

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 wrestling, 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

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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 look 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.

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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.

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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*, Gavalier 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), Gavalier 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-sliding 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. Gavalier 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. Gavalier 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. Gavalier 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. Gavalier 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*, Gavalier 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.

Gavalier 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.

Gavalier'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, Gavalier's stylistic choices in this volume sometime get in the way of him fully expressing these ideas. Gavalier can be oblique in his analysis, making the reader have to work to figure out the intellectual fascia connecting his points. Gavalier 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, Gavalier 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.

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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. Sourdout, 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. Sourdout, 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.

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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 usefulness 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 its 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 permits 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 exists 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, became 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.

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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.

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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 Rosa¹ 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

¹All references to *luchadoras* reflect their in-ring names, not given names.

²All 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 Monsivaís). 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

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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Cornette, Jim, host. *The Jim Cornette Experience*. MLW Radio Network, 2013-present. Available on iTunes and MLW.com.

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/Stam 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” by 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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