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# Get In The Ring: Professional Wrestling and Heavy Metal Music in Parallel

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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cenate.pruitt@ung.edu The author wishes to thank Colette Arrand, Bryce McNeil, Gabriel Owens, Shane Toepfer, Kathleen Scott, Marla Blair, the anonymous reviewers, and Heavy Metal Randy, wherever you are.

# Get In The Ring: Professional Wrestling and Heavy Metal Music in Parallel

Cenate Pruitt, *University of North Georgia*

**Abstract:** The sociological study of commonalities between professional wrestling and heavy metal music seems intuitive. Both are considered loud, flashy, and aggressively macho. Both have seen an explosion of critical academic analysis in the last decade. Both are perfect embodiments of what Barthes (1956) called “the spectacle of excess”. And yet, no academic research has explicitly brought the two together until now. This article serves as a beachhead, to first establish commonalities between the two forms, and then to explore the specific ways in which heavy metal culture has both infiltrated and been co-opted by mainstream American professional wrestling in the modern era (1985-present). By exploring successful and failed attempts to marry metal and wrestling, I argue that the heightened sense of authenticity central to both heavy metal and professional wrestling makes seemingly obvious cross-promotions difficult to achieve.

**Keywords:** Popular culture; Professional wrestling; Heavy metal music; Mass culture

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## Introduction

The PBS Frontline documentary “The Merchants of Cool” (Goodman 2001) explored (and bemoaned) the marketing industry’s co-opting of various youth culture trends of the late 1990s, including hyper-sexualized pop singers and inane gross-out comedy. Intriguingly, the film also examined the parallels between rap-metal and professional wrestling, a striking cultural intersection, as there are many ways in which the two worlds seem to share sensibilities beyond the hand-wringing and moral panics of their critics. It is in that spirit of exploration—although from a place of appreciation rather than dismay—that I begin this article.

In the last few years both metal music and professional wrestling have seen an increasing sense of legitimacy among scholars. The University of Maryland recently secured the original footage of the infamous short film “Heavy Metal Parking Lot,” referring to it as “a glimpse of this really distinctive, fascinating and kind of repelling working class culture” (McKenna 2016) while

discussions of wrestling’s “kayfabe”<sup>1</sup> veneer have spilled over into the mainstream, as multiple pundits have used the concept to explain the political rise of Donald Trump (Quinn 2016; Rogers 2017).

Metal music studies has made much of mainstream dismissal of metal as an “abhorred Other” (Brown and Griffin 2014), one of the commonly derided genres alongside country and rap that are often dismissed by consumers as “anything but,” as in “I listen to anything but country, rap, or metal” (Bryson 1996). In that context, it seems almost obvious that Kid Rock, an artist who has dabbled in all three of those genres, has been extensively involved with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), even being inducted into WWE’s “Hall of Fame” (Melok 2018). Academic analyses of pro wrestling (Maguire 2000; Woo and Kim 2003) cite the use of heavy metal music as part of the broader enterprise of “sports entertainment,” but the music side of the literature has said relatively little about the historic and thematic partnerships between the two forms.

## Pruitt

This project, then, has two tasks: it is an exploration of the conceptual similarities between metal music and professional wrestling as popular art forms, and a social history of the interplay between the two. I contend that these two oft-derided art forms have fundamentally similar underpinnings (spectacle, authenticity and extremity), which I will demonstrate by examining memorable instances where metal performers and metal aesthetics appeared in wrestling programming. This expands the literature in both areas by exploring the ways metal music and aesthetics are marketed by the wrestling industry, as well as expanding on the literature on the use of popular music in pro wrestling.

### Literature Review

The current field of metal studies draws from a wide variety of disciplines: music theorists discussing the actual technical components of metal music (Walser 1992); cultural scholars discussing the gender roles and aesthetics of metal subgenres (Overell 2011); and the ever-important question of “what actually *is* heavy metal?” (Klypchak 2007; Hill 2011) Sociological analysis of metal music has largely focused on data-driven perceptions of metal music (and/or metal fans) as unpleasant, violent, or otherwise *déclassé* (Bryson 1996; Lynxwiler and Gay 2000; Brown and Griffin 2014), while the work of Karen Halnon (2004, 2006) focuses on the “carnival” aspect of metal music, where both fans and performers engage in rituals of transgression. This sociological focus on the genre as a loathsome Other spurred this project, as there is a certain parallel in discussions of pro wrestling as “fake,” “lowbrow,” and so on.

The body of work on professional wrestling largely grows from Barthes’ (1972) anthropological framework, but it has come to encompass such diverse fields as sociologists doing ethnographic research of wrestling audiences and wrestlers themselves (De Garis 1999; Smith 2008; Chow 2014), theater and performance studies looking at wrestling as a live performance art (Hadley 2016; Laine 2016), and historians and cultural scholars who take a longitudinal approach to wrestling’s evolution from sideshow fare to TV staple (Mazer 1998;

Bovey 2018). As of February 2019, the Professional Wrestling Studies Association has approved its charter and selected an initial board of directors, with plans to establish a peer-reviewed journal and annual conference in the works (Reinhard 2019).

Thus far, there has been no single academic work connecting professional wrestling directly to heavy metal music. The linkages are clearly there in fan spaces, where websites for metal audiences frequently feature articles like “10 Worst Metal Wrestlers” and “10 Most Metal PPV Themes” (Pasbani 2012; Smallman 2016) and the film *Body Slam* (Needham 1986) tried to monetize the relationship between metalheads and wrestling fans. Yet there is still room for a serious social and historical look at the relationship. Both fields are highly interdisciplinary in nature, and that interdisciplinary focus frames out this article. Building on sociological theories about role performance, I explore how wrestling performers create characters and construct narratives and how audiences react to those narratives. The work of performance is a variation on Hochschild’s (1979) “emotional labor” insofar as performers must conceal their true feelings from the audience in service of the narrative. In wrestling, the villain must scowl and hiss at the jeering crowd, a hero must be bold and courageous, and all parties involved must work through tremendous actual physical pain while simultaneously pretending that *other* parts of their bodies are injured (De Garis 1999; Hadley 2016). Friends must pretend to be enemies and, occasionally, vice versa. Much the same is true in metal, down to members of a band who dislike each other personally but must work together on stage to create a successful performance.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model, a successful wrestling match is a carefully constructed performance of real and artificial athletic skill, requiring all performers (the wrestlers, the referee, any other individuals involved in the story) to work together to achieve a convincing result. The popular *Botchamania* video series features various moments where such combined performances fell short<sup>3</sup>; as of this submission it is on its 382<sup>nd</sup> installment (maffew 2019). Wrestling, particularly when kayfabe is upheld, is a quite literal example of Goffman’s concept of “front

