

'Smarks': Kynical engagement and coalitional fandom of Professional Wrestling

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Abstract:

Conflict in professional wrestling is not limited to the performers in the ring, as World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and other promotions have toxic fan practices borne out of their varied engagements with the wrestling texts. Conflicting reactions to performers and storylines speak to a larger divide within the professional wrestling community exemplified by 'smarks': industry-savvy fans whose knowledge of backstage dealings impacts their perceptions of the product. In analyzing smarks, I employ Peter Sloterdijk's conception of kynicism, distinguished from cynicism by an attitude of cheekiness that enables the user to subvert hegemonic idealism through a particular performance. In his words it is 'a way of presenting himself, as well as a form of argumentation'.¹

How did such an oppositional, ironically engaged fan base emerge? How does this fan base enact toxic practices in response to their favored text? How then do these practices interact with the text itself through audience participation as well as with other fan groups outside the 'smark' identity? This paper argues that the kynical engagement of smarks emerges as a reaction to popular pathologizing of wrestling fandom, particularly as a taste culture representative of the uneducated and lower class. Smarks' emphasis on reinforcing knowledge of wrestling's industrial production through these kynical expressions can be understood as a response to negative mainstream understandings of wrestling fandom more broadly.

Keywords: coalitional fandom, textual poaching, class, wrestling, WWE

"Let's Go, Cena! Cena Sucks! Let's Go, Cena! Cena Sucks!"

These words are chanted loudly by thousands of people in arenas around the world when World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) hosts a show in town. The chants refer to John Cena, who is by far the most popular and commercially successful star on the WWE roster for the past several years. As a headliner in all shows in which he participates and as the hero

perennially positioned against insurmountable odds, John Cena has quickly become the face of the company and their broadcasts. Yet as the dueling chants show, Cena is not always positively received when he emerges from behind the curtain to head to the ring for a match or segment.

John Cena and the chants referenced above are a perfect reflection of the coalitional fandom that has emerged in WWE, often divided between the growing youth and family demographic the WWE has courted over the past decade and an older, savvier fan base whose engagement with the product has changed over time and stands apart from those families around them. Despite the way the narrative is constructed on weekly programming, this fan community will sometimes reject John Cena as the hero or babyface, boozing him as a sign of this refusal.² How did such an oppositional, ironically engaged fan base emerge? How does this fan base enact toxic practices in response to and often towards their favored text? Is this type of engagement unique to professional wrestling, or is this an example of similar fan activities across other media texts? In this paper I plan to address these questions through a study of ‘smarks’, industry-savvy professional wrestling fans who participate in an cynical engagement with the text, deriving and building new meanings through online and in-person participatory culture.

Methodology

This article analyzes the discourse of many sites of this smark engagement, namely in the digital forums that are so often associated with the smark fan (or sometimes colloquially the Internet Wrestling Community, or IWC) as well as in the physical arenas where WWE puts on their live events. In both cases smarks are ultimately building on the wrestling text to create a new culture of fandom marked predominantly, I argue, by a cynical attitude. The exploration better allows us to understand precisely why smarks often take on this perspective and what that can teach us about how these activities can be seen as toxic from other wrestling fan coalitions.

After providing some background on both the history of smarks and the theories behind cynicism as it pertains to fan studies, I turn first to the digital havens of smarks, most notably online newsletters and digital forums like Reddit. The activity here is punctuated by an emphasis on education of industry lore and knowledge that is crucial to smarks’ activity as savvy, insider-fans. I look particularly at an incident on Reddit wherein a discussion revolved around someone revealing spoilers from an alleged inside source, analyzing how the discourse reflected a cynical response. Next I look at activity during live events, namely in the forms of chants that seemingly break the narrative reality of the wrestling program. This again presents an ironic engagement with the text that is built not just on an investment in the deeper levels of the product (like its backstage workings), but also an ironic distancing from a supposed ‘lower-class’ fan object.

Smarks and Cynical Engagement

'Smark' is a portmanteau of the words *smart* and *mark*. 'Mark' is an insider wrestling term for someone who enjoys the product as if it were real competition and not a staged narrative. The term derives from wrestling's carnival roots, similar to the idea of a mark for a confidence job or someone to fool for money. Smart, on the other hand, refers to the smark having insider knowledge of the wrestling industry, the art form and skill it requires, and even the real names and personalities behind the characters on-screen. Smarks are the savvy, informed, and knowledgeable viewers that enjoy the product not despite its staged nature but *because* of its staged nature. This makes the smark someone who enjoys the product but also the production politics and decisions that come along with it. They are interested in more than just the narrative storylines placed before them; they are interested in how those storylines are constructed and how they relate to the real world creative decisions and events happening 'behind the scenes'.

McBride and Bird explore the two facets of the smark - the smart fan and the mark - when they describe what they call the 'Smart Fan phenomenon'.³ They emphasize the knowledge and backstage focus of the smart fan, comparing them to savvy fans of other media whose interests lie not only in the fictional worlds and narratives depicted on screen but in the industry politics and strategies that undergird them. Most academic writings on the topics of smart fans and marks treat them as two fandoms that are seemingly divided along a particular question of knowledge (how aware of the constructedness of wrestling performance is the fan?) as well as a question of focus (is the interest more in the narrative or the backstage dealings?).⁴ However, ethnographic accounts and even cultural scholarship will admit that this distinction is false or at best incomplete at representing actual fan coalitions. As Annette Hill notes, 'the terms of smart fans and marks do not reflect the actual experiences of professional wrestlers and audiences'.⁵ Rather, these terms become shorthand used within these communities to help better distinguish coalitions and taste culture which, in turn, reinforce cultural power and capital.

The delegitimized standing of professional wrestling is well documented, as its perception in mainstream culture as low-class and unintelligent carry with it the larger cultural ideas of lower-class white identities or 'white trash'. As McBride and Bird note, 'wrestling, and by extension, its fandom, is one of the most denigrated forms of popular culture'.⁶ It is precisely with this notion that smart fans hope to engage in order to step 'above' the mark fans - those dupes who are worthy of social scorn. Of course, these distinctions are culturally constructed and not always reflective of reality. As Sam Ford notes, 'despite the classic stereotype, this is a fan base who knows that pro wrestling isn't legitimate sport but show up to the arena to play their part in the role of "sports fans".'⁷ Ford here acknowledges wrestling fandom as a performance like any other, but one that goes beyond to actually impact live shows.

