

A Response to Fiona McQuarrie's Response to Benjamin Litherland's "Notes on Kayfabe"

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Thanks for your response, Fiona!

Your points about the “external environments” that kayfabe operates is critical here, I think. Any study of professional wrestling really needs to take into consideration the broader political, media and cultural environments it operates in. As you point out, laws, regulations and political economy, and the promotional and commercial logics that emerge from these conditions, could well be the biggest influence on how *kayfabe* operates (though I leave open the possibilities that performers, promoters, and audiences have their own creative inputs).

For me, really, the development of *kayfabe* as a historical feature of pro wrestling was merely the by-product of the tensions between competing fields (sport and the stage) and the promotional and commercial logics that operated between them.

If I can get away with *another* cheap promo for my own book, I found fields and Bourdieu's wider work helpful here insofar as it allowed me to think about and map the social relationships and rivalries between different individuals, institutions and fields. The strength of Bourdieu's work on fields is always that it offers a starting point for thinking about relationships and how people themselves exist in those spaces, the written and unwritten rules that govern the space, and how that constitutes possible actions. All (sub)fields have their own internal dynamics, forms of capital, rules of the game, but also influence and are influenced by other fields. As you point out, though, fields are never entirely closed off from one another: in my work I used Simmel's intersecting social circles to think about how this plays out for individual's habitus, but the broader point that fields shape one another has always been critical. Again, you're right to suggest that the logics of one field might be completely illogical to another.

I do want to stress that how professional wrestling presents its own celebrity culture isn't any stranger or more convoluted than any other media industry, much of the discussion generated here is merely because it's tricky to pin down which lens to assess it with, and that pro wrestling has historically sat uncomfortably across the fields of theatre, sport, television, Hollywood (to which, I suppose, we might now also add politics!). I sometimes think professional wrestling scholarship has a bit of a bad habit of using kayfabe as a catchall to access much more prevalent promotional or commercial strategies that have

been developed in a variety of spaces. I think it remains critical to place it into those contexts to really evaluate how things like celebrity and promotion are operating, and how they differ exactly.

My critical point regarding Vince McMahon is that his impact on kayfabe is really more to do with the fact that he fully brought his company entirely into the logics of televised popular culture, and the commercial and branding logics that go with that. In this regard, kayfabe is arguably the least important factor of a much broader set of conversations about political-economy, the changing environment of 1980s and 1990s US television industry, pay-per-view, merchandizing and a whole range of other factors. As a narrative and promotional logic, kayfabe has adapted to these contexts rather than being a driving force. And as you indicate, Twitter is but one example of both wrestlers, promoters and audiences experimenting with the promotional logics and adapting as necessary.