

Combining Sport and Performance: Dramaturgical Identity Enactment Among Independent Wrestlers

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Abstract

This research examines the consumer subculture of local independent wrestling through the lens of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach. This approach combines the perspective of theater with wrestling's more typical portrayal as sport. The focus of this research is not only to differentiate independent wrestling's thespian foundations from competitive sport, but also to unveil a cultural extension and novel individualism that differentiates it from its "professional" role model, Worldwide Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Through qualitative methods including depth interviews and participant observation, the study finds that localized enactment of professional wrestling is associated with the interdependent structure that exists at a local level between fans and the independent wrestlers themselves. Specifically, wrestlers exhibited gender performativity (Butler 1988), frequently depicting extreme gender portrayals, and described nostalgic recreation of past times (Holbrook 1993). The findings highlight independent wrestling's focus on the dramatization of a "plot" in contradistinction to the competitive norms of sport and introduces more individualized notions of wrestling as an extension of the self (Belk 1988) and a personal escapism from everyday life.

Keywords: performativity, dramaturgical, self-concept

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, And Practitioners:

This paper examines the nature of dramaturgical performativity among the localized reenactment of professional wrestlers. This provides insight into how individuals within an entertainment venue position themselves in the adoption of wrestler names and personae in relation to their self-concept and the more nationalized portrayal of wrestlers.

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