

1 CHAPTER 15

3 JOHNNY RODZ AND THE JADE
5 RING: LARRY AND TED'S
7 EXCELLENT ADVENTURE IN
9 PRO WRESTLING

13 Ted M. Butryn and Larry deGaris

15
17 Ethnography has a long tradition as a research technique in which
19 academics 'get their hands dirty'. Recently, more attention has been paid
21 to the ethnographic body (Sparkes, 2002; Stoller, 1997) with particular
23 attention to physical risks in 'dangerous' field settings (Giulianotti, 1995;
25 Lee, 1995; Wolf, 1991). A growing volume of sport ethnography is following
27 the trend towards privileging embodied experience by embracing 'partici-
29 patory' ethnographic roles. Rather than follow the ethnographic tradition of
anthropologists like Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard in which researchers
are participant observers, sport ethnographers tend to follow the literary
tradition of 'participatory' sport journalism popularised by American writer
George Plimpton in which researchers are *observing participants*. In short,
sport ethnographers (Bolin, 1998; de Garis, 1999; Sands, 1999; Wacquant,
1992, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2004) are 'getting in the ring' as an ethnographic
practice, and creating experiential ethnographic work (Sands, 2002).

31 However, there are many different ways to participate in a sports
33 culture – in the case of this chapter the arena of professional wrestling –
without 'getting in the ring'. Besides actually getting in the ring and being a

1 wrestler, one can be a referee, a manager, a promoter, a ring announcer,
2 a ring crew worker, or a fan. All of these disparate roles, which are
3 characterised by their own perspective of authenticity, work together to
4 comprise a culture of professional wrestling, and each contributes to the
5 subculture, if not equally then at least substantively. For example, in a
6 response to Mazer's (1998) ethnographic study of a pro wrestling gym,
7 de Garis (1999) noted that what the researcher did not, at times, seem
8 to understand was that she was a constituent part of the wrestlers'
9 performances in and out of the ring. If the researcher did one thing, the
10 wrestlers responded to her in a particular manner, and if she responded
11 in another way, the wrestlers engaged with her differently. Thus, with
12 respect to authenticity, although the researcher is clearly 'doing the
13 research', the subculture of pro wrestling dictates that the performers
14 study the audience, whether they are researchers, factory workers, or
15 young children, as well. Our point here is that, for the domain of
16 professional wrestling, traditional notions of authenticity are problematic
17 from the outset, and ethnographic work on wrestling necessarily begins
18 with the assumption that the researcher may become part of the wrestlers'
19 own performance.

20 In this chapter, we present the experiences of two researchers who have
21 embraced multiple roles in pro wrestling. Drawing on previous work on
22 questions of access in ethnographic sport studies research, we present two
23 interweaving auto-narratives of issues related to how one 'comes to
24 subculturally know' pro wrestling. The authors' dual narratives, which at
25 times reveal radically different subject-positions on a single event, provide
26 an opportunity for the reader to engage with the authors-as-researchers as
27 they relate what Sparkes (2002: 57) calls 'confessional tales', or stories that
28 foreground 'the voice[s] and concern[s] of the researcher[s] in a way that
29 takes us behind the scenes of the 'cleaned up' methodological discussions'
30 that are often included in sport ethnographies and qualitative research in
31 sport, in general. Finally, regarding the style in which this chapter is written,
32 we point to sociologist Laurel Richardson, who wrote that post-
33 structuralism, a type of thinking that links language with subject position,
34 social organization, and power, has two important implications for
35 qualitative researchers:

36 First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular
37 positions at specific times, and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in
38 which everything is said at once to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the
39 censorious hold of 'scientific writing' on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it
40 fosters in our psyche: writing is validated as a method of knowing. (2000: 9)

1 The structure and style of this chapter, then, is a *conversation* in the third-
3 person between the authors who examine issues of access reflexively and
of ethnography: ‘accounts of the processes underlying the formation of
5 [researcher-participant] relationships are fragmented into isolated segments
within the ethnographic methods literature’. Therefore, this chapter also
7 briefly examines the perceptions of the two authors as they interact with
players in a particular pro wrestling space, and of equal importance, as they
9 interact with each other.

