolved and changed. Either way, his commentary adds to the public discourse surrounding pro wrestling.

As an artifact of the wrestling industry and its now almost equally successful "shoot" video and podcasting business, *JCE* holds an interesting place as both a bridge to wrestling's kayfabe past and the post-kayfabe present while still keeping kayfabe alive, albeit from behind a microphone instead of between the ropes. While kayfabe in the wrestling ring died long ago, Cornette (along with the entire "shoot" video and

podcasting industry) is keeping the carny tradition alive, as listeners can never be certain what on *JCE* (or any wrestling podcast or video involving wrestlers) is a work, a shoot, or a worked shoot. The long-standing con of working marks out of their money has moved from the arena to digital media, as fans who used to buy tickets for Friday night's show now download the latest podcasts to experience their favorite wrestling personalities cut a promo.

Further listening: *The Art of Wrestling*, Colt Cabana, 2010-present; *E&C's Pod of Awesomeness*, Adam Copeland and Jay Reso, 2017-present.

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"Women's Royal Rumble Match." *Royal Rumble 2018*, created by Vince K. McMahon, World Wrestling Entertainment, 28 Jan. 2018. Available on the WWE Network with subscription.

On paper, the list of entrants into the first-ever women's Royal Rumble for *Royal Rumble 2018* reads like a checklist of diversity. Following Sasha Banks and Becky Lynch—already two of the most unique women on the active roster—are women of color as well as women over 30, 40, and 50. The match featured wrestlers old and new who were mothers, married women, single women, and more. Wrestlers represented plus-size and fat women, visibly tattooed women, and even one gay woman. In many ways, the women's Royal Rumble was more inclusive than the men's roster ever has been. WWE even allowed an Asian woman—a vastly underrepresented, if not stereotyped, group—to win the Rumble. It seems WWE is becoming less and less afraid to roll with the tides of changing times.

Outside the plurality of competitors, in a general sense, the beauty of the women's Rumble is something that male fans can only appreciate in the most basic sense. Because it was the first installment, it was a celebration and homage to where the women's division has been over the last 20 years: where it is, and where it could be going. This was evidenced by the large number of nostalgia entrants, ranging from forever favorites like Trish and Lita to beloved athletes like Molly Holly and Beth Phoenix. The match itself saw a balanced combination of old rivalries (Trish and Mickie, Asuka and Ember Moon) and teases of dream matches between past and present Superstars (Beth Phoenix and Nia Jax).

While reliance on nostalgia is usually a tactic bemoaned by fans when done on the men's side, it worked in the women's Rumble because none of the women who appeared from the past are slated for full-time returns anytime soon. It was all in good, lighthearted fun, and a metaphorical way to say: "We see the road you paved for us; you get a piece of this pie, too.*"* As a woman who grew up watching these Superstars make the best of what they were given, the place of nostalgia in this match was more than heartwarming.

The women's Royal Rumble had the same aspects as the men's: storytelling, fan-service face-offs, comedy, surprise returns, suspense, and feel good moments. Yet the women's Rumble still had a different feel to it, instead of the copy-paste vibe that women's segments often have. For the most part, the match felt fresh. Perhaps the most distracting aspect of it was how it dragged in sections, and the competitors were noticeably scarce at times. While the women's Rumble had 30 entrants just like the men's, the women were eliminated more quickly and spent considerably less time in the ring without being formally eliminated. As such, you could see some of the competitors contemplating their next moves when the ring was close to empty. Other imperfect elements, such as lingering on the ropes too long trying to eliminate a Superstar and outright stopping

eliminations altogether, are likely kinks that will be ironed out with a few more years of practice.

Whether intentional or not, WWE put together arguably their most feminist piece of entertainment. Feminism, in the nuanced sense, is about acknowledging the foremothers who laid the groundwork for the present, and uplifting one another to create a better future for all women inclusive of race, gender identity, sexuality, and religion. This often takes the form of women trying to achieve the same social and political freedoms as men by subverting structures that have created power imbalances. The match embodies this capital F "feminism" b going on as the main event, for almost the same amount of time as the men, acknowledging the past, and being inclusive. Yet we still had Ronda Rousey emerge to nearly ruin it all.

With Rousey interrupting Asuka's moment at the end of the pay-per-view, we are snapped back to reality. Even if they are not famous in the same way our favorite Hollywood actors are, wrestlers are still performers, WWE is still a media text, and audiences are dollar signs to the showrunners. Rousey is a gold credit card to the McMahons and she knows that. Therefore, she probably expects to be compensated accordingly. Just as the men have a white UFC fighter who occasionally wrestles to collect a giant paycheck and "legitimize" the product (aka Brock "The Beast" Lesnar), so now do the women. Only in this case, the added stinger is that Rousey isn't even a homegrown WWE talent. Is this the "equality" the women were striving for?

Some have argued that Rousey's star power will bring greater exposure to the women's division, thus elevating it. There is room for that argument, and it may prove to be true. However, were it not for the women who put in the work for decades, Rousey would have never been in a position to "elevate" any division. It is even more metaphoric that Rousey only made her entrance after 30 women fought in a ring for almost

an hour. The work was already done; she was only there to steal the glory, in very "white feminist" fashion.

Nonetheless, hope for the division lies in the fact that despite weeks of rumors and buzz that Rousey would be in the Rumble, she was not. For once, WWE trusted the women on their roster and the legends that came before them to put on a good show with enough time to do so. The women pulled it off without a big mainstream athlete. They did that. Now that the dust has settled, the revolution has only begun. True evolution rests in the hands of not only the performers, not only the powers that be, but the fans who are relentless in making sure everyone gets what they deserve.