The idea of wrestling fans' role in the performance falls in line with the active labor of wrestling fans Annette Hill notes when she claims that 'the labour of fans and anti-fans is a sign of passionate engagement, where audience members legitimate their role as more than smart fans or marks; they are instead part of a collective cultural performance'.⁸ The

cultural performance by fans like smarks includes pushing back against the chosen reading of the narrative as intended by those producing the show, but the purpose is not meant so much to destabilize the text but to reinforce the fan's power in the equation. This becomes particularly evident in the live space of the arena, which I address following a look at the digital presence of online smarks.

Smarks have existed for as long as the business has, though their numbers have seemingly grown with the combined impact of networked communities, increased insider knowledge proliferation through the Internet, and an aging fan base following in the wake of the late 1980s-90s wrestling boom. While the first two of these reasons will be discussed in greater detail as key sites of engagement for smarks, I will comment briefly on the third point here as a point of historical context. Wrestling went from a local/regional entity to a global mass media enterprise starting in the late 1980s with the rise of Hulk Hogan and the Rock 'N' Wrestling Connection that featured popular music stars, athletes, and celebrities like Cyndi Lauper and Mr. T appearing on wrestling programming, helping thrust it further into the mainstream. With a small decline in the early 1990s, wrestling grew back into prominence in the mid to late 1990s with the birth of the Attitude Era, a new direction in wrestling programming that saw WWE⁹ competing directly with Ted Turner-owned competitor World Championship Wrestling (WCW). Both promotions aired flagship programming head-to-head Monday night during the same time slot in what is known in the industry as the Monday Night Wars. The direct competition raised both organizations to increased public visibility and ratings, though WWE would eventually win with its purchase of the WCW brand and library in 2001. The Attitude Era and Monday Night Wars were known for their extreme violence, sexual content, and overall shocking programming, as the direct competition brought out the most salacious of stories in order to grab the eyes and wallets of wrestling fans (primarily the highly sought after young male demographic). Since WWE gained a virtual monopoly, ratings gradually declined. This led to a shift in programming in the early 2010s towards a TV-PG rating¹⁰ and an increased push to attract a younger, family-friendly audience. These changes were also in part due to the company needing to find new ways to increase their value in the eyes of stockholders. WWE's shift in programming philosophy is key to understanding the bifurcated audience this article addresses.

While this article addresses the phenomenon of smarks and their fan activity as counter to other fans of a single product, it is worth clarifying that like any audience, smarks exist as part of a spectrum of wrestling audiences and not as a simple binary (as the 'Cena' chants might attest to). Smarks as a term has also shifted in its use, as it can refer to anyone with insider knowledge of the wrestling industry to those that are more vocal and critical in their engagement. Smark has connotations beyond this definition. The user-generated Urban Dictionary provides definitions that include a 'sports entertainment fan who is hardly ever satisfied', who 'tend[s] to be extremely negative on what the majority seem to favor', and 'usually acts in an arrogant manner towards other fans'.¹¹ As these definition attest, the vision of smark is an audience member who seems overly cynical, critical, and pretentious

towards the wrestling product and other fans. These are the smarks that are the focus of this article, the ones whose fandom is based in what I call a ‘kynical engagement’ with the text.

My intervention into this literature on wrestling fandom and particularly the notion of coalitional wrestling fandom is twofold. First, I seek to better examine this ‘third group’ of the smark as a cross-section between the more discussed smart fans and marks. Doing so will not only provide better context into the understanding of type of fandom but help us better understand the loose distinctions between the other groups. Indeed it is the interaction between these groups that truly defines what is considered a ‘toxic fan practice,’ as toxicity as discussed in this article in a perception from those outside the smark designation towards those actions. In essence, this article clarifies the conversation around wrestling fandom by providing more nuance to these classifications. Second, this examination into smarks will allow us to better understand the cultural and social motivations behind such fan activities. Ultimately, I argue that the creation, identification, and debate around wrestling fan groupings is a form of fan self-reflection on the cultural status of professional wrestling and its fandom more broadly. Because professional wrestling is a particularly denigrated cultural object, it makes sense for a fan to be motivated to legitimize their fan object as well as their particular association and activity alongside it while still not fully embracing unconditionally. This is precisely where kynicism enters, as it allows the fan to enjoy their text, display their knowledge in the hopes of legitimizing their fandom, and still retain a particular distance that does not fully embrace a denigrated form.

While it would be easy to simply dismiss smarks as cynics with a grudge, distinguishing between cynicism and what Peter Sloterdijk calls kynicism can provide a more nuanced understanding of smark fan engagement. Drawing upon ancient conceptions of cynicism, Sloterdijk defines cynicism as an engagement and attitude of cheekiness. The cheekiness of kynicism acts as a reply and subversion of hegemonic idealism. As Sloterdijk puts it, ‘It does not speak against idealism, it lives against it’.¹² This relation to dominant power structures is crucial for kynicism, as actions of an individual go beyond the private and into a ‘way of presenting himself [or any individual], as well as a form of argumentation’, acting within the public sphere to overcome idealism and hegemony.¹³

Žižek continues the discussion of kynicism and cynicism’s relationships to ideology, claiming, ‘Kynicism represents the popular, plebian rejection of official culture by means of irony and sarcasm’.¹⁴ This is exactly the type of activity we see from smarks: utilizing tools of irony and sarcasm to display a kynicistic response to their beloved wrestling product and the official culture it presents. Of course this display of irony and sarcasm can also be considered particularly toxic form of participation in a text due to distancing itself from the original text as well as drawing distinctions amongst groups based on intelligence and class. Kynicism is active, political, and certainly cheeky, and this is why the activity of smarks is worth investigating.