*The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

space” and “back space”. Before a match begins, wrestlers may plan out moves, discuss finishes, work out, or snack at the craft services table together. Once the curtain opens and the wrestlers go out before the audience, backstage friends become hated enemies. Maintaining the illusion requires active audience segregation, and failure to uphold those boundaries can result in a breakdown of wrestling “reality.” In one infamous example, all-American babyface<sup>4</sup> “Hacksaw” Jim Duggan and the “foreign” heel<sup>5</sup> Iron Sheik were arrested together for drug possession in 1987, with the media spending as much time on the revelation that a “good guy” and a “bad guy” were riding in the same car as on the minor amount of marijuana and cocaine found in said car (Associated Press 1987; Keller 2012).

A more macro-level sociological framework can be used to analyze wrestling narratives as texts to be interpreted as products of the (sub-)culture that created them. I am specifically applying Griswold’s (2013) “cultural diamond” approach in this project. To wit, all cultural objects (including a televised wrestling broadcast) exist as part of a broader framework: the social world of which the objects are a part; the producers that create and broadcast the matches, interviews, and so on; and the receiver audience that consumes the broadcasts. What makes wrestling, particularly live wrestling, interesting in this framework is the intense immediacy of response – a crowd’s cheers, boos, or silence provide real-time feedback as to how the in-ring action is being received, as opposed to more delayed metrics like television ratings, pay-per-view buys, or merchandise sales.

Wrestling narratives like “working-class hero against decadent elitist” or “patriotic American versus foreign interloper” are repeated time and again in the industry, reframed ever so slightly to meet the current socio-political moment. The aforementioned Iron Sheik, representing fears of Iranian power during the Cold War, was repackaged as Colonel Mustafa, an Iraqi military officer and supposed confidant of Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War. His former tag-team partner, the “Soviet” Nikolai Volkoff, was reinvented by *perestroika* and the fall of the USSR into a newly

liberated pro-Western good guy who turned on his former Bolshevik partner (Jenkins 2004; Lincoln 1992; Mondak 1989). These melodramatic stories can serve as a salve (working-class Dusty Rhodes beats the ostentatiously wealthy Ric Flair) or as a salvo against current events (tag team partners Billy and Chuck “come out” and proffer to engage in a same-sex wedding on the air, only to recant at the altar and reaffirm their heterosexuality), but they definitely present a window into the world outside of wrestling. By looking then at moments where metal music and metal aesthetics interact with the world of wrestling, we can arrive at a deeper understanding of both forms.

### “Here comes the Ax, here comes the Smasher”: Entrance Music as Aesthetic Signifier

The narrative of the wrestling match begins long before the bell rings. A significant part of building a wrestler’s persona<sup>6</sup> is the ring entrance, the critical moment where performers introduces themselves to the crowd before the start of a match. A wrestler can establish a great deal about the embodied persona during the entrance sequence. A kid-friendly fan-favorite will shake hands, slap five, and so on; a dastardly heel will stalk to the ring, sneering at the simpletons in the audience, stopping to berate some hapless fan along the way; while a neutrally aligned performer will maintain a steely focus on the opponent in the ring and the match ahead. These ring entrances can become spectacles in their own right, particularly at major events like *WrestleMania*, with live musical performances, costumed extras, performers being lowered from the ceiling or raised from the floor, elaborate pyrotechnical displays, and so on. Popular media sometimes refers to *WrestleMania* as “the Super Bowl of professional wrestling” (DeBenedetto 2017), but I would argue that a more accurate comparison is the Super Bowl halftime show – indeed, the half-time show is much more structured (and the outcome more predetermined) than the “big game” itself, and assuming everything goes according to plan, the result looks seamless and natural. Indeed, the most infamous event in halftime show memory, 2004’s “wardrobe malfunction”, was

## Pruitt

scripted, although the intent was to reveal Janet Jackson's undergarments, not her bare breast (Butler and Izadi 2018; Cogan 2014).

As far back as the 1950s, Gorgeous George, the original glam heel with his sequined robes, flowing blond hair, and "cheat-to-win" attitude, used Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" as entrance music. One of the first contemporary uses of entrance music was also the earliest known use of metal music; in the mid-1970s, wrestler Chris Colt came to the ring to the strains of Alice Cooper's "Welcome To My Nightmare" (Cornette 2016; Lenard 2011). The practice was then popularized in the early 1980s by the Fabulous Freebirds in World Class Championship Wrestling, who, in keeping with their tough-guy Southern redneck personae, began using Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Freebird" as a ring theme before moving to an original composition (Hughes 2016). Since then, countless performers have used rock and metal music as ring themes. A complete list would be impossible in this space, but, as an example, at least a half-dozen well-known performers—from Mick Foley to "Flyin'" Brian Pillman to the Steiner Brothers—all used Guns N' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle" at some point in their careers (Cagematch.net n.d.; ECW Archive n.d.; Howse 2016). Not every promotion paid for performance rights, however, and much of the material archived on the WWE Network has the licensed music removed and replaced with alternative tracks or crowd sounds (Bee 2014; SmarkNico 2016).

Tompkins (2009) identifies a comparable relationship during the late 1990s in the use of metal music on horror movie soundtracks. Record labels and film studios work together to create links between horror film imagery and metal music as a means of targeting certain market segments as part of a brand-centric "lifestyle format". For Tompkins, this branding synergy is based upon an assumption that horror films and metal music share a core audience. This assumption of a shared demographic to be reached is perhaps best seen in *ECW: Extreme Music* (1998), *WCW Mayhem: The Music* (1999), and WWE's *Forceable Entry [sic]* (2002), albums consisting of metal artists covering wrestlers' entrance themes. In the case of *Extreme Music*, ECW's failure to secure the rights for the popular

songs used as wrestlers' themes meant several of the tracks were covers of well-known metal songs by other metal artists (e.g., Lemmy and Zebrahead covering Metallica's "Enter Sandman" and Kilgore covering Pantera's "Walk").