11 A brief introduction of the authors is useful for several reasons. First, it
will serve as a general background. More importantly, though, these brief
13 descriptions will allow the reader to better envision Larry and Ted as they
recount their embodied experiences in a space where body type, and general
15 esthetic, affect interactions. Larry is an experienced pro wrestler who began
his training in 1987, and who maintains an active to semi-active
17 performance and practice schedule. He has performed across the United
States for a variety of local and regional promotions, including perfor-
19 mances on numerous local televised events. He has also wrestled on tours
throughout Japan, Malaysia, and the Caribbean. In addition to being a
wrestler, Larry has also published several articles and book chapters on pro
21 wrestling. Mazer (1998: 62) described Larry’s appearance as ‘solid without
seeming particularly large or muscular’, meaning Larry’s years of amateur
23 wrestling are evident in his physique – but he does not take steroids, sit in a
tanning bed, or shave his body, as other wrestlers do. Like many academics
25 who write on the subject, Ted was a wrestling fan during his childhood
and adolescence. However, he had only recently rediscovered the spectacle
27 after watching a critical video on wrestling that dealt with violence and
masculinity in the popular World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Like
29 Larry, however, Ted is also an academic, with a PhD in sport and cultural
studies, and he is interested in both pro wrestling and mixed martial arts.
31 Ted’s appearance is, by most accounts more youthful than his 35 years
would indicate, and he is slightly more muscular than he was when he was a
33 college distance runner. At 5’ 8”, he is far from an imposing figure.

35 After meeting Larry at a conference in 2004, and sheepishly admitting
that he was both a critic and a hardcore fan of pro wrestling, he accepted
Larry’s invitation to come visit him in New Jersey, and enter Larry’s
37 ‘stomping grounds’. It should be noted that Ted was not explicitly visiting to
conduct research, but as a scholar doing work on the topic, he was aware
39 that he was taking the trip for both personal and professional reasons. Of
course, this raises the question of when research begins and ends in any type

1 of qualitative research, and one might argue that the genesis of this chapter
began the first time Larry and Ted crossed paths.

3 Indeed, Ted first met Larry at a sociology of sport conference the previous
fall, and he had read Larry's work on wrestling for use in his own work. On
5 the final night of the conference, Larry and Ted went to a pub near the
conference site and talked for hours about wrestling. Ted was nervous, and
7 at times he felt intimidated by Larry. Although he was a fan, Ted had also
done a critical media analysis of WWE programming. Did Larry think he
9 was treading on 'his' academic domain, or perhaps worse, exploiting for
academic gain something Larry had done as a pseudo-career? Why did
11 Ted feel as though he were walking on eggshells? Ted wondered if Larry
understood, or cared, that he did not see himself simply as a detached
13 'academic', but rather as a young scholar and fan interested in listening to a
fellow scholar and actual wrestler. This is an important dilemma, because an
15 ethnographer working in a subculture, or any qualitative researcher for that
matter, engages with two communities – the community in which he or she is
17 working (in this case wrestling), and the community of scholars doing work
on the topic. Larry, on the other hand, worked primarily in sports
19 marketing of late and has less of a professional stake in this particular
scholarly community and was more interested in just talking wrestling and
21 making friends. Either way, the relevant point is that membership in both
respective communities and the development of personal friendships
23 influence the way ethnographers behave.

As previously noted, in the growing body of sport ethnography, we see a
25 trend towards the privileging of active participation over other forms of
engagement (Sands, 2002). Although full participation in a subculture or
27 subworld (Crossett & Beal, 1997) is an important means of investigating
sport spaces and practices, we suggest that roles of fan, spectator, and
29 observer are also key in constituting sports subcultures, and that active
participation should not imbue any special authority on an ethnographer.
31 For example, early in his wrestling career, Larry was an informant in an
ethnographic book about pro wrestling (Mazer, 1998). Later, Larry wrote
33 about the experience and argued that Mazer was overly deferential about
the importance of her role in the gym, and did not fully account for the
35 possibility that she, as the researcher, was not the only one doing research
(de Garis, 1999). As Larry noted, there were many times when the wrestlers,
37 aware of Mazer's presence, engaged in a variety of 'inauthentic' actions, and
even fed the researcher misinformation. In a review of Mazer's book, Miller
39 (2001) suggested that Larry's paper constituted a 'refutation' of Mazer's
work. However, it was far less a refutation than Larry's attempt to point out

1 that, particularly in sports subcultures, audiences and fans are important
2 constituents in an overall culture. And since most sports subcultures involve
3 spectators, a researcher who is 'observing' inherently assumes the role of
4 spectator. In pro wrestling, this is especially relevant because pro wrestlers
5 have a tendency to perform both in and out of the ring.