Fandom: Performance, Identity, and Kynicism

In the introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Stuart Hall asks ‘Who Needs Identity?’¹⁵ Bringing in conceptions of process, play, postmodernism, and performance, Hall’s question responds to criticisms of identity as an observable phenomenon due to its status as constantly in negotiation. If identity cannot be reduced or pinned down, why bother? For Hall, this acknowledgement of the ‘endlessly performative self’ and its status as ‘increasingly fragmented and fractured’ is precisely the reason one still needs to study identity, though in light of these post-modern notions.¹⁶ I aim to study smarks by examining the performative and identity-forming elements of a cynical engagement with a media text.

When considering the performativity of an audience, I refer most directly to Abercrombie and Longhurst’s proposed Spectacle/Performance Paradigm (SPP).¹⁷ Describing a shift in the way audiences are conceived and researched, Abercrombie and Longhurst traced a trajectory from Behavioral (BP) and Incorporation/Resistance (IRP) Paradigms that favored, respectively, stimuli effects on individuals and textual encoding/decoding of ideological messages.¹⁸ SPP looks at mediascapes more broadly by ‘foregrounding the notion of identity’ and the ‘construction of the person’.¹⁹ Due to increased notions of spectacle and narcissism as well as media saturation, Abercrombie and Longhurst see everyday life as part of a performance of identity through and in relation to one’s media. It is through this paradigm that I wish to examine smarks, as they perform through direct participation with live shows and perform identity through their discussions in Internet spaces.

SPP falls well in line with other emerging conceptions of individual and group performance of identity, namely P. David Marshall’s proposed ‘persona studies’. Persona studies is a response to the ‘moving from a *representational* media and cultural regime to a *presentational* media and cultural regime’, where the media user is not just experiencing a text but crafting a persona in relation to it.²⁰ In a similar way to Abercrombie and Longhurst, Marshall sees this shift as a function of spectacle and narcissism as well as rises in individualized labor, social networking, and affect clusters. While professional wrestlers are known for crafting elaborate personae, smarks show that fans themselves are highly invested in their own personae and identities.

Smarks often appropriate wrestling content by chanting against expected narrative norms or exposing backstage production information at live events. These activities can most readily be described as textual poaching, where the given media text serves as a source for new creations. Henry Jenkins notes, ‘fans’ response [to media texts] typically involves not simply fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism’.²¹ This certainly seems prevalent in the actions of smarks. Jenkins explains that fans ‘often [...] respond with hostility and anger against those who have the power to ‘retool’ their narratives into something radically different from that which the audience desires’.²² The cynical response comes from resentment over the product and an ideal notion of ‘what it could be’. One cannot discount the importance of nostalgia here. The older age of many smarks means not just increased knowledge of the product, but increased memories of

'better days'. For this reason, among others, smarks poach the material presented before them as a sign of active protest.

I want to complicate this matter further, as I believe smarks are acting out of much more than dissatisfaction with the product before them. Indeed, smarks exhibit a deeper anxiety over their identity as not just fans, but fans of *wrestling*, an often derided and mocked form of media and spectacle rife with cultural and class connotations. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, taste is a matter of social classification: 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'.²³ Lower or coarse entertainments are seen as delegitimizing as a form of social function, and professional wrestling certainly fits the bill as a perceived 'lower class' entertainment. Michael Newman and Elana Levine discuss the way 'legitimation is a discursive formation made up of a multitude of expressions'.²⁴ Smarks participate in this discursive formation with the express desire to legitimate their fandom while at the same time seemingly emphasizing and publicly acknowledging its flaws. In this sense, smarks are performing both legitimizing and delegitimizing work, which is why cynical, ironic engagement is their mode of activity.

This is certainly related to the way Joli Jensen critiques the common conception of the fan as one of psychological pathology that 'supports and justifies elite and disrespectful beliefs'.²⁵ Going beyond Bordieu's conceptions of taste distinction as a function of social hierarchy, Jensen sees these distinctions as even more personally and emotionally motivated stating, 'stigmatization of a persona or group can be seen as a way of relieving anxiety by a display of hostility or aggression'.²⁶

While professional wrestling fans can be viewed as victims of such distinctions that place their text of a lower class and a lower intellectual value, fans of the same text can also perform these acts of distinction to distinguish themselves. This article argues smarks are performing this coalitional work; by engaging cynically with their enjoyed text, smarks are performing an identity that segregates themselves from the rest of the wrestling community. The reason for such activity is because of these larger anxieties over being perceived as a wrestling fan. If wrestling fans are often understood in mainstream culture as unintelligent rubes who are too stupid to understand the staged nature of the product, smarks overcompensate by displaying their intelligence and savvy to mark themselves as 'different' from these culturally constructed rubes. This is why their activity is both celebratory of wrestling but also overly judgmental of the WWE product and often other fans.

The apparent cynicism on display from smarks can be seen as a reaction to two different impetuses. First, smarks respond to the anxieties that come from being perceived as a wrestling fan in general. The activities of smarks that will be examined in the rest of this article can all be read as a form of coalitional, territorial markings wherein smarks hope to disassociate themselves from the publicly perceived notion of the ignorant, low-class wrestling fan. In this way, smarks are simply performing their audience identity, but one that is intrinsically tied up in the perceived identity of the fandom more broadly. Yet smarks can also be seen as textual poachers, crafting new meanings from a text they love as a form

of protest or even personal enjoyment. Nostalgic and craving better quality, smarks react kynically by undermining yet still appreciating their beloved text.

Smarts are constituent with the cynic, who Timothy Bewes categorizes as ‘the typical “postmodern” character, a figure alienated both from society and from his or her own subjectivity’.²⁷ These feelings are similar to a realization of particular contingencies in life that Richard Rorty discusses, an acknowledgement of which leads to the creation of what he calls the ‘ironist’.²⁸ Cynicism, then, comes from both alienation as well as knowledge of one’s own alienation, thus leading to living a life of ironic engagement. Smarts are confronted with this tension as both subjects to their wrestling fandom and as objects to culture’s perception of wrestling fans. The knowledge of their own alienation is at the root of their apparent cynicism, but I wish to emphasize my orienting towards Sloterdijk’s kynicism as an alternative and more appropriate discussion of this engagement. Cynicism often gets confused with nihilism or passivity despite ‘the cynic’s special psychic burden [...] in his conviction that the problems that he faces are indeed amenable to intellectual solutions, while also remaining convinced that those concerned will never work together to solve their problems’.²⁹ This conception of the cynic taken from Mazella’s *The Making of Modern Cynicism* (2007) helps us understand the predicament the smart finds him- or herself in. The burden placed upon smarts is a love of a cultural product and a desire to see it succeed that is weighted down by an understanding of the near impossibility of such success ever coming. Professional wrestling will always be somewhat marginalized or at the least specialized, placed into its own category of ‘sports entertainment’. This is what makes the product both exciting and problematic for the smart, as their love of something special comes with an anxiety over other’s perceptions of that very love.