Further viewing: *Mae Young Classic*, WWE Network, 2017; Shimmer Women's Professional Wrestling, www.shimmerwrestling.com, 2005-present.

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

ABOUT

The Popular Culture Studies Journal is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

AIMS AND SCOPE

Popular culture is at the heart of democratic citizenship. It serves as an engine driving technology, innovation, and information, as well as a methodological lens employed by the many fields that examine culture, often from an interdisciplinary perspective. Managed by The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association (MPCA/ACA), *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study America and American culture. The journal serves its membership and scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES

Based on analysis of the proceedings of the Midwest PCA/ACA and the national organization reveals that most popular culture scholars are interested in American-based:

- Film
- Music
- Television
- Sports
- Celebrity Culture
- Technology
- Literature
- Comics/Cartoons/Graphic Novels

However, many scholars approach these topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, which adds significant value over single-issue or more focused/specialized journals.

All contributions to *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* will be forwarded to members of the Editorial Board or other reviewers for comment. Manuscripts must not be previously published, nor should they be submitted for publication elsewhere while being reviewed by *The Popular Culture Studies Journal's* Editorial Board.

Submissions (three documents, MS WORD, MLA) should be submitted via our PCSJ Google Forms (http://mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/author-instructions/)

1) Short Bio: On a separate document, please also include a short (100 words) bio. We will include this upon acceptance and publication.

2) Title Page: A single title page must accompany the email, containing complete contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address).

3) Manuscript: On the first page of the manuscript, only include the article's title, being sure not to include the author's name. The journal employs a "blind review" process, meaning that a copy of the article will be sent to reviewers without revealing the author's name. Please include the works cited with your manuscript.

Essays should range between 15-25 pages of double-spaced text in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, including all images, endnotes, and Works Cited pages. Please note that the 15-page minimum should be 15 pages of written article material. Less than 15 pages of written material will be rejected and the author asked to develop the article further.

Essays should also be written in clear US English in the active voice and third person, in a style accessible to the broadest possible audience. Authors should be sensitive to the social implications of language and choose wording free of discriminatory overtones.

For documentation, *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* follows the Modern Language Association style, as articulated by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert in the paperback MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (New York: MLA), and in The MLA Style Manual (New York: MLA). The most current editions of both guides will be the requested editions for use. This style calls for a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. This approach reduces the number of notes, which provide further references or explanation.

For punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style, follow the MLA Handbook and the MLA Style Manual, supplemented as necessary by The Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). The most current edition of the guide will be the requested edition for use.

It is essential for authors to check, correct, and bring manuscripts up to date before final submission. Authors should verify facts, names of people, places, and dates, and double-check all direct quotations and entries in the Works Cited list. Manuscripts not in MLA style will be returned without review.

We are happy to receive digital artwork. Please save line artwork (vector graphics) as Encapsulated PostScript (EPS) and bitmap files (halftones or photographic images) as Tagged Image Format (TIFF), with a resolution of at least 300 dpi at final size. Do not send native file formats. Please contact the editor for discussion of including artwork.

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Before final submission, the author will be responsible for obtaining letters of permission for illustrations and for quotations that go beyond "fair use," as defined by current copyright law.

FOR SUBMITTING REVIEWS

The Popular Culture Studies Journal is seeking authors to review works on any aspect of U.S. or international popular culture. In particular, we are interested in books, films, videos, websites, or any other works that critically engage popular culture that have been published, released, or posted in the last two years. We will also consider older seminal pieces that deserve a second look. If you submit a review of the latter, a rationale for the relevance of the review today will be expected.

Reviews should adhere to the ethos of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* and be largely positive with any criticism of the work being constructive in nature. For more information about this journal, please visit: http://mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/

Written reviews should be roughly 800-1,000 words and should be typed, double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Research and documentation must adhere *to The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The MLA Style Manual*, 8th edition, which requires a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. Punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style must also follow *The MLA Handbook* and *The MLA Style Manual*. If you are interested in submitting any alternative form of review, please contact the reviews editor directly with your proposed format. Guidelines will be determined depending on the proposed format.

Reviews should be sent electronically to Malynnda Johnson at malynnda.johnson@indstate.edu with **PCSJ Review and the author's last name in the subject line.** Reviews should include both the review and the reviewer's complete contact information (name, university affiliation, address and email). Reviews should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments in .doc or .docx format, unless an alternative format has been approved by the editor.

If you are interested in reviewing for *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* or if you are an author or publisher with a work you would like to have reviewed, then please contact Dr. Johnson at the following address or email:

Malynnda Johnson, Reviews Editor
Email: malynnda.johnson@indstate.edu

FOR REVIEWING ARTICLES

Our reviewers are important to us. We appreciate their service as well as the significant role our reviews play in ensuring quality of our publication.

 If you are interested in being part of The Popular Culture Studies Journal as a reviewer, please complete our online form (http://mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers/)

For our reviewers, who would like a certificate for service, please fill out our online form (http://mpcaaca.org/the-popular-culture-studies-journal/for-article-reviewers/)

Upcoming Special Issues

In addition to *PCSJ* calls for ongoing journal and reviews submissions (above) we are also planning for three special issues. In other words, the special issues will appear alongside *PCSJ* articles and reviews in upcoming volumes.

October 2018 - Monsters and Monstrosity
Guest Editor: Bernadette Marie Calafell
Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu
Call for papers closed

May 2019 - Asian American Worlds and Pacific Worlds
Guest Editor: Rona Tamiko Halualani
Rona.Halualani@sjsu.edu
Call for papers closed

MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a come-back conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

We look forward to seeing you next year in Indianapolis!

midwest popular culture association
american popular culture association

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**2018 CONFERENCE
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA
October 3-7, 2018**

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