7

9

GETTING IN

11 Bernard (2006) argues that fieldwork can involve three very different roles:
12 (1) complete participant, (2) participant observer, and (3) complete observer.
13 Choosing a role is an important first step in studying a sport subculture.
14 However, these roles can be somewhat fluid. Larry's entrée in to the pro
15 wrestling world preceded his research interests into the subculture, so he
16 started his research as a complete participant. After enrolling in a graduate
17 program in the sociology of sport, Larry became a participant observer and,
18 in some cases, took matches, went on pro wrestling tours, and developed
19 new ring personae primarily for research purposes. For instance, several
20 years ago Larry employed a 'gay gimmick' in a number of matches in which
21 he wore pink tights, and essentially mimicked the flamboyant, ballet-dancing
22 in-ring persona of the 1950s wrestler Ricki Starr. Using himself as a text, he
23 detailed how the fans responded to and interacted with him, and his
24 experience of performing the gimmick in an often homophobic environment.

25 In contrast, Ted had been mostly an observer, albeit an active one, writing
26 cultural critiques of pro wrestling narratives based on television program-
27 ming and attendance at live events. So, Ted's introduction into the pro
28 wrestling subculture, at least as an adult academic, followed a more typical
29 path for ethnographers. As Bernard suggests, 'Use personal contacts to help
30 you make your entry into a field site' (2006: 357). In this case, Ted accepted
31 Larry's invitation to visit Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn, meet trainer and
32 World Wrestling Federation Hall of Fame inductee Johnny Rodz, and 'get
33 in the ring'.

34 It should be noted that Ted really had no idea what was in store for him
35 during the trip and, at one point, in the weeks prior to the visit, Ted began
36 joking that he would have a good time as long as he did not end up 'sleeping
37 with the fishes', a reference to a phrase used by mobsters in various films.
38 That said, when Larry was there at the terminal waiting for him when he
39 arrived, Ted felt that, whatever happened that extended weekend, he was in
40 good hands.

1 Johnny's daughter had recently returned from a trip to China and had
brought back a piece of jade that Johnny was planning to craft into a ring.
3 Johnny described in minute detail how he asked his daughter to buy him
some jade, and how she actually acquired the piece. He even showed us his
5 drawings for the planned ring. Larry could see Ted squirm but there was
nothing he could do. If Ted was to gain entry, he had to do it on his own
7 terms. As Harrington (2003) notes, one of the most well outlined approaches
to gaining access in fieldwork involves the notion of role-playing, and the
9 idea that researchers intentionally play different roles, and thus have access
to different information. However, Harrington also states that researchers
11 do not have sole control over which role they assume. Rather, they have a
limited number of options, depending on the parameters the subculture and
13 its inhabitants set, and thus ethnographers must pay close attention to the
roles offered by the participants 'from the earliest moments of the study'
15 (2003: 602).

In fact, Larry had seen similar scenes several times, as overzealous
17 newcomers would enter a gym and eagerly seek entry into the world of
pro wrestling. Being overzealous is potentially dangerous in pro wrestling
19 because a novice who is overeager might attempt moves beyond his or her
capability, potentially leading to injury. For example, the early part of pro
21 wrestling training consists primarily of learning how to project yourself and
your partner. However, many novices are eager to learn moves they have
23 seen on television, such as bodyslams and suplexes. In this way, guiding
initial conversations away from wrestling is one way to orient oneself as a
25 newcomer. Specifically, does the newcomer have the patience to learn? The
process of gaining entry into the gym and, more broadly, the subculture is
27 itself a 'meta-lesson' about the importance of patience in the subculture.