It is for this reason I return to kynicism as the best descriptor of the activities of smarts. As Sloterdijk puts it, ‘bourgeois culture, oriented toward reality, cannot help taking up the thread of the *kynical cultural revolution*’.³⁰ Kynicism is a form of revolution, an oppositional strategy to present standards and hegemonic power structures that need addressing but are seemingly out of reach. While smarts may not be arguing for capital-P Political agendas, this does not make the emotional investment in their activities and their text any less important, particularly for the individual.

The rest of this article will explore these smart activities, as well as their sites of performance. In fact, the relationship between the virtual and physical presence of the smart is crucial to understanding not only their proliferation, but also their modes of address. As referenced earlier, the rise of networked communities through the Internet is a key factor to the rise of the smart identity. For this reason I look to Mark Andrejevic’s 2008 study of online fan productivity, ‘Watching Television Without Pity’, as a model for this article’s approach to the smart.³¹ In the article Andrejevic surveyed posters on the television fan site Television Without Pity (TWP) to see the ways fan labor is produced, exchanged, and utilized. When Andrejevic notes, ‘TWP posters [...] pride themselves on their savvy’, we can see another strong through-line to this article’s look at smarts, another

Internet-influenced community where industry knowledge and savvy is crucial to their performance and productivity.³²

I say ‘Internet-influence’ in order to avoid over-determining the role of the Internet in the activity of the smark. Indeed, the opening example of dueling John Cena chants notes the importance of physical proximity and interaction with both the live wrestling shows as well as interactions with other members of the wrestling fan community. With this in mind, I share Christine Hine’s concern about the study of online fandom becoming too limiting ‘by focusing on a particular kind of bounded online context we also bound the possibilities of our theoretical development’.³³ Smarks not only exist outside Internet contexts, but perform in them as well, particularly at live events. Thus, my examination of smark activity will not only address the Internet but also the live shows as sites of fan engagement. To be sure, when one attends live or even watches on TV a wrestling program, the audience is just as performative and crucial to the show’s success as the stars in the ring. As many of these examples will show, although it doesn’t always happen, smarks can change wrestling’s textuality entirely.

Where the Smarks Dwell: Digital Engagement

Smarts live in both the virtual spaces of the Internet as well as the physical spaces surrounding a text. It is important to remember that a smark is an identity defined by its cynical engagement with the wrestling text and more broadly, the wrestling industry. In fact I argue that the true text for the wrestling smark is not so much the individual wrestling programs that occur on television, pay-per-views, and live in arenas around the country but rather the wrestling *industry* itself. The news and stories of backstage politics, booking and creative decisions, and hirings and firings become as much of a source of fan engagement as the individual programs and broadcasts themselves. This can be seen in the sites smarks frequently engage in, like dirt sheets and forums, as well as in the content and reference points of that engagement.³⁴

As I alluded to earlier, the Internet and the growth of networked communities has been a key factor to the rise of smark wrestling fandom. In their ethnographic account of smart fans, McBride and Bird claim, ‘smart fans also call themselves Internet fans’, drawing a clear link between the communication medium and the particular fan community.³⁵ The use of Internet technologies for wrestling fan activities is deeply connected to the shared identity of particular wrestling fans. As Ellen Seiter notes, ‘The denigrated status of wrestling makes Web-based fan activities ideal in some respects, since fans are always already cognizant of their lowly status. The Internet proved to be an exceptionally useful space for fan activity, given the disparaged nature of wrestling as a popular culture genre’.³⁶ While Seiter is specifically talking about the wrestling fandom of children, particularly lower class and minority children, the use of the Internet is crucial in all fan groups. Of equal importance is the relationship of wrestling fans to culture more broadly, which for these children could lead to alienation and for the adult smark fan something more cynical.

The Internet also serves as a site for distinguishing types of fandom and levels of engagement, helping craft a divide between those ‘in the know’ and those who are ignorant of industry news. Terry McNeill Saunders writes in 1998, ‘the Internet has reinforced the outsider/insider aspect of being a wrestling fan’.³⁷ Here, Saunders is speaking more generally about fans and non-fans, but this can be extended to the coalitional work being done *within* the professional wrestling fan community. Writing in the late 1990s, Saunders was seeing wrestling in its most popular heyday and the Internet it is earlier incarnations. Thus, the Internet can be seen as an even more important haven for ostracized fans today, as well as being more fragmented and individuated to allow for more diverse types of communities to form.

Since smarks, by definition, must be smart or informed about the wrestling industry, some of the primary sites for gathering this information are dirt sheets. The term comes from wrestling parlance that referenced insider newsletters and fan magazines that circulated in the early days of wrestling. Now, ‘dirt sheet’ is used to describe not only physical newsletters like *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* but also websites that report on industry news and backstage rumors and reports.³⁸ Dirt sheets frequently include news and information as well as editorials, commentary, wrestler ‘power rankings’, and match ratings. The most well-known match ratings come from journalist Dave Meltzer, whose *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* popularized the ‘star rating’ system used by many in this secondary industry to rate and critique matches across promotions. These newsletters began in the 1970s and 80s primarily as a way for people to stay further informed on regional promotions, as professional wrestling stopped getting coverage in most American newspapers after the 1960s. With the nationalization of the wrestling product in the 1980s and 90s coinciding with the rise of cable television and the ascension of WWF and WCW, dirt sheets became more focused on backstage reporting, taking a financial-industrial look at professional wrestling due to its becoming nationally prominent and easier to watch across the country. In some ways dirt sheets can be understood as an unofficial, unsanctioned form of trade press for the wrestling industry. While some physical, print dirt sheets still exist today, the vast majority have either closed shop or migrated to online-only platforms due to increased costs of printing and ease of Internet distribution.