Furthering this demographic strategy, WWE began working with record labels to give pay-per-view events official theme songs in 2001. These songs featured heavily in advertising for the events, including full-screen displays promoting the song, the artist, and the album on which it appeared (High 2008). The initial wave of these official themes largely consisted of nu-metal acts like Puddle of Mudd, Saliva, and Drowning Pool, whose "Bodies" would become the theme music for a short-lived revival of ECW in the middle of the decade (Wrestling's Dirty Deeds n.d.). Ironically enough, many of these licensed songs are not found on the WWE Network edits of those shows (Alvarez 2005; Bee 2014).

As a single embodiment of this marketing strategy, consider the aforementioned relationship of WWE and Kid Rock, beginning in 2000 with a performance on *Monday Night Raw* and culminating with his induction into WWE's "Hall of Fame" in 2018 (Melok 2018). Kid Rock performed live at WrestleMania 25, several of his songs were used by wrestlers as entrance themes, and others were used as "official themes" for WWE events. While Kid Rock's particular genre has transitioned from rap-metal to country-rock, his "in-your-face style" (and flag-waving patriotism) has remained consistently on-brand with WWE's image (Melok 2018).

The wrestling industry also has a long history of creating original musical content. In the Memphis wrestling territory, wrestlers were recording novelty songs as promotional material as early as the mid-50s, but the practice did not become common nationwide until the "Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection" era of the mid-1980s, when WWF, and later WCW, released several albums of music that included wrestler themes alongside comic skits and novelty tunes performed by the wrestlers themselves (Bovey 2018; Christman 1998; Stacey 2018). It would take until 1996 for a wrestling company to release an album of nothing but original

*The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

theme songs, with several entries in *WWF: The Music* series breaking the 100,000 sales mark (High 2008).

While the demographic assumptions about metal fans and wrestling fans create a space for these branded cross-promotions, the actual in-ring world of wrestling presents another option for connecting with audiences. The structural similarities between metal music and pro wrestling make for a natural relationship built on spectacle, authenticity, and extremity, at which both forms excel.

**"The world is watching!": Stagecraft and Spectacle**

There is an obvious and practical connection to be made here between the epic pageantry of acts like KISS and a modern WrestleMania entrance. In both cases, the goal is to get the audience on their feet and engaged—sonically, psychically and emotionally connected to the action on the stage or in the ring. Even the people in the cheap seats can experience the heat of Kane's pyrotechnics or Blue Oyster Cult's infamous laser show. Metal, more than other genres, can exist in a space similar to wrestling, as both performance *and* theater (Chow, Laine, and Warden 2016; Laine 2016). The scripting of a metal show consists, at minimum, of a set list and a block of time to fill but can run into the sort of territory occupied by the band GWAR, where music is a key part of the show, but the performers in their elaborate costumes, playing characters, are also a critical part of the experience. Beyond that, room is left for improvisation—a guitar solo, addressing the crowd, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

Wrestling is similarly improvisational. A list of matches is announced and certain moments, or "spots," are planned in advance. However, beyond the broad strokes of who wins and how (e.g. "when the referee's back is turned, I hit you with a chair"), the actual matches are often a sort of "physical jazz," designed to provoke increasing levels of emotional response from the audience (De Garis 1999; Di Benedetto 2016). A wrestling match essentially requires a live audience to act and react to what is happening in the ring. Footage of wrestlers putting on a show in an empty auditorium reveals the significance of the crowd, as the performers

instinctively gesture out into empty seats and their howls of pain echo in the silence to no reaction (Ezell 2016).

On a theoretical level, what both art forms have in common is a dedication to the spectacle. Barthes' seminal essay, "The World of Wrestling" (1972), is crafted around this concept of spectacle—the idea that a wrestling match is itself made up of many individual moments of excess, each one a miniature transcendent melodrama where Good and Evil are embodied, and each maneuver a cascading and overwhelming emotional experience. The actual bout is less important than the individual moments generated during the bout. The hero is laid low by the villain's treachery, the hero rises again, the villain begs for mercy, and so forth. Each moment that allows the audience to cheer or jeer is necessary to construct the narrative of a wrestling match, and a match without such spectacle is a decidedly dull affair. The grotesque footage of Mankind-the-persona/Mick Foley-the-performer plummeting off a steel cage and through a table has become both a highlight reel icon and a "don't try this at home" cautionary tale, allowing viewers to simultaneously "withstand barbarity and revel in it." (Arrand 2015)

Halnon (2004) similarly situates the live performances of bands like Slipknot, Ozzy Osbourne, and Cradle of Filth as a distinct form of "heavy metal carnival" (2006:34), taking the spectacle of a rock concert and escalating the transgressive content, creating something intentionally designed to push, or perhaps break, the limits of propriety and good taste. GWAR's faux human sacrifices, mutilations, and gonzo costumes create a larger than life experience and a spectacle of excess every bit as emotionally resonant as the action in a wrestling ring. However, there is an inherent contradiction here, as the "metal carnival" is a space that is commercialized (in that it exists to sell records and promote bands) and yet by being so outrageous creates resistance against commodification, as Goodman (2001) observed at the conclusion of *The Merchants of Cool*. What record company would attempt to mainstream something as outrageous and

## Pruitt

profane as the antics of Insane Clown Posse? A parallel form of resistance certainly exists in wrestling, where “smark”<sup>8</sup> fans boo the designated good guys and cheer those who are presented as villains as a way of rejecting the “official” narrative (Ezell 2016; McBride 2005).

### Keeping it Real: Authenticity in a Fake World

Pro wrestling exists in an unusual space in popular culture, an experience that appears to be a legitimate sporting bout but in fact has a predetermined outcome. WWE uses the term “sports entertainment” to refer to this peculiar art form, initially developing the term as a way to avoid oversight by state-level athletic committees. (Bixenspan 2019; Fannin 2018) It is challenging to define what is or is not “sports entertainment.” Davich (2015) put it thusly: “Sports come with rules. Sports entertainment comes with the illusion of rules.” Wikipedia describes it as an extravagant form of sporting event performed specifically for the benefit of the audience, as opposed to an event done for competitive, recreational, or salutary purposes. (“Sports entertainment” n.d.) As such, Wikipedia’s category for “sports entertainment” includes such disparate events as cheerleading, competitive eating, monster truck rallies, and obstacle course shows like *Wipeout* and *American Ninja Warrior* alongside pro wrestling. In the late 1980s, WWE’s Linda McMahon (currently a member of the Trump administration) compared wrestling to the Harlem Globetrotters’ exhibition basketball games, which combine legitimate play with pre-determined stunt work, where the Globetrotters (almost) always win the day<sup>9</sup> (Bixenspan 2019; Posnanski 2011).

