

Running Head: PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

The Impact of Professional Wrestling on Children's Aggressive Behavior:

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Professional wrestling has become the latest fad among children and adolescents. There is a concern among the public and school personnel, including teachers, school psychologists, and counselors, that it influences children's behavior in an aggressive manner. It is also thought that children perceive wrestling as reality instead of perceiving it as fantasy. With the majority of children and adolescents watching professional wrestling, it is important to understand how children actually perceive professional wrestling and if it promotes aggressive behavior. In addition, this literature review will identify the lack of research that has been conducted on professional wrestling and demonstrate that the majority of information on the impact of professional wrestling on children has come from articles or other forms of popular literature such as Newsweek. In these articles professionals make negative statements about professional wrestling without research to back these statements up. They are drawing from research that has been conducted on television violence, not professional wrestling. This literature review will analyze the differences between television violence and professional wrestling and

discuss the limitations of the current research on this issue. Finally it will provide suggestions for further research on the psychological impact of professional wrestling.

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Introduction

Professional wrestling is taking the world by storm. An individual can watch wrestling 4 times a week if he or she would like. The World Wrestling Federation (WWF) has four weekly television programs: RAW is WAR, Thursday Night SmackDown, Saturday Morning Jacked, and Sunday Night Heat (Bessman, 1999). Raw is War and SmackDown are watched in over 5 million households (Bessman, 1999). SmackDown is the highest rated program on the cable channel UPN and Raw is War competes with Monday Night Football. In fact, SmackDown saved UPN from going bankrupt. The television network ABC recently offered the WWF one million dollars to move Raw is War to another night so it would not take ratings away from Monday Night Football. They are afraid that the WWF is taking away too many of its viewers (Cooper, 1998).

Wrestling audiences include a wide range of individuals. Children from the ages of 2-17 years make up 25% of their audience (Gabler, 1999). Males over the age of 18 make up 80% of the audience. Men are not the only ones watching wrestling. Females make up almost 25 % of the population watching wrestling (Gabler, 1999).

There are several WWF wrestlers that have written autobiographies. Mick Foley (2000) wrote the book Have A Nice Day and The Rock with help from Layden (2000) wrote The Rock Says. In their first week they both hit number one on New York Times best-seller list (Bessman, 1999). The WWF's home videos are frequently ranked number one in sports, and their action figures outsell the current craze Pokemon. The WWF has also combined forces with top music artists, such as Run DMC and Redman. They

currently released a compact disc that went Platinum in a matter of weeks (Bessman, 1999).

Professional wrestling's popularity has not come without much criticism. Professional wrestling is a \$100 million a year entertainment industry that attracts 35 million people a week, a large proportion of whom are children (Bird, 1999). In spite of the evidence that suggests television violence influences children to behave aggressively, broadcasters and scientists continue to debate the link between watching professional wrestling and the aggressive behavior of children (Bird, 1999). This is mainly due to the fact that there are limited studies on the impact of watching professional wrestling. The majority of these studies define professional wrestling as a live action cartoon where revenge, betrayal, greed, sex, and pride are woven into staged plots featuring lewd, crude, violent, elaborately costumed, steroid-enhanced giants (Bird, 1999, p. 689). Can these statements be justified by the minimal amounts of research done on professional wrestling?

A large number of studies have been done on television violence in general and its influences on children. Television violence is defined as any overt depiction of the use of physical force-or credible threat of physical force-intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings (Aidman, 1997). Television violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means (Aidman, 1997). There are two terms that one must be familiarized with before reading this review of literature. The first is the term literature. Literature refers to journals, textbooks, and other books by professionals in

fields related to psychology. The second term is articles, which refers to opinions by writers and professionals that have not conducted research to prove their statements.

In the current literature, research has been conducted on television violence, which is the source for most of the information on professional wrestling and its relationship to children. There is limited literature specifically on the effects of watching professional wrestling, but numerous articles by professionals making connections between aggressive behavior and watching professional wrestling. In a search of Psychinfo and other psychological databases, I only found three studies that actually included professional wrestling in their research on television violence. However, on other searchers, such as on EbscoHost and Wilson Web, I found eighty-nine articles in popular literature that made connections between aggressive behavior and professional wrestling. Two areas will be explained in this critical review of literature: literature on television violence and professional wrestling and secondly, articles by psychologists and other child experts about the impact of watching professional wrestling on children.