Despite the shift to digital distribution or even just websites and blogs, the term ‘dirt sheet’ is still readily applied to online portals that provide news coverage and critical opinion of professional wrestling as both an industry and a television program. Websites like Prowrestling.net and WrestleZone.com exist as sites solely devoted to covering wrestling, while other websites have cropped up as smaller subsets of larger sports outlets like on BleacherReport.com, SBNation.com’s CageSideSeats, Deadspin, and even ESPN. Many of these sites feature similar content ranging from show previews and reviews, opinion pieces, backstage news, visitor polls, podcasts, and more. Almost all of the content is meant to be taken as a paratext to wrestling programming (like reviews and reaction pieces), but some industry news can exist on its own, reporting on individual wrestlers and members of management/creative in the way one might interact with a star text. Dirt sheets exist

primarily as news sources and forums for the sharing of ideas, but in a more one-directional journalistic mode. Other sites prove useful for more networked, open-ended discussion.

E-federations, or fantasy wrestling, have followed a similar path as dirt sheets, first existing in physical forms then transitioning into forums and finally entire sites dedicated to the practice. As the name implies, fantasy wrestling is a kind of role-playing fan activity where people create their own storylines using actual or created wrestlers. In its current Internet incarnation it is most often referred to as E-wrestling or E-feds with participants working together to craft their own shows.³⁹ This activity is similar to writing fan fiction, as E-feds sometimes involve actual characters from the current wrestling product, though many also use entirely made up wrestlers and simply use the current product as a reference point. E-federations fit into the kynicism of smarks by allowing fans to act out storylines in the way they prefer, poaching the elements they like and discarding those they do not. The fantasy of fantasy wrestling could be an envisioning of the perfect promotion that fans are not getting from the WWE. Related to E-federations is the concept of ‘armchair booking’, taken from the sports term ‘armchair quarterbacking’. Like that term, it refers to people criticizing the product and claiming how they would do it differently, though ‘armchair’ implies a pejorative tone; the person doing the criticizing is not actually doing any real creative work.

These types of activities all revolve around communication and conversation with wrestling as the common reference point. When smarks become involved, a cynical edge can emerge that emphasizes criticism and negativity towards the current product. These interactions can often take place on Internet forums or threads, like the Reddit-based forum SquaredCircle.⁴⁰ Like the rest of Reddit, SquaredCircle operates through registered⁴¹ users making posts, commenting on others’, and voting posts up or down to move their position on the page.⁴² These posts can range in content from personal anecdotes, discussions of current programming, backstage news, informal polls, commentary of historical matches, and much more. Instead of the one-way journalistic model seen through the dirt sheets, forums like SquaredCircle represent the next step, where users can interact and congregate. While all of these interactions fit into the broadly spectrum of ‘smark’ based upon the fact that and inside knowledge of the industry and basic vocabulary is expected, there are pockets of more belligerent, cynical smarks that exist in a position almost similar to ‘trolls’ in other forums.

One particular example of smark interaction worth examining is the ‘Dolphins1925’ case that emerged in 2013. As compiled and reported by *Deadspin*, a Reddit user under the name Dolphins1925 began predicting the outcomes of WWE pay-per-view events with 100% accuracy, claiming to have a source working in the organization.⁴³ The poster described him- or herself as ‘a WWE fan like everyone else’ who was motivated to reveal match results as a way of gaining the WWE’s attention so he could actually help ‘put an end to WWE insiders leaking PPV outcomes’, noting how those who do leak information frequently profit off their knowledge and hurt ‘the integrity’ of the product.⁴⁴ While I cannot attest to the legitimacy of any of Dolphin1925’s claims, the fact that s/he identifies as a fan and claims a

duty to other fans and to the product itself is telling. Dolphin1925's engagement with the text was of a decidedly political nature with a specific endgame in mind that saw, in his or her mind, a better quality product in the end. While the act of spoiling the events of the broadcasts could be seen as an entirely cynical maneuver, Dolphin1925's response to other fans' criticisms shows a more cynical nature to his or her actions.

As the Dolphin1925 case shows, features of Internet networked communities, open-ended communication, and anonymity can be powerful forces in the way fans engage not only with a particular media text and its paratexts, but also with other fans of that very text. Coalitions can spring up in defense or to attack a given opinion or situation. These passionate responses show that the actual text itself may be secondary to the actual affective levels of a particular fan. To put it another way, a fan, particularly a smark, will often be more invested or interested in these community events happening *around* the programming than in the actual programming itself. While Internet communities like this allow for communication amongst fans, it is still relatively contained and segregated from both the other fan communities and the producers of the wrestling product itself. It is at the live events where fan interactivity, particularly that of the smark, becomes more widely visible and even more engaged on a bodily, direct level.

'We Are Awesome': Smarks and Liveness

While certainly related in some aspects, it would be a disservice to simply define smarks as wrestling-specific Internet trolls. One of the key distinguishing factors is the role of smarks in live events, interacting with other smarks, other wrestling fans, and perhaps most intriguingly, with the performers and the wrestling 'text' itself. Internet criticisms and communities can become echo chambers, with fan groups shouting at each other with the shared bond of the media text acting as primarily a site of mutual engagement. With their live events, WWE thrives upon and must respond, in many ways, to the voices shouting back at them. I mean voice here in both a more figurative sense but also in a literal one, as fans chanting, cheering, and booing has an impact on the textuality of the wrestling product, sometimes changing the meaning of the text for others in the audience and viewers at home in ways the WWE may not be able to predict. In this section I will examine some of the ways smarks perform their savvy through cynical engagement of ironic chants and cheers that also seek to subvert the very product they are there to enjoy. In many ways these activities may seem to undermine the very enjoyment of the product, but this tension only reveals further the underlying anxiety felt by many smark fans as to the lowly status of the wrestling fan in culture more broadly. Indeed, if one is at a live event and wishes to distance oneself from the other fans in the midst the best way may be to act counter to the perceived 'correct' narrative.