Even in this post-kayfabe era, where most wrestling consumers know full well that what they are watching is a staged event with a predetermined outcome, success or failure outside the ring depends on a performer’s ability to connect with the audience on a higher level (Di Benedetto 2016; Ezell 2016). The goal is not just to convince viewers that the action in the ring is more-real-than-real, but also that the performer’s persona (or “gimmick,” in wrestling slang) is real as well. For Barthes, wrestlers literally embody human emotion; the hero is

an Adonis, perfect and pure in every way, while the villain twists and contorts his form to express his deviance, his cruelty, and his vice. Barthes’ wrestlers are living embodiments of archetype. Arrand (2015) goes further, observing that wrestling in the age of television is a far cry from such simple melodrama, with characters and narratives much more complex than mere “hero vs bastard.” Modern wrestlers must be, paradoxically, real *and* superhuman, often simultaneously—a concept I call “contested authenticity”. A most instructive example of contested authenticity is the persona of Hulk Hogan. When Hulk Hogan sued Gawker for defamation, he did so as Terry Bollea, his legal name. Terry Bollea appeared on the witness stand, dressed in shades of black as opposed to Hulk Hogan’s famous red and yellow. Under oath, Terry Bollea testified that he was not the same person as Hulk Hogan, but that both he and Hulk Hogan were “embarrassed” by the course of events, and that while Hulk Hogan might make bold claims about his strength or his sexual prowess, Terry Bollea would never lie under oath. Further demonstrating this contestation, the vast majority of media coverage of *Bollea v Gawker* referred to Bollea as “Hulk Hogan” (Gardner 2016; Saul 2016). This contestation of wrestlers’ authentic selves is also seen on social media, as wrestlers post photos of their injuries and surgical scars to inform the audience that while the action in the ring is predetermined, actual human bodies take the toll (Ezell 2016; Hadley 2016; McNeil 2018).

Bayer (2017) observes this contested authenticity in the postmortem deification of Motörhead’s Lemmy, whose on-stage persona was, in almost the same way Barthes describes, a physical embodiment. Lemmy was never conventionally handsome, and his folk-hero legend revolves around drinking, loudness, and a general sense of not giving a damn.<sup>10</sup> Even still, toward the end of his life, Lemmy appeared in a Finnish milk commercial not as Ian Kilmister the man, but as Lemmy the icon. Moreover, the various hagiographies that appeared after his death focused on his Motörhead cavalry-hat-and-muttonchops image, not his earlier, proggy, aesthetics. In this case, the normally flexible boundary between the performer and the performance is reduced to a single immutable image, exaggerated past the point of stereotype and into archetype. Ian



*The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

Kilmister will forever be “Lemmy” as Terry Gene Bollea will forever be “Hulk Hogan.”

This flattening of detail is essential to the narrative outlined below, as when wrestlers and promoters who do not actually understand metal attempt to recreate the aesthetic, the result might as well be a cheap Halloween costume. Conversely, when the metal aesthetic is deployed by those with authentic knowledge and appreciation, the results tend to be better rounded and more successful.

### **“I Wanna See You Bleed”: Extremity, Loudness, and Blood**

The aforementioned arguments about pro wrestling could be said about any musical genre, not just metal. Jazz or jam rock are just as reliant on improvisation; rap and indie are equally concerned with authenticity. Where metal and wrestling really come together is in the desire for extremity, defined here as inflicting a certain degree of real or perceived pain on the performer. Overell (2011) discusses the “brutal affect” (205) found in grindcore and other extreme metal genres: the groans, screams, and growls at the edge of recognizable human vocalization and the discomfort they cause vocalists. Hannum (2016) expands metal’s focus on virtuosity and adds pain. Yes, musicians must be technically proficient, but they must also be ever louder, faster, harder, and more extreme—a set of requirements that sets metal apart from both the careful craftsmanship of prog rock and the intentional sloppiness of punk. Professional wrestling similarly negotiates this space. A wrestler must not only be able to successfully mimic pain (or “selling” in wrestling slang), but also to ignore the actual pain caused by the performance itself (Barthes 1972; De Garis 1999; Hadley 2016).

While numerous acts like GWAR, KISS, and Alice Cooper use copious amounts of fake blood in their performances, relatively few metal performers have self-mutilated on stage (Halnon 2006; Pattie 1999). The image of Andrew W.K.’s bloody nose on the cover of *Get Wet* exists in this space as a statement about the

Andrew W.K. persona, although a significant amount of pig blood was also allegedly used in the shoot (Ozzi 2016). For pro wrestling, the use of real human blood is perhaps the ultimate extreme, a tool virtually unique to wrestling to heighten the realism of the goings-on, although the industry itself has treated the practice with varying degrees of acceptance, depending on the political climate. WCW attempted to ban it outright while ECW openly embraced the practice during the same timeframe, but it is currently forbidden in today’s PG-rated WWE (Chow, Laine and Warden 2016).

At the end of the day, wrestlers and metal musicians must create a look, a sound, and a performance that is interpreted as authentic and legitimate by the audience, lest they be booed off the stage, or worse, met with silence. Both create an emotional spectacle of excess that draw in the viewer or listener, and both share an audience, consequentially generating multiple crossover partnerships, with varying degrees of success. I now move to a broad historical overview of how WWE and its primary competitors deployed metal aesthetics in wrestling programming to further explore the boundaries of the metal/wrestling relationship.

### **Methods**

This project began as a late-night conversation with friends, centered on the commonalities of various “low-brow” areas of pop culture—comic books, pro wrestling, heavy metal, and so on—and fond memories of metal-inspired wrestling gimmicks from the 1980s and 1990s. From that kernel of an idea, a more robust methodology was developed; using a mix of period resources and modern commentary, a sociologically, historically-informed overview of the crossover between metal and wrestling could be developed.

The data here consists of materials from roughly 1985 forward in three core formats: the online archive of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter (WON) and Figure Four Weekly (F4W), the two longest-running and most widely-known professional wrestling fan newsletters; recordings of wrestling programming archived on WWE’s WWE Network service; and broader online

## Pruitt

metal and wrestling fan spaces, including message boards, social media accounts, and news sites.