There are other 'meta-lessons' that are taught indirectly through such
29 experiences. Bernard (2006: 366) suggests that participant observers should
develop skill at being a novice, 'at being someone who genuinely wants to
31 learn a new culture'. In addition to a genuine desire to learn something new,
ethnographers in physical cultures may need to consciously practice
33 deference to authority. Having read about a culture previously, many
academics enter the field with pre-conceived notions about its members, and
35 assumptions about how to best gain access. However, research participants
will often want to dictate the terms of how they tell their stories. Sometimes
37 there is a moral to the story, sometimes there is not.

With the story of the jade ring, however, Johnny is telling a personal story
39 and dictating the terms of the discussion. The jade ring is a parable that,
should one have the patience and humility to submit oneself to listening to

1 the whole story, will yield some lessons about pro wrestling. Pro wrestlers
are not one-dimensional. The story of the jade ring lets you know that
3 Johnny Rodz has a second trade in addition to his decades of experience as a
pro wrestler and that Johnny Rodz has a family, including a professionally
5 successful daughter. The story is also a lesson in patience – that if you want
to learn the ‘game’ of pro wrestling, it will take time. Finally, the story of the
7 jade ring is a lesson in methodological humility – that the researcher does
not necessarily set the terms of the discussion.

9 Larry has had similar experiences in going to different pro wrestling
territories and gyms, and meeting new people in the business. While Johnny
11 Rodz’s penchant for parables is somewhat unique, most experienced
wrestlers try to get a read on someone attempting to gain access to a
locker room. This kind of ‘sizing up’ includes both physical and personality
13 attributes. Veteran wrestlers study the way newcomers walk and move, how
they lace up their boots, how they shake hands. Further inspection is gained
15 often by ribbing (teasing ranging from gentle to harsh) and prodding.

17 Larry’s status as an insider is also interesting, because over the course of
the years he trained steadily at Gleason’s, he had become a Masters degree
19 student, a Doctoral candidate, and finally a university professor. In previous
research on gaining access to a sport club, MacPhail (2004) experienced
21 some degree of ostracism partly because of the knowledge of her status as
a researcher and academic, and partly due to the possibility that others in
23 the gym perceived her as a person who could take a spot (in various
competitions) from one of the club regulars. In contrast, however, Larry’s
25 experiences seemed to indicate that the other wrestlers saw him as a
knowledgeable veteran, rather than a threat to their advancement in the
27 business, perhaps because he had moved on to an academic career. Indeed,
as a participant in Mazer’s (1997) ethnography over a decade earlier, Larry
29 did have other wrestlers ‘shoot’ on him, rather than ‘work’ with him.

Larry, then, was at once a gatekeeper and a temporary outsider who, in
31 short order, could gain insider status almost immediately, not only because
of the shared history between Rodz and himself, but also, importantly,
33 because of his still formidable skills in the ring, both as a wrestler and as
a *de facto* coach. Ted saw this firsthand, as the younger and/or less
35 experienced performers clearly deferred to Larry on several occasions, while
Larry vocally coached them through whatever set of maneuvers they were
37 executing. Thus, an important part of the process of gaining access is
determining the subculture’s axes of prestige. Although space precludes a
39 more nuanced discussion of this concept, the relevant point is the primacy of
ring skill, whether as a technical worker, shooter, or performer, relative to

1 outside pursuits. In one domain – academia – Larry and Ted occupied a
2 similar position within an established hierarchy, but in Gleason's, the
3 cultural capital of being a seasoned, and still well-skilled, ring veteran and
4 product of the gym were of far greater value in terms of access to the space,
5 and interest on the part of other wrestlers.

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9
REACTIVITY AND THE CASE OF 'THE FIREMAN'

10 In relation to those being studied, Fabian (1990a: 4) argues that 'ethnography
11 is essentially, not incidentally, communicative or dialogical; conversation, not
12 observation, should be the key to conceptualizing ethnographic knowledge
13 production'. Bernard suggests that 'reactivity' – people changing their
14 behavior when they know they are being studied – is a problem reduced by
15 extended periods of participant observation. Since reactivity can never be
16 completely eliminated (in the case of Ted's visit it was impossible to eliminate
17 because it was his initial entrance into the space) there are circumstances in
18 which it might be embraced in order to conduct subcultural experiments.
19 In other words, from our perspective, even a brief field visit involves a
20 dialogical dance between the researcher and participant. In the next section,
21 we describe an example of what, in pro wrestling slang, would be called a
22 '3-way dance', in which Larry and Ted, who in one sense are on the same
23 'team' as researchers, interact in the Gleason's wrestling ring with Todd, a
24 wrestler known as 'The Fireman', who in another sense is on Larry's team, as
25 a fellow wrestler and insider.