The live performance of a professional wrestling show is deeply dialogic, as fans become not just passive viewers but active laborers in the production of what ultimately becomes the 'text' of professional wrestling. This is where Annette Hill helpfully pushes beyond more simplistic smart/mark distinctions to emphasize, 'People at live wrestling

matches are paying for the chance to spontaneously express themselves within the scripting and ritual elements of an event'.⁴⁵ And this expression is relatively free, only constrained by the manipulations of the performers putting on the show and any mediated technology to shift audience engagement (like the placement of cameras and microphones, editing and shot composition, lighting, etc.). Hill calls his labor 'passion work', and the importance is not only in the fact that it is labor deeply indebted to affective relations but that the public performance of that work becomes a performance about power relations.⁴⁶ Indeed, 'crowds at wrestling events are crucial in shaping an emotional structure to the spectacle of live matches'.⁴⁷

Yet in the examples that follow, we can see this action going beyond simply retuning the emotional resonances of a particular live performance into something much broader and ultimately more cultural. The power wrestling audiences and fans are exerted are not just in terms of influencing the narrative of the show and critiquing the company line – though that motivation is still strong. Pushing further, we can see this as exerting power against a much larger mainstream culture that often sees professional wrestling and its fandom as inherently lesser-than, indicative of lower-class offerings and thus not worthy of legitimate adoration and engagement.

As opposed to the relative anonymity of an Internet forum/website, live events are attended in person with physical proximity. Notions of body, voice, and physiological stimulation suddenly come into play in ways that are not accessible on the Internet. It is important, then, to remember that fans exist across these virtual and physical places. True, many fans may only watch on television and/or interact through the web with other fans having never gone to a live event. Yet even fans watching at home often congregate for group viewing, whether in a shared physical space or virtually through Twitter and other social media conversations. Bars and restaurants frequently offer WWE pay-per-views on their televisions for people to congregate and watch. These sites, similar to the live event, include more direct interaction with other wrestling fans and thus stand as a site of coalitional performance and distinction, people taking sides on matches and storylines. The actual live event in the arena, on the other hand, provides the unique opportunity for the audience to talk not just to each other, but to the text itself: the characters, the matches, and the storylines are viewed through the lens of the live audience's engagement.

The most obvious example of crowd interaction is simply cheering and booing with no specific words (as with chanting, which I will discuss next). Most wrestling storylines feature clear-cut heroes and villains, or 'faces' and 'heels', that mostly confront one another in matches at various events. Like any serialized narrative, motivations and storylines change, new characters are introduced, characters change, and new relationships are formed and broken. What makes the WWE particularly unique is the way in which the audience can work with or against these trends through whom they decide to cheer for and whom they decide to boo. While there are instances where a character is neither a true face nor heel, known in industry parlance as a 'tweener', meaning in-between, most storylines are more straightforward. This is in part due to that factor of becoming broad, family-

friendly entertainment that leaves less room for subtlety. Still, audiences still have final ‘right of refusal’, and this has impacted storylines time and time again.

It is common in wrestling for a single performer to be both a face and a heel at different points in his/her career. Partially as a way of keeping characters fresh as well as a way to open up the roster for new feuds that pit two characters against each other who otherwise wouldn’t have fought due to having the same alignment, characters’ switches are still controlled by the creative unit and promoters. However, these decisions can be influenced by crowd behavior. For example, if a heel wrestler is frequently being cheered rather than booed, creative might decide to just make him a face.

Cheering for a heel or booing a face is a common action of a smark, but it can have varying motivations. The first is something more cynical, a contrarian maneuver meant primarily to establish one’s status as ‘in-the-know’. By becoming aware of the constructed, contingent nature of the good/bad guy status of the character, a smark might choose to ironically engage and take the perceived opposite action. The other factor is still somewhat cynical and motivated through knowledge but has more of a positive spin. While a particular wrestler’s ‘character’ may be a villain, the performer may be especially skilled in technique. For example, they may perform particular moves well or simply do a great job at portraying a villain. A smark, then, will cheer as a sign of respect and approval towards the performer behind the character, at once showing their savvy for both the character’s constructed nature as well as an understanding of wrestling styles and maneuvers. This happens frequently but was particularly crucial to the eventual ‘face turn’ of Dolph Ziggler, a wrestler who was a heel for several years after his introduction in 2008.⁴⁸ It was not until 2013 that he turned face, a move that followed months of a growing fan base cheering for him despite him playing a villain character. An exceptionally talented in-ring performer, Ziggler is known for his ability to ‘sell’ and ‘take bumps’, and audiences eventually grew to love how well he could get defeated by the conquering heroes.⁴⁹ This led to more cheers, which led to an eventual moral realignment.

Just as smarks themselves exist on a spectrum, so do their actions. Cheering and booing alternatively to what the storyline dictates can have multiple motivations, yet all rely on an insider knowledge of the wrestling industry or at the least an awareness of its contingently staged nature. Like the Internet forums and reviews, cheering and booing as one sees fit allow a fan to feel smarter than the product might perceive them to be. Indeed, this desire to express savvy, particularly in front of a live and television audience, can be as much about personal identity and anxiety as it is about the product as a whole. The example above shows how while there are individual reasons for such action, there are also ideological and creative ones, as cheering and booing ‘against story’ can be seen as a political action to express dislike. This is especially true with more specific chants.

Chants, like cheering and booing, are a way to show support for a particular character or a performer, either through generic chants of approval or disapproval or more specific chants specified to particular characters. Generic chants like ‘This is awesome’, ‘Boring’, and ‘You can’t wrestle’ can be deployed towards anybody as a sort of feedback

loop for the performers as well as for creative who are booking the storylines. Like booing and cheering, promoters and performers can direct chanting through attaching chants to particular performers or even just telling the audience to chant, yet the final decision comes down to the fans themselves. The audience must give the voice, and that freedom can allow smarks to actively go against form in another cynical, ironic active engagement.