The initial data collection consisted of searching the WON/F4W archives for keywords, including “heavy metal” and the names of specific wrestlers using metal gimmicks that the author personally recalled as a fan or came up as a consequence of the first search (“Van Hammer,” “KISS Demon,” etc.). Where the newsletter archives mentioned specific programming, efforts were made to view said programming via streaming services in order to observe and document audience reactions to the performers as well as commentators’ statements about the characters. Finally, the contemporary fan sites were searched for the performer names identified by WON/F4W using a variety of internal and external options such as an individual message board’s search option or targeted Google searches on a specific site.

An intentional and significant decision was made at this point to limit the topic to United States professional wrestling because while metal-themed wrestlers certainly existed in other markets (indeed, Mexican *lucha libre* star Heavy Metal featured prominently in these searches), there were significant barriers to exploring those areas due to issues around language and the relative availability of such material. The period from 1985 onward was chosen as it effectively represents the beginning of the modern age of pro wrestling – and programming produced after this point is relatively easy to obtain via streaming services. A third cut narrowed the sample to wrestling done under the aegis of WWE, WCW, or ECW, as they were the three dominant promotions at the peak of wrestling’s popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, and WWE almost totally dominates mainstream discourse on wrestling since its purchase of WCW and ECW’s assets in 2001 and 2003 respectively. While there are almost certainly many more metal-themed wrestlers on the independent circuit, information about them is relatively scarce – one issue of WON mentions a “Heavy Metal Randy” who lost a match in South Bend, Indiana, on August 8, 1992, and that is the sum total of information available online about “Heavy Metal Randy” (Meltzer 1992). Finally, the sample was narrowed down to two specific types of event: appearances by metal musicians

on wrestling programming and appearances by wrestlers whose ring personas involve metal aesthetics.

The end result was a broad historical collection of appearances by metal artists and wrestlers with metal personas on televised wrestling programming, as well as an assortment of newsletter articles (ranging in length from short essays to brief blurbs) and fan letters covering the time period in question. Pairing those primary sources with after-the-fact fan discussions allows for an analytical framework that first looks at these performances as they aired and were discussed at the time, then looks at retroactive audience perspectives. I then selected about a dozen specific performers who appeared in at least two televised storylines, were discussed in at least two fan letters in the *Observer* or *Figure 4 Weekly* or featured in at least two threads/blog posts on contemporary fan sites – The Sandman, discussed below, appears frequently in discussions like “who is the most metal wrestler,” while his ECW contemporary Heavy Metal Maniac is rarely if ever brought up in such conversations.

While I am being precise about my focus on eras of pro wrestling, I am intentionally playing fast and loose with the question of “what is heavy metal?” While some wrestling performers and promoters are known and avowed fans of heavy metal (Anderson 2011; Heavy Metal Wrestling n.d.), others likely could not tell the difference between Spinal Tap and Cannibal Corpse.<sup>11</sup> At the peak of wrestling’s late 1990s boom, *Steve Austin’s Stone Cold Metal* spent four weeks on the *Billboard* 200, primarily on the strength of Stone Cold’s face being on the cover and a promise that the songs were hand-picked by the wrestler himself (Christman 1998). The track list put Scorpions and Dio next to Foghat and Molly Hatchet—a loose interpretation of “metal” to be sure, but a fine example of the sort of interplay I wish to discuss here.

### Welcome to the Jungle: The Road Warriors and Their Inheritors

The mid-1980s was the apex of WWF’s “Rock and Wrestling Connection,” with pop star Cyndi Lauper

## *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

appearing on WWF programming and WWF star “Captain Lou” Albano appearing in multiple Lauper videos. Around the country, metal aesthetics were integrated into professional wrestling in a variety of ways, with groups like the Rock ‘N’ Roll Express and the Midnight Rockers adopting Van Halen-style teased hair and colorful spandex. Metal artists involved themselves in the action as well, with Ozzy Osbourne assisting The British Bulldogs at WrestleMania 2 while Jake “The Snake” Roberts entered into a partnership with Alice Cooper to defeat the cowardly Honky Tonk Man, wrestling’s only Elvis impersonator. Kevin Sullivan and the Satanic-panic-inspired Army of Darkness group so perfectly integrated wrestling and heavy metal that the band Nasty Savage thanked Sullivan in the liner notes of their first album, and members of the Army of Darkness performed backing vocals on their second album (Bird 2016; Bixenspan 2015; Welton 2015).

Probably the most influential use of metal aesthetics in this era is by the Road Warriors, also known as the Legion of Doom, who initially entered the ring to Black Sabbath’s “Iron Man” and created an instantly iconic look by liberally borrowing from the *Mad Max* film series—mohawk haircuts, spiked football pads, and perhaps most importantly, distinct face paint patterns (Dunn 2005). While the members of the Road Warriors specifically cite *Mad Max* as an influence, the concept that each member of the team had a unique face paint scheme also harkens back to KISS, King Diamond, and others.<sup>12</sup> The Road Warriors’ post-apocalyptic look spawned a variety of copycats, clones, and followers with varying degrees of success.

In the WWF, Demolition borrowed more liberally from heavy metal iconography, pairing elaborate Road Warriors-type warpaint with the sorts of studded leather fetish gear also sported by Rob Halford of Judas Priest. Their theme music was literally heavy metal—it began with the sound of a hammer striking an anvil. Probably the best-known of the Road Warriors’ spiritual descendants, Ultimate Warrior, combined the physique of Hulk Hogan with the mannerisms of glam metal, sporting unique face paint, voluminously teased hair, tassels, fringe, and neon everywhere, head-banging

around the ring before the start of a match. Ultimate Warrior’s one-time tag-team partner, Sting, by contrast, took the muscles-and-face paint aesthetic in a more family-friendly direction, working as a clean-cut wholesome hero in WCW, largely divorced from the metal-inspired roots of the look.

### **If It’s Too Loud, You’re Too Old!: Experiments and Failed “Metal” Gimmicks.**

The Road Warriors, Demolition, and the Ultimate Warrior all achieved significant success in their day, and they are fondly remembered by wrestling fans (Kazarian 2014; Sturm 2018). In all three cases, metal-inspired (or at least metal-adjacent) aesthetics were a part of the gimmick, yet not the entirety of the wrestlers’ personas. When wrestling promoters have directly attempted to create a character based on the idea of “heavy metal,” however, the results have been far less successful.