This review of literature will draw from the field of psychology, especially child development. In the area of child development, the review focuses on potential influences on children's aggressive behavior, children's perceptions of violence on television, and at what ages they are most likely to be affected by television violence. A mixture of journal articles from the social sciences and articles from common magazines, such as Newsweek, are also included in this review. The authors of these articles include professionals such as psychologists and other child professionals. It is important to include these articles from popular literature because they contain the majority of information on the impact of professional wrestling on children's behavior.

There have only been a few studies done on the impact of professional wrestling and only one that actually included children in their research. This study by O' Sullivan (1999) found that children who view professional wrestling are more likely to engage in violent behaviors after viewing professional wrestling. In addition, this study indicated that children who are exposed to violent acts will tend to solve conflicts through the use of aggression (O'Sullivan, 1999). Finally, it is also believed that children do not realize that professional wrestling is acting. They do not understand that the wrestlers are using prompts to make themselves bleed (O'Sullivan, 1999).

John Murray, a professor of family studies and human services at Kansas State University, has hypothesized that preteens should not watch professional wrestling because they're struggling to establish their identities and can become fixated on hypermasculine role models (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 1999). He also states that if children watch too much wrestling they may become aggressive or even fearful because they might see the world as a mean or dangerous place (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 1999). Other psychologists suggest that wrestling promotes aggression in children and suggest that disputes should be settled by fighting rather than other methods (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 2000). Yet, as Rosellini (1999), author of "Lords of the Ring" and reporter for U.S. News and World Report stated, "The extent to which wrestling's violence and vulgarity affect society—and especially young people—is far from clear" (p. 54). Vince McMahon owner of the WWF stated, "You don't see guns, murder, knives," he says. "We resolve our differences physically, in a wrestling ring. How bad is it compared to a Schwarzenegger or Stallone movie?" (Rosellini, 1999 p. 56).

Which side of this controversy is right? Do children perceive professional wrestling as reality or fantasy? Does their perception of professional wrestling influence their behavior? Does watching professional wrestling with a parent influence children the same way as not watching it with an adult figure? These are all questions that must be addressed so that psychologists, parents, and school personnel can have a better understanding of whether professional wrestling influences children in a negative way. It is important for school professionals working with children to know about the impact of professional wrestling on children, children's perceptions of wrestling and whether professional wrestling increases aggressive behavior. With this information, attention may be focused on preventative measures for children who watch professional wrestling and to other sources that may be influencing children in an aggressive manner.

Definitions

WWF refers to the World Wrestling Federation, which is the most popular professional wrestling corporation.

WCW refers to World Championship Wrestling, which is the second most popular professional wrestling corporation.

Lords of The Ring is an article in the magazine U.S. News and World Report on professional Wrestling. This article contained many psychologists or other child professionals opinions on the impact of professional wrestling.

SmackDown is a Thursday night show at 7:00 P.M., which is owned by WWF (2 hour show)

Raw is War is a Monday night show at 8:00 P.M., which is owned by WWF (2 hour show)

In the next chapter, a review of literature and articles relating to the impact television violence and professional wrestling has on children will be conducted. This literature review will focus on six areas of research: amount of television children watch, effects of television violence, desensitization to violence, identifying with fictional characters, reality vs fantasy, and parental influences. Each section will first discuss the literature on television violence and then specifically describe the literature and articles on professional wrestling.

Review of Literature

Introduction

This review of literature will elaborate on how violence on television is perceived by children and the influence such violence has on children's behavior. Topics to be covered include when and how much violence children are watching and the roles parents have while watching professional wrestling. The ages of groups that watch professional wrestling and at what age's children are able to differentiate between fantasy and reality on television will also be discussed.

The majority of Americans agree that entertainment television is far too violent, that it is harmful to society, and that we as a society have become desensitized to violence (Atkin, 1983). Holmstrom (1998) goes beyond Atkin's statement on society's desensitization to violence by adding that professional wrestling is a sign of changing times. Today's society is more confrontational and disrespectful than it has ever been. Children have different values, professional wrestling has become more violent, and society is turning its head to these changes. These changes provide three good reasons to conduct research on professional wrestling, especially with children.