26 After talking with Johnny Rodz in the office, Larry and Ted ventured to
27 the ring for an introductory workout. As a prominent cultural producer in
28 the wrestling gym, Larry's introduction of Ted into the ring afforded Ted a
29 certain amount of instant access. Somewhat humorously, one of the
30 wrestlers actually thought Ted was Larry's son despite a relatively modest
31 age difference, and the perceived familial relationship between the two
32 reminded them of their very first interaction, when Larry teased Ted that he
33 was the ultimate 'babyface'.

34 In any event, one of the current top prospects in the gym, Tim 'The
35 Fireman', came up to Larry during a break in Larry's tutoring of Ted. While
36 Larry went to get a drink of water, The Fireman began showing Ted a
37 different variation of a front roll drill that Larry had been teaching him.
38 Ted's experience, aside from feeling exhausted after a couple hours of drills
39 and little sleep, was one of excitement, and he found himself flashing back to
his first day of Pee-Wee football practice. Just as he had been as a scrawny

1 fifth grader, Ted was eager to show both Larry and The Fireman that he had
some skills, and he listened intently to both of their feedback.

3 One must keep in mind that pro wrestling is at its foundation based on the
con. Part of pro wrestling training involves being able to ‘work marks’, to
5 deceive people into believing that you really are, for example, Russian rather
than an Ohioan, or that you really are an extremely violent, unstable
7 individual, rather than a relatively passive person. In short, the art of
wrestling performance lies in the ability of the wrestler to prompt the
9 viewers, and in this case the college professor-as-outsider, that the emotions
being conveyed are real, or at least could be real. Ted experienced this
11 ambiguity between reality and a wrestler working an outsider during the
latter part of his Gleason’s gym workout. Larry encouraged Ted to act as a
13 referee for an ad hoc tag team match. This is a typical role for a novice
because it gives a newcomer a chance to get close to the action, and get a feel
15 for the flow of a match. In the wrestling ring, situated among four other
rings dedicated to boxing trainees, the practice sessions can feel very ‘real’
17 for several reasons. On a practical level, it is important that the wrestlers
practice not only their moves, and their holds, but also their timing, and
19 things like kicking out of attempted pins and distracting the referee during
tag matches are part of the larger knowledge base of the business. Thus,
21 although Ted was really trying to have fun, he was also nervous because he
was not part of the training session and performance of a group of wrestlers
23 who were not just there to make research contacts and have fun. Just as
Wacquant (2004, 2005) felt that his French identity shielded him from what
25 he perceived would have been negative outcomes related to his Whiteness,
Ted felt that Larry’s presence as a respected figure was his own shield
27 against what may (or may not) have been an awkward experience; Ted was
very conscious that, even though he had paid the daily gym fee of \$13, he
29 was talking ring time from others who he perceived to be ‘real’ workers.

In the course of the match, Tim ‘The Fireman’, who was working as a
31 heel, got in Ted’s face and yelled at him. Specifically, The Fireman yelled,
‘What the fuck are you doin’, ref? Come on, this is bullshit!’ Then, as Ted
33 stood wondering, for a split second, what he did wrong, The Fireman gave
Ted a strong two-handed shove. Even though The Fireman had gone out of
35 his way to teach Ted only a half hour earlier, and even though Ted, on a
cognitive level, was in on the game, he panicked. Whether it was because of
37 his somewhat meek demeanor – Larry had suggested ‘Charlie Bucket’
(the young boy in the film, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*) as a gimmick
39 because of Ted’s appearance of wide-eyed naivete – or, on another level,
because of his background as a competitive athlete, Ted interpreted The

1 Fireman's actions as 'real' aggression directed at him. From Ted's
perspective, he was about to be assaulted, and must have looked like it,
3 as The Fireman leaned forward and quietly said something like, 'It's cool,
just go along'. To Larry, Tim was inviting Ted 'in'. By working as if the
5 match were real and not just a gym workout, Tim was letting Tim in on the
game. Wrestlers on the sideline shouted instructions to Ted, 'Don't take that
7 from him. Disqualify him'. Larry did not find out until after the workout if
Ted knew that The Fireman was playing the heel with him as an act
9 bestowed on all newcomers.