As an example, consider the case of Maxx Payne. Payne saw some success overseas, including a championship run in Germany under the name Heavy Metal Buffalo, with a character based on a genuine love of metal music and an embrace of metal aesthetics. He sported long hair, a leather duster covered in skulls and other dark imagery, and a carried around a guitar nicknamed “Norma Jean” that itself became the subject of several storylines.<sup>13</sup> Payne, a competent guitarist, would sometimes play his own theme music while walking to the ring, and he kicked off Superbrawl III by playing “The Star Spangled Banner” in the middle of the ring, Hendrix-style (World Championship Wrestling 1993). Payne stood out in the technicolor carnival of early 1990s wrestling, with his WCW career including feuds with the street punk Nasty Boys as well as Johnny B. Badd, whose persona was summed up by his ring entrance theme: “He’s as pretty as a picture/He looks just like Little Richard” (The Grand Theft All Star Band 1992). Payne left WCW and made his way to the WWF at the end of 1994, where management promptly re-branded him as “Man Mountain Rock,” gave him a guitar in the shape of the WWF logo, and dressed him in a garish tie-dye getup, while WWF owner and then commentator Vince McMahon whooped, “If it’s too loud, you’re too old!” (World Wrestling Federation

## Pruitt

1995). This incarnation of the character lasted less than a year before he was released due to injury and drug issues, ending his wrestling career.

"Heavy Metal" Van Hammer was a more unusual case. Having wrestled in Europe as simply "The Hammer," he was allegedly given the "Van Hammer" appellation and a Flying V-style guitar due to a vague resemblance to Sammy Hagar (Pasbani 2012). Hammer had no actual experience with the guitar and would simply mimic playing it during ring entrances and in taped promotional segments. Audiences could tell; virtually every period discussion of Van Hammer in WON letters pages comment on his lack of wrestling and musical talent (Harrington n.d.; Meltzer 1991, 1993). Even so, Van Hammer stuck around in WCW for the better part of a decade, with his gimmick eventually shifting from "heavy metal" to "Deadhead burnout" to "grunge rocker" back to "Deadhead burnout" to "military washout" over the years, depending on what was trending in pop culture and which group of wrestlers needed a big guy to round out their look. Despite whatever talents the men who portrayed them may have had, Man Mountain Rock and Van Hammer both failed as characters because of their inauthenticity. Despite being portrayed by the same individual, Man Mountain Rock was an aging promoter's idea of what heavy metal was like, rather than the authentic creation of an actual metal fan, as Maxx Payne was. "Heavy Metal" Van Hammer was even more blatantly artificial—a cheap guitar and a leather vest do not a metalhead make.

### Enter Sandman: ECW Gets it Right and Redefines the Metal/Wrestling Relationship.

While WWF and WCW were shoving guitars into the hands of bodybuilders and calling it "metal," up in Philadelphia, a low-rent outfit called Eastern Championship Wrestling was changing the face of wrestling. Redubbing itself Extreme Championship Wrestling, ECW rejected the cartoonish characters of the two major wrestling empires and instead went for a gritty, violent, and altogether extreme product (McBride 2005). Wrestlers were encouraged to simply be larger-

than-life versions of themselves, embracing the contested nature of authenticity in wrestling. ECW offered a freewheeling mix of hard-hitting Japanese "shoot" wrestling, high-flying Mexican *lucha libre*, and their stock in trade, "hardcore" wrestling, which amounted to guys with high pain tolerances beating each other with trash cans, folding chairs, and anything else that looked good on camera. Airing late at night on syndication and broadcasting out of a former bingo hall under a freeway overpass in South Philadelphia, ECW's unflinching attitude and growing popularity dragged WCW and WWE toward a new understanding of authenticity.

A representative example of ECW's approach to authenticity is the metal-flavored career of one of its flagship stars, the Sandman. Arriving in Eastern Championship Wrestling with a goofy beach-bum persona, the Sandman was reasonably successful. After being told to change the character to reflect his real personality, the Sandman became a beer-swilling, chain-smoking anti-hero who mercilessly beat his opponents with a bamboo training sword referred to as a "Singapore cane," inspired by the then-recent caning of an American student by the Singaporean government (Loverro 2007). While generally considered to be at best a limited talent in the ring<sup>14</sup>, the Sandman's ultra-macho, ultra-violent persona was a huge success, best exemplified by his own ring entrance. Set to Metallica's "Enter Sandman," he would appear at the back of the crowd and push his way through the audience rather than use the fenced-off area intended for wrestlers' entrances and exits. Even today, fans identify the Sandman's entrance as a spectacle unlike any other in the world of professional wrestling, with a capacity crowd all singing along, working themselves into a frenzy to match whatever was about to happen in the ring (Verhei 2010; StevoLopata 2017).

WWF and WCW eventually course-corrected, primarily by buying out the contracts of many of ECW's biggest stars. To stay relevant against edgy ECW imports like brooding goth Raven and masked *luchador* Rey Misterio Jr., 1980s stars put away the neon and started wearing black leather, with Hulk Hogan trading in the patriotic anthem "American Made" for Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)" and the clean-

## *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

cut Sting adopting Metallica's "Seek and Destroy" as theme music and retooling his look to one inspired by *The Crow*. The "Attitude Era" was underway.

### **Here Comes the Money: Cross-branded Corporate Promotions in the Attitude Era.**

Throughout the peak of wrestling's "Attitude Era" in the late 1990s, non-wrestling celebrities made regular promotional appearances on WCW, WWF, and ECW programming. WCW kicked off the trend when NBA star Dennis Rodman "joined" the villainous New World Order. Metal musicians soon followed and were occasionally integrated into storylines. WWE used a performance by Motley Crüe on *Monday Night Raw* to introduce a new wrestler, while a performance by Megadeth on *WCW Monday Nitro* heralded the return of wildly popular wrestler Goldberg (World Championship Wrestling 1999; World Wrestling Federation 1998). Metal band Stuck Mojo featured the WCW United States Championship belt on the cover of their album *Rising*, the title track was played on *WCW Monday Nitro*, and WCW wrestlers appeared in the song's music video. These were largely one-off events, a single performance for the bands to promote their latest albums while the wrestlers promoted themselves. Attempts at longer lasting cross-promotion proved less successful.

