

Professional Wrestling Scholarship: Legitimacy and Kayfabe

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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

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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, Genzlinger 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 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.

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.

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

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 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

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 professional 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*.

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?

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, <i>Lucha Libre</i> 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	Anthropology	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 Sehmy	Professional Wrestling, Whool: 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