As an 'insider', wrestlers learn to take everything at face value. Since it is
11 impossible to tell definitively what is authentic, what hurts, and who might
be angry, wrestlers will simply ask questions after the fact: 'That looked
13 stiff, what did it feel like;' 'Are you hot, or just working,' etc., Since the
entire business is a 'work,' wrestlers maintain a healthy sense of skepticism,
15 but also become nonchalant about situations that would make many people
uncomfortable. It did not occur to Larry that Ted was uneasy – Larry just
17 thought Ted was doing a good job with a Charlie Bucket gimmick, which he
was, because it was 'real'. In fact, numerous wrestling scholars and insiders
19 agree on one thing – many of the most successful gimmicks, including
characters such as Dwayne Johnson's 'The Rock' and Steve Williams'
21 'Stone Cold Steve Austin', involve the performer taking some aspect of their
own personality and accentuating it to a theatrical level. In Ted's case,
23 although a confident person and former Division-I athlete outside of
Gleason's, in the ring his excited yet timid demeanor did not need much
25 amplification.

27

29 **DOWN ON THE CORNER: INCREASING ACCESS** 30 **AND HINTS OF INITIAL RAPPORT**

31

After the Jade Ring initiation ceremony and the subsequent workout,
33 Johnny, Larry, and Ted left the gym around 10 p.m., and although Ted
could barely stand after eating only two energy bars all day, he was excited
35 that he was in the company of a WWE Hall of Fame members – yes, even
researchers can become awe-struck, if only for a minute or two. In fact, Ted
37 had interviewed numerous high-level athletes, including several Olympians,
and because of his love of his current subculture of choice, and his long-time
39 status as wrestling fan, it was this particular encounter that challenged
his ability to turn off the wide-eyed 'mark'. Larry asserts, though, that

1 sometimes, though not always, the best approach to gaining access in the
subculture of pro wrestling is to embrace the mark within you. Larry even
3 remembered former wrestler Hercules Hernandez saying that he was *always*
a big wrestling fan, even after he had a successful career. As Feldman,
5 Bell, & Berger (2003), drawing in part from Michael Agar's (1980) book,
The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography, argue,
7 scholars would do well to remember that, even though different roles yield
different forms and depths of access, sometimes there is more rather than
9 less room for simple honesty. In this case, Johnny Rodz even asked Ted
whether he watched wrestling, and rather than openly stating that he was a
11 long-time fan, he withheld the admiration he had not only for the spectacle,
but for the physical performances of the wrestlers.

13 The trio ended up on a street corner outside of a convenience store across
the street from Gleason's, and Larry and Johnny talked about a few road
15 stories, and how the blocks around Gleason's had become remarkably
gentrified over the years. Although Ted thought that being privy to these
17 stories meant something in terms of access, Larry noted afterwards that it
used to be fairly typical, especially after a long workout on a hot summer
19 day. As he put it, 'We'd get a six-pack, a bag of Dipsy Doodles, and shoot
the shit. Since it was a "natural setting" as opposed to Johnny sitting behind
21 a desk lecturing, it leads to both personal and professional exchanges'.

At one point, about halfway through their 40-ounce, brown-bagged beers,
23 Johnny invited Larry and Ted to his place for a 'cook-out' the following
evening. Ted remembered the experience well, as it was not only a chance to
25 talk with someone he had watched on television as a younger wrestling fan,
but it was also a sign of acceptance, at least in his eyes. Larry, however,
27 simply viewed it as Johnny's acceptance of Ted as person and new friend
because he was a cool guy. Regardless of the 'real' motivation, it was a
29 chance for Ted to continue his entrance into a friendship with Larry, and
vice versa. In fact, as rewarding as the interactions with Johnny Rodz were,
31 it was the experience with his fellow academic-as-subculture guide Larry
that proved to be most fruitful and educational.