Two particularly infamous attempts at metal cross-promotion show up in this era. The first is the brief career of The Demon, a wrestler dressed in Gene Simmons' iconic KISS attire. The character was intended to be the first of four KISS-themed wrestlers, each one replicating a band member's appearance (Murphy 2011). KISS received a significant amount of money in licensing fees and made an appearance on *Nitro* to promote the concept, but it was an obvious commercial, and commercials are never authentic. KISS did not seem to care about anything but the paycheck; their fans did not tune in; and wrestling fans definitely did not support it (Alvarez 2001; Liston 2015). The second is the involvement of Misfits in a 1999 WCW storyline assisting goth wrestler Vampiro. Initially, Vampiro simply wanted to use Misfits' music as his ring

entrance, with the band later being contracted to appear on WCW programming and eventually actually wrestling, including a steel cage match between Misfits bassist and vocalist Jerry Only and veteran wrestler "Dr. Death" Steve Williams (Colt Cabana n.d.; Williams 2014). While Misfits only stayed in WCW about two months, the Demon had a marginally longer run, with his nine-month stint in WCW concluding in a partnership with Vampiro and rappers/wrestlers/entrepreneurs Insane Clown Posse.

Insane Clown Posse (ICP) is an interesting case, as they began as independent wrestlers well before fusing rap, metal and horror into their specific brand of musical spectacle. In a three-year period, Insane Clown Posse had brief appearances in ECW and WWE and a year-long stay in WCW before founding their own independent promotion, Juggalo Championship (later Championship) Wrestling (Violent J and Echlin 2003). On stage or in the ring, ICP embodies Halnon's (2006) "heavy metal carnival," something so bizarre and unpalatable that it cannot be successfully marketed to the mainstream, creating a truly distinct space of simultaneous consumption and resistance. With the possible exception of Chris Jericho, detailed below, few performers have had as much success in both music and wrestling.

### **Time to Play the Game: Authenticity, Metal, and Wrestling Post-2000.**

By the summer of 2001, both WCW and ECW were out of business, their assets eventually bought by WWE. The lessons learned from ECW were fully visible, though; WWE's biggest star was ECW alumnus "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, a beer-swilling tough guy with a metal entrance theme. The synthesis of the spectacle of the performance and the authentic personality of the performer had reached its apex. This back-to-basics approach is best exemplified by the relationship between WWE star Hunter Hearst Helmsley (HHH) and the band Motörhead. The HHH persona is "the cerebral assassin", a master planner who is several moves ahead of his opponents within and outside the ring. To that end, when looking for a new entrance theme to fit the

## Pruitt

character, HHH repeatedly told WWE house composer Jim Johnson that he wanted something “gritty” and to “think Motörhead,” leading to the decision to actually approach Motörhead to write a song (Anderson 2011). Motörhead then recorded two solo entrance themes for HHH at different stages of his career and a theme song for a group of wrestlers, licensed a different song as the theme music for 2008’s *Unforgiven* pay-per-view, and had HHH perform a spoken world segment on 2002’s *Hammered* (Alvarez 2001; Motörhead 2002). The apex of the relationship was Motörhead appearing live twice at WrestleMania X-Seven and WrestleMania 21, both times playing HHH’s theme as part of an elaborate pre-match introduction sequence. The connection between HHH and Motörhead was so significant that *WWE Monday Night Raw* broadcast a video package upon the death of Motörhead’s Lemmy, a tribute usually reserved only for wrestlers. In the package, HHH, who is also WWE’s Executive Vice President of Talent, Live Events, and Creative, described Lemmy as “a member of the WWE family” (World Wrestling Entertainment 2015; WWE.com Staff 2015). Like the Sandman before him, HHH’s use of metal is an organic outgrowth of the character, an authentic aesthetic validation of the performer’s identity. While HHH’s visual aesthetic is often influenced by imagery that is certainly metal-adjacent (e.g., Frank Frazetta art, biker gangs), it never becomes the core of the character’s persona. Rather, it is part of a larger image—Conan the Barbarian is badass, Motörhead is badass, HHH is extra badass.

An alternate form of authenticity is carried out by Chris Jericho, who pulls double-duty as a professional wrestler and as lead singer of the metal band Fozzy. Jericho is far from the only professional wrestler to try out a music career, but he is one of only a handful to do it with any lasting success<sup>15</sup>. Jericho’s love of metal only occasionally comes through in the ring, where he portrays a more traditional “cocky villain” persona. If Jericho limited his ring identity to “rock star Chris Jericho, lead singer of Fozzy,” he would be limiting the ways in which he could engage with the wrestling audience. Similarly, if he took the wrestling antics too far with the Fozzy audience, he might run the risk of alienating listeners in that direction. Instead, he practices what Goffman (1959:85) calls “audience

segregation”; wrestling marks to the left, metalheads to the right, and where the Venn diagram overlaps, well, that means more tickets sold. In fact, early on in Fozzy’s existence, Jericho performed with the band under the moniker Mongoose McQueen, claiming not to be Jericho, while Jericho the wrestler claimed not to be Mongoose McQueen the musician, an unusual and unique form of contested authenticity as he has two separate personas (Alvarez 2004). As the band moved from novelty cover band to a full-fledged group performing original songs, the Mongoose McQueen persona was discarded. Jericho’s career post-2005 has alternated between time in the wrestling ring and time in the studio or on the road with Fozzy.

Over the last decade, WWE has undergone a dramatic shift in its focus, moving its televised programming toward an explicit PG rating and courting a younger audience with animated films like *Scooby-Doo WrestleMania Mystery* and *Surf’s Up 2: WaveMania*, heavily promoting its women’s division, and expanding online offerings to include not only wrestling events, but also reality-style programming. Blading has been banned, along with attacks that target the head (Chow, Laine and Warden 2016). Even still, one of the current stars of the NXT<sup>16</sup> division is Aleister Black, a quasi-Satanist figure, presented as something of a Byronic hero. Black is a fan favorite despite—or perhaps because of—his metal aesthetic. In this case, Black’s persona is similar to HHH, in that he is presented first and foremost as a dangerous fighter, with the WWE website boasting of his “head-rocking” mixed martial arts skill. The aesthetic is an integral part of the package, however, with the same site describing Black as “mysterious,” “dangerous,” “emerging from the quiet darkness,” and defeating foes with the “Black Mass spinning heel kick” (WWE.com n.d.).

## Conclusion

This article expands the sociological literature around professional wrestling by connecting it to the symbolic interactionist approach, exploring wrestlers’ constructed personas through Goffman’s lens of “audience segregation” and Hochschild’s “emotional

*The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*

labor." Wrestling, as an art form, is a very literal type of "body work," as the wrestlers contort their bodies, sneer, grimace, and cry in (imagined or real) pain as an essential part of the storytelling process. In the post-kayfabe era, the act of audience segregation has mutated from maintaining a veneer of reality into a blurring of the real and the surreal, a contested authenticity where wrestlers must manage their emotion in the ring but have a certain freedom of self-expression when the cameras are off.