One example of this type of engagement is showing an ironic lack of engagement, as in chanting ‘Boring’ or something entirely unrelated to the narrative or match happening before them. This was certainly true of a particularly rowdy crowd on the *Monday Night Raw* following *WrestleMania* on April 8, 2013. *WrestleMania* and post-*WrestleMania* crowds often have a higher percentage of smarks than a normal crowd might. This is due to an increased amount of older, international, and more die-hard fans traveling great distances to WWE’s biggest event of the year (in addition to the staggeringly higher costs of WWE’s largest spectacle). While people from the local area attend most shows, *WrestleMania* is big enough to draw in people from around the world, as evidenced by the increased *WrestleMania* weekend activities that WWE puts on similar to the Super Bowl experience weekends that line up with that event. These people are thus more knowledgeable and critical of the product (though obviously still fans for such an investment), and this leads to more smark activities like the chants heard on this particular broadcast.

During a match between Randy Orton and Sheamus, two faces that some smarks have criticized for being bland, the crowd chanted mercilessly for practically anything and anyone but the two men in the match. There were soccer-style ‘Ole’ chants (further emphasizing the international makeup of this particular crowd). They chanted for wrestlers not involved in the story like Dolph Ziggler and even chants for wrestlers not currently employed by the company like Rob Van Dam. They chanted for the now defunct ECW, a wrestling promotion that went bankrupt in 2001.⁵⁰ They canted for announcers JBL, Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, and even the referee Mike Chioda. It is important to note that referees are rarely referred to by name on broadcasts, so the fact that a large portion of the crowd not only knew his name by looking at him but decided to chant it together is remarkable and indicative of deep insider knowledge.

While this particular *Raw* crowd was an anomaly in comparison to WWE’s standard operating procedure, it does help bring to focus the activities of smarks, as this was a case where their voices were louder than others. Smarks are vocal and passionate, but they are rarely the majority, particularly at live events. Wrestler CM Punk, in an interview with Marc Maron for his *WTF* podcast, emphasized that the fans who are more emotionally, rather than intellectually, invested in the product are the ‘general audience’. He goes on to say that, ‘The smart fans, who are in on it and are super into it and they read everything on the Internet [...] that’s a small sliver of the pie’.⁵¹ While smart fans certainly attend live events, the relative number is important, and speaks to the coalitional makeup of fans within a particular arena during a given show.

This brings us back to the chant that opened this article: ‘Let’s go Cena. Cena Sucks’. WWE and other wrestling promotions are obviously aware of these chants. In many ways they serve as a direct feedback other television producers might not get. By broadcasting live (or taped within the week), WWE can respond to and play off certain chants or alternatively choose to ignore them. John Cena has become one of the most polarizing figures in the company, as he is easily the face of the industry and the most profitable, dominating merchandise sales for nearly a decade. Yet smarks, often claiming disenchantment with his stale character development, have often taken to booing him and chanting against him despite his perennial status as a hero.

John Cena acknowledged these chants during an in-ring promo in 2010 when he was *kayfabe* fired. *Kayfabe* is a wrestling term for events that are staged or scripted, meaning part of the narrative and not reality – meaning Cena was not really fired but was only part of a storyline. As part of his goodbye, Cena expressed his desire to hear the dueling chants one more time. He told the crowd, ‘I want every woman and every child to say “Let’s go Cena.” And I want every guy over the age of 18 to say “Cena Sucks”.’ This promo is notable for a number of reasons. Firstly the WWE, via John Cena’s character, is acknowledging the divisive nature of not only the character but their entire fan base as well. Cena draws the line down gender and age, a reference to his popularity with women for his good looks and children for his wholesome character traits as a virtual superhero. Older, male audience members, Cena deftly points out, are the ones who dislike him.

The example of the dueling Cena chants and the post-*WrestleMania* crowd show the importance of gender, age, and nationality to WWE fandom and the description of smarks. The ‘smart’ fan is seen as being older, usually male, and more international and urban.⁵² The lines that demarcate the casual fan with the smark fall very closely along lines of social privilege. The fact that the typical smark is an older man from urban/international locations cannot be seen as mere coincidence. The privileged nature of the smark is key to the understanding of their cynical engagement, yet if we recall Žižek’s description cynicism is meant to be a tool of the oppressed, not those in privileged positions of hegemonic power.

Thus we come to a bizarre reversal where a privileged group in terms of race, class, and gender is using tools of the oppressed to push back on a ‘hegemony’ of a company like WWE for allegedly catering to another demographic. In this case that alternative demographic is predominantly young and/or female, as is the case with the fans of people like John Cena. It is possible that smarks’ anxiety leading to their cynical engagement come from a fear of being infantilized or emasculated by being lumped in with a younger and more female fandom. In other words, what happens when WWE is not meant just for normative men but for ‘everyone?’ I would not argue WWE represents a particularly progressive or counterideological stance in much of its programming, and so this coalitional fandom is somewhat more localized and specific to its product and relative fan base. However, the self-perception of the disempowered white male consumer has become more powerful in recent years with events like GamerGate, boycotts of ‘diversity’ programs, and the rise of white supremacist discourse around the globe.

Conclusions

Smarks are put in a tenuous position. While socially they are, generally, part of the most privileged of social groups, they are still fans of a product that is seen culturally as made for an unintelligent lower class. This position leads to what I have called a 'kynical engagement' with professional wrestling, a tongue-in-cheek approach that resembles mockery while at the same time requiring a great deal of devotion and interest. The kynical engagement of smarks is meant as a way to distinguish themselves from a perceived inferior, pathological, and ignorant fan that is often portrayed in the media, resulting in what could be considered toxic fan practices by nature of their coalitional and divisive actions. This is why so much of smark culture, even down to the etymology of the term, revolves around a display and performance of one's intelligence, of being in-the-know, of being 'smart'.

Despite worldwide exposure, over seven hours of weekly television, and a viewership of millions, professional wrestling and professional wrestling fandom has continually been portrayed as low culture and firmly outside the mainstream. Wrestling fans are frequently portrayed as ignorant, white-trash, and incapable of reflexivity. This, like the portrayal of many fan communities, is a gross exaggeration, ignoring a deep interpretive community of wrestling fans that watch with a critical savvy that many other media properties do not possess.