33

35 IN THE TRENCHES AND BLOODY NOSES

37 The space of pro wrestling affords a researcher an interesting opportunity to
investigate a subculture that has its own embedded tension between the
39 'real' or 'authentic' subculture, and the business of pro wrestling, the work.
Indeed, as Ted found out when he almost inadvertently slipped into the role

1 of what Larry terms 'the sensuous ethnographer' (de Garis, 1999), the
ongoing process of gaining different types of access is intimately connected
3 to what knowledge is gained from the experience. More importantly, the
knowledge itself, on one level, is less important than the process itself. The
5 process produces the knowledge; it doesn't 'uncover it'.

Sometimes, 'inner' access obscures what is going on – such as Larry's
7 inability to read Ted's anxiety about working with The Fireman. It is not as if
there is a linear progression of continuing access that leads to a greater truth.
9 Instead, gaining access means gaining access to data, not to knowledge. So in
this sense, the process constitutes the knowledge. So, 'deeper' levels of access
11 sometimes lead to deeper levels of bias, which is understandable. It is
important to reflexively confront these biases. Roberts & Sanders (2005)
13 articulate the 'reflexive dilemmas' involved in ethnography and the tendency
overlook this important process at all stages of the ethnographic experience
15 including before, during, and after fieldwork. Moreover, they argue that as a
result of the trend to privilege personal identity and active participation
17 (especially in auto-ethnographic representations) researchers often fail to
notice important structural processes that necessarily impact knowledge
19 production whether tethered to institutional expectations of research, or to
issues of access to a subculture.

21

23

CONCLUSION

25 In his response to a special issue of *Qualitative Sociology* devoted to his
widely read ethnography, Wacquant (2005: 450) notes that although the
27 non-native researcher may never be able to overcome his or her outsider
status, his work in a lower-class boxing gym demonstrated that the
29 researcher may 'provisionally suspend or significantly attenuate many
differences' during the relationship-building process. As this chapter shows,
31 gaining and maintaining access to the subculture of pro wrestling can occur
by 'getting in the ring' and getting your nose broken, like Wacquant (2003)
33 or violently pushed to the canvass, like Ted. However, it is far more complex
than that, and the boundaries between access, gaining entry, and establish-
35 ing rapport are not always as easily distinguishable and clearly definable as
Harrington (2003) frames them to be. The process at one moment seemed to
37 Ted like a hopeless attempt at gaining access, and at another an encouraging
moment of rapport, as when Johnny actually began to lean against Ted as
39 he fell asleep while they watched boxing after the barbecue at his house. Of
course, when Larry and Ted dropped by the gym the next day to say

1 goodbye, there were no hugs, and Johnny was busy with other students,
and ... with his Jade ring.

3 As we have discussed, this is not to say that gaining access into non-
traditional subcultural spaces is simple or unproblematic. Feldman *et al.*
5 (2003) state that, along with what one might consider more obvious
mediators of one's ability to develop rapport in a new setting, such as race,
7 class, gender, and nationality, the status as a person as a 'researcher' and
'professional' are also important to account for. The authors refer to the
9 sum effects of the researcher's multiple lines of identity as 'intersectionality',
and point out that an awareness of this factor helps remind researchers that
11 the rapport-building process is complex, and never unidirectional, because
whatever one's sense of identity may be, participants and informants may
13 read the researcher as something very different (2003: 38). As Larry
reminded Ted, in subcultures such as pro wrestling that tend to have few
15 college graduates, people can become defensive regarding the perceived
intellectualisation of 'their' practice. When Larry did his ethnographic
17 research with boxers, for instance, many of the participants responded by
using pseudo-intellectual metaphors they would not have normally (such as
19 metaphors related to geometry, for instance). Finally, this chapter points to
the possibility of further work in the area of dual ethnographies, whether the
21 researchers are equal or highly divergent in their experience or status within
a given sport subculture. Although it has been common for ethnographers
23 to journey out into the field on solo endeavors, Larry and Ted's experiences
show that there is room for joint research projects that may yield rich data,
25 and rich personal bonds.

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