It also expands the disciplines of professional wrestling studies and metal music studies by drawing connections between these two oft-derided forms, built around shared focus on spectacles of extremity, whether it be Gene Simmons of KISS spitting fake blood into the crowd or the high-tension drama of a ladder match. Wrestling programming that embraces authentic use of metal aesthetics meets with fan approval, even when the wrestling performances are lackluster, as seen with The Sandman and Maxx Payne, but a crass or misappropriated metal aesthetic meets with derision, as seen with KISS Demon and "Heavy Metal" Van Hammer. In the ring, the most successful uses of metal aesthetics are part of a more complex persona, not a bogus "metal guy" shtick. Performers like HHH and Aleister Black find success by drawing upon metal aesthetics as part of an intimidating image as opposed to the flattened cartoons of the early 1990s, while Chris Jericho has found success in both worlds by maintaining a tactical distance between his wrestling villainy and his metal theatrics. While metal artists have historically been on the forefront of cross-promotional branding between the music industry and the wrestling world, WWE's move towards a PG-rated product and in-house production of entrance themes has somewhat softened this crossover potential.

Future metal/wrestling crossover analyses could look at metal aesthetics in the independent wrestling scene in the U.S., including promotions such as Heavy Metal Wrestling and the aforementioned Juggalo Championship Wrestling, or at mainstream wrestling promotions in Japan, Mexico, and Europe. Another area for research is audience-driven—to what extent are

metalheads wrestling fans, and vice versa? A third project could look at the metal music scene's interaction with wrestling, essentially inverting this study. One approach might investigate the use of wrestling imagery by bands like GWAR, the Ultimate Warriors, and Eat the Turnbuckle. An alternate view might look at metal websites' frequent discussion of wrestling themes, with metalinjection.com specifically including a "wrestlemetal" tag for crossover content and various other sites offering top-10 lists including the "best entrance themes ever" (Hill 2015; Metal Injection n.d.).

Another direction for the sociological study of pro wrestling involves applying the interactionist perspective, particularly the concept of kayfabe and the construction and presentation of wrestling personas as a very literal version of Goffman's "front space/back space" concept. This analogy might serve as a framework to teach interactionist concepts in the undergraduate classroom. I would also like to explore the overt and covert political messaging in mainstream U.S. pro wrestling, including Donald Trump's historical involvement in WWE (including a 2007 segment where he was kayfabe attacked by "Stone Cold" Steve Austin and a 2009 storyline where Trump "bought" WWE), WWE's attempts at encouraging voter registration via the "Smackdown Your Vote!" program, and the two 2018 WWE pay-per-view events held in Saudi Arabia as part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's modernization efforts, with *Crown Jewel* held a month after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi amid public outcry (World Wrestling Entertainment 2008, n.d.; Sullivan 2018). The development of the Professional Wrestling Studies Association will undoubtedly open up further lines of research and collaboration as well.

### Footnotes

- 1.) Kayfabe" is wrestling argot for wrestlers' attempts to preserve the illusion of wrestling against the real world. A fine example of kayfabe is Johnny Walker, aka "Mr. Wrestling II", turning down an invitation to Jimmy Carter's presidential inauguration because he would have had to remove his iconic wrestling mask for the occasion (Varsallone 2014).

## Pruitt

- 2.) Ramones are arguably the best example of this in popular music; founders Joey Ramone and Johnny Ramone essentially did not speak to one another off-stage for much of the band's twenty-plus year touring and recording career. (Gilmore 2016).
- 3.) Often quite literally, as wrestlers falling down at the wrong time, tripping over things, and the like are a common theme in the series.
- 4.) "Babyface" is wrestling slang for a good-guy character.
- 5.) "Heel" is wrestling slang for a bad-guy character.
- 6.) "Persona" here refers to the wrestling character portrayed by the wrestler; Virgil Runnels is the performer, "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes is the persona.
- 7.) As a counterpoint, Taylor Swift's "Reputation" tour requires fifty tractor trailers to haul instruments, props, and the like, another thirty flatbed trucks to move the stage and load-bearing structures and is scripted to the point that Swift could specifically state how many songs from her prior albums would be performed each night, effectively crossing the line into theatre (Berg 2018; Chiu 2018). Similarly, the aforementioned Super Bowl halftime programming is so carefully regimented that anything unexpected is itself noteworthy (Cogan 2014).
- 8.) A "smark" is a wrestling fan who believes he or she knows more about how the wrestling business works than they actually do – particularly the sort of fan who follows "inside" news about contract negotiations, future storylines, and the like.
- 9.) Infamously, the hapless Washington Generals eked out a victory over the Globetrotters once, in 1971. The Generals continue to challenge the Globetrotters today, having borrowed a page from WWE – the current roster includes a massive, masked player identified only as "Cager", presented as an implacable force similar to wrestling's "monster heels" (Washington Generals n.d.).
- 10.) An avenue for future research in this area might be the ways in which Andre the Giant has become a similar icon within the world of wrestling. WWE's documentary films feature near-mythic tales of his sheer size, his ability to consume alcohol and his capacity for incredible physical feats (while Andre's sexual potency is generally only alluded to in PG-rated ways) (Murphy 2013).
- 11.) For the uninitiated, Spinal Tap are the fictional satirical metal band from 1984's *This Is Spinal Tap*, while Cannibal Corpse are a death metal band who are absolutely not satirical.
- 12.) The Road Warriors were not the first wrestlers to use face paint per se - "Exotic" Adrian Street wore a variety of designs as far back as the early 70s, while wrestlers managed by Gary Hart painted their faces as part of "wildman" gimmicks. Where the Road Warriors innovate here is the idea of a consistent, recognizable, marketable, design (again, ala KISS) that is replicated night after night, which was then carried forward by Demolition, The Ultimate Warrior, Sting, etc.
- 13.) These were largely variations on the theme of "another wrestler damaged/stole Norma Jean, Payne must take revenge".
- 14.) As one letter to the WON put it: "With the music, he's Sandman. Without it, he's a drunk with a stick." (Alvarez 2006).
- 15.) Aside from the aforementioned ICP, the only other meaningful competition is John Cena, whose sole album, 2005's "You Can't See Me" went platinum. In contrast, Fozzy have released seven albums and gone on tour multiple times, opening for such notables as Metallica. Which one constitutes greater "success" is left up to the reader.
- 16.) "NXT" is neither an acronym nor an initialism. It is just "NXT".



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