Amount of Television Children Watch

Americans have dramatically increased the amount of time spent watching television over the past 45 years. At the same time, the content of the shows being watched also has changed. In 1949, a mere 2% of American homes had television sets. This increased to 64% by 1955, 93% by the mid-60s, and 98% today (Murray, 1995).

The American Psychological Association estimates that children and adolescents spend 22-28 hours per week watching television (Smith, 1993). They are engaged in watching television more than any other activity except sleeping. By the time our

children reach the age of 70, they will have spent 7-10 years watching television. A Psychological Assessment Task force found that by the time a child leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed about 8,000 murders and more than 10,000 other assorted acts of violence on television (Smith, 1993).

It is possible for a child to watch up to ten hours of professional wrestling per week if a child watched the two major wrestling organizations (WWF, WCW). There are other professional wrestling organizations that are starting to become more popular and are making their way onto television. For instance, Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW) is now televised on the cable channel TNN. If this organization is included, a child could watch up to twenty hours of wrestling per week. A child can find professional wrestling on numerous cable channels such as: USA, TBS, TNT, TNN, and UPN. If this is not enough wrestling, a child can order up to three pay per view events per month. All he or she has to do is know how to punch in the numbers for the program they are about to order, a task most children are able to do. Each pay per view event is around three hours in length.

Effects of Television Violence

Effects of television content on children's behavior have been extensively investigated in the last two decades (Huston, Donnerstien, Fairchild, Feshbach, Katz, Murray, Rubenstein, Wilcox, & Zuckerman, 1992). The majority of research has found that exposure to television violence correlates with aggression and antisocial behaviors in many children. Social science research conducted over the past 40 years supports the conclusion that viewing violent television programming has negative consequences for children (Primavera & Herron, 1996).

The majority of research conducted to study the effects of television violence has been carried out in laboratory settings. The first ever study on television violence was conducted by Albert Bandura in 1963. He found that children who were exposed to a film depicting aggressive behavior being rewarded, later demonstrated violent behavior towards a Bobo doll and more aggression in children than children who were shown films in which the aggressive behavior was punished or in which the behavior was nonaggressive (Primavera & Herron, 1996). The majority of research since Bandura's first study has supported the premise that television violence and aggressive behavior in children are highly correlated (Huesmann, 1988).

The finding most commonly found in the research literature is that media violence can encourage children to learn aggressive behavior and attitudes (Aidman, 1997). The imitation of aggressive behavior appears to increase when the perpetrator is attractive, the violence is justified, weapons are present, the violence is graphic or extensive, the violence is realistic, the violence is rewarded, or the violence is presented in a humorous fashion (Aidman, 1997). Conversely, the learning of aggression is inhibited by portrayals that show that violence is unjustified, show perpetrators of violence punished, or show the painful results of violence (Aidman, 1997).

In a study done at Pennsylvania State University, (Gerber, 1999) about 100 preschool children were observed both before and after watching television; some watched cartoons that had many aggressive and violent acts; others watched shows that didn't have any kind of violence. The researchers noticed significant differences between the kids who watched the violent shows and those who watched nonviolent ones.

Children who watched the violent shows, even cartoons that portrayed violence, were more likely to disobey class rules and argue with classmates.

The overall pattern of research findings, indicate a positive association between television violence and aggressive behavior. Smith (1993) has stated that "the preponderance of evidence from more than 3,000 research studies over two decades shows that the violence portrayed on television influences the attitudes and behavior of children who watch it" (pg. 1). Signorielli (1991) also found that most of the scientific evidence reveals a relationship between television and aggressive behavior. While few would say that there is absolute proof that watching television causes aggressive behavior, the overall cumulative weight of all the studies gives credence to the position that they are related.

While there have been numerous studies about television violence and aggressive behavior in children very little research exists on the effects of professional wrestling on children's behavior. One study conducted O' Sullivan (1999) found that children imitate aggressive behaviors seen on professional wrestling programs immediately after viewing them. Children in her study (N=16) felt physically stronger after viewing professional wrestling and felt like they wanted to wrestle someone. O'Sullivan (1999) argues that young children do not realize what they view on television is acting. Children also do not understand that the actions are scripted and the actors are using prompts to make themselves bleed.