The evolution of the 'smark' from savvy, knowledgeable fan to belligerent troll did not mean a true rise of a new fan type, but it reveals how the deeper anxieties and fears over being a marginalized wrestling fan arose. With deep pressures from mainstream conceptions of wrestling fandom, the community has responded not outwardly at those mainstream depictions, but instead turned inward on its own fandom, using terms like 'smark' as boundaries and labels to push off the 'bad behavior' in a form of Othering that speaks to a deeper fear of negative identification that comes with such a marginalized media text as professional wrestling. By delving deeper into the actions and motivations of this industry-savvy fan position, I hope to trouble our understanding of many toxic fan practices and question the role class and other identity markers play in its definition as such. Indeed I believe toxic fan practices are most often found coming from positions of privilege where those in the position still feel a semblance of being oppressed or overlooked.

While I have focused on a particular subset of an audience for professional wrestling, we can see many similar functions of coalitional fandom across media platforms. Like the smark, these activities are often meant as a way of distancing a subset from a perceived negative connotation that the wider cultural has taken with a beloved product and the fans of it. Coalitional fandom is tied up in notions of self-hate, with fans having to love their text but hate the connotations that come with it. This tenuous position is why many turn to kynical engagement. By being 'cheeky', fans can have their fun but keep their distance. In many cases those fan activities end up being the primary way the group engages with the text. Like the smarks chanting about something completely unrelated to the match going on in the ring, some fans will make their own fun. What cannot be forgotten, however, is the role power and privilege play in one's ability to engage in these practices and how they may

become toxic to other coalitions within the fandom. Kynicism and these types of practices are not being used to bring social groups together. On the contrary, they are often seen as toxic to a larger population of fans, increasing fragmentation and ultimately the perception of difference more broadly.

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Notes:

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 105.

² ‘Babyface’ or ‘face’ is wrestling parlance for a hero, meant to be cheered for against the villain or ‘heel.’

³ Lawrence B. McBride and S. Elizabeth Bird, ‘From Smart Fan to Backyard Wrestler: Performance, Context, and Aesthetic Violence,’ in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, eds. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 169.

⁴ McBride and Bird, 2007, David Beard and John Heppen, ‘The Dynamics of Identity in the Communities of Local Professional Wrestling,’ in *Sports Fans, Identity, and Socialization*, eds. Adam C. Earnhardt, Paul M. Haridakis, and Barbara S. Hugenberg. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 25-36. Sam Ford, ‘Storytelling Lessons from World Wrestling Entertainment,’ *Harvard Business Review*, February 4, 2014.

⁵ Annette Hill, ‘Spectacle of Excess: The Passion Work of Professional Wrestlers, Fans, and Anti-Fans,’ *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2015): 184.

⁶ McBride and Bird, 166.

⁷ Ford.

⁸ Hill, 176.

⁹ Known at the time as the World Wrestling Federation (WWF).

¹⁰ US television content rating that marks a program as inappropriate for the youngest viewers, but acceptable for older children and teens (as opposed to TV-14, the next highest rating to denote something as unsuitable for those under age 14).

¹¹ ‘Smark.’ Urban Dictionary. <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=smark>>.

¹² Sloterdijk, 104.

¹³ Sloterdijk, 105.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 29.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity?’’ in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1.

¹⁶ Hall, 1-4.

¹⁷ Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: a Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 37.

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- ¹⁸ Abercrombie and Longhurst, 37
- ¹⁹ Abercrombie and Longhurst, 37.
- ²⁰ P. David Marshall, 'Persona Studies: Mapping the Proliferation of the Public Self,' *Journalism* 0, no. 0, (2013): 8.
- ²¹ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers : Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23.
- ²² Jenkins, 24.
- ²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984), 6.
- ²⁴ Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 11.
- ²⁵ Joli Jenson, 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization,' in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis. (London: Routledge, 1992), 10.
- ²⁶ Jenson, 24.
- ²⁷ Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*. (London: Verso, 1997), 2.
- ²⁸ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.
- ²⁹ David Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 4.
- ³⁰ Sloterdijk, 106.
- ³¹ Mark Andrejevic, 'Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans,' *Television & New Media* 9, no. 1 (2008): 24.
- ³² Andrejevic, 27.
- ³³ Christine Hine, 'Towards Ethnography of Television on the Internet: A Mobile Strategy for Exploring Mundane Interpretive Activities,' *Media Culture & Society* 33, no. 4 (2011): 569.
- ³⁴ Newsletters reporting behind-the-scenes information and rumors about the wrestling business.
- ³⁵ McBride and Bird, 170.
- ³⁶ Ellen Seiter, *The Internet Playground: Children's Access, Entertainment, and Mis-education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 81.
- ³⁷ Terry McNeill Saunders, 'Play, Performance and Professional Wrestling: An Examination of a Modern Day Spectacle of Absurdity' (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998), 209.
- ³⁸ *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* began in 1979 as a monthly print version. It continues today as in both print and digital forms as well as a website.
- ³⁹ Short for 'E-federations,' referring to an electronic federation playing of the common use of the term for wrestling promotions.
- ⁴⁰ www.reddit.com/r/SquaredCircle
- ⁴¹ Free of charge
- ⁴² This is a form of site moderation, though many subreddits elect moderators to help enforce community posting rules.
- ⁴³ Barry Petchesky, 'A Redditor Has Been Leaking WWE Outcomes,' July 15, 2013, *Deadspin* <<http://deadspin.com/a-redditor-has-been-leaking-wwe-outcomes-update-wwe-r-787445495>>
- ⁴⁴ <http://www.reddit.com/r/SquaredCircle/comments/1enttu/spoilers_extreme_rules_results_inside_this_thread/ca2gthv>
- ⁴⁵ Hill, 184.
- ⁴⁶ Hill, 176.

⁴⁷ Hill, 176.

⁴⁸ ‘Turn’ is wrestling parlance for when a character changes from a face to a heel or vice versa. Sometimes combined to show which alignment the character became as in a ‘face turn’ or ‘heel turn.’

⁴⁹ ‘Sell’ means to act hurt by a maneuver. A ‘bump’ refers to taking the impact of a move.

⁵⁰ ECW’s assets would be purchased by WWE, who would use the name as part of promotions for its own product.

⁵¹ Marc Maron, ‘CM Punk,’ *WTF with Marc Maron Podcast*, November 18, 2013.

<http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode_444_-_cm_punk>

⁵² Large metropolitan areas like New York and Chicago feature similarly ‘smark-heavy’ crowds, while the South and rural areas are generally seen as having less ‘smart’ fans.