Desensitization to Violence

Desensitization to violence refers to an increased tolerance of violence. It is predicted from exposure to extensive, graphic or humorous portrayals of violence and is

of particular concern as a long-term effect for heavy viewers of violent content (Aidman 1997). Some research has found that children may become immune to violence on television and gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems (Smith, 1993). Some of the most violent programs are those children's animated series in which violence is routinely intended to be funny, and realistic consequences of violence are not shown (Krieg, 1995).

Television violence appears to have a significant influence on our children and, as a result, on our society as a whole through the desensitization of children to the realities of violence and the instilling of a belief that "might makes right" (Krieg, 1995).

Television violence is perceived as an acceptable means of resolving conflict by many children which influences them to behave aggressively (Krieg, 1995). Krieg (1995) also states that whenever a subject perceives violent acts perceived on television as justified, the probability increases that the subject will act aggressively. An attitude of acceptance toward aggression and violence can increase the likelihood of aggression and violence being performed. Long term television exposure may also have a desensitizing effect, in which inhibitory fears of physically dangerous behaviors may be diminished with repeated exposure to fearless models (Potts, Doppler, Hernandez, 1994).

According to a study by Gerber (1999), children may become desensitized to violent television programs because these programs present violence as "the cool thing to do." He argues that programs like professional wrestling do not give accurate messages about violent behaviors. Children identify with these characters because their actions are glorified. He further suggests that negative consequences of violent behaviors in real life situations are not portrayed on television. A child will think that he or she is immortal

and imitate the behaviors he or she has seen on television. These findings infer that once they view enough violent behaviors children will be more likely to strike out at playmates, argue, disobey authority, and less willing to wait for things (Gerber, 1999).

Some child experts see wrestling's implicit values reflecting some of society's distorted values. "Our culture has become one of confrontation and disrespect," says Michael Brody, a child psychiatrist at the Media Committee of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Washington. He writes that professional wrestling fits with what has happened in our culture. It's entertainment today (Holmstrom, 1998, p. 13).

Current events only confuse the issue on the impact professional wrestling has on children. In the aftermath of the tragic shootings in Littleton, Colo., many Americans are debating whether the United States has a special culture of violence in which the link between social ills and televised brutality like professional wrestling seems all too obvious. The fact that the two Columbine teens who instigated the tragic shooting watched professional wrestling does not give scientific data that there is a cause between professional wrestling and violence. In fact, there is surprisingly little scientific research to connect professional wrestling and incidences like the one at Columbine (Rosellini, 1999, p. 54).

Identifying With Fictional Characters

Within the existing literature, the evidence is ambiguous on the role that identification plays in observational learning (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). Although the weight of evidence from the research indicates that viewers are more likely to imitate white male actors as heroic more than any other actors (Huesmann & Eron, 1986).

According to Josephson (1995), children may also identify with certain characters or victims that are involved in violent behavior on television programs. They may identify with aggressive heroes and engage in aggressive fantasies more than they identify with real people. Josephson (1995) found that children like these unrealistic characters because they are powerful, brave, and strong, despite the fact that these characters display their strength and power in violent ways.

Children who watch large doses of television violence may observe characters behaving aggressively in order to solve interpersonal problems. A study by Huesmann and Eron (1986) indicated that children may see these violent acts regularly and identify with the aggressive characters. They found that children may encode in memory the aggressive solutions they observe. Also, they note that if children engage in aggressive behaviors and are rewarded with positive outcomes, then these aggressive behaviors are more likely to occur in the future.

Although few researchers have zeroed in on televised wrestling, a 1994 Israeli study of third-through sixth-graders showed a correlation between watching professional wrestling and aggressive behavior (Rosellini, 1999). Once the WWF started airing in Israel in the early 1990s, violent behavior in the form of mock wrestling matches that often escalated to fighting and injuries increased "to a degree never known before." When WWF airtime was cut back, the violence among schoolchildren diminished sharply (Rosellini, 1999). The researchers attribute this rise in children's aggression to the identification of professional wrestlers. It is believed that these children attached to the wrestlers and made them their role models.

Reality vs Fantasy

Jaglom and Gardner (1981) found that younger children have difficulty understanding the difference between reality and fantasy, especially between the ages of 2 and 5. Children aged 2 and 3 showed little understanding of the boundary between television and the immediate perceptual environment (Jaglom & Gardner, 1981). For example, when an egg broke on television, they tried to clean it up. When these children were asked whether a bowl of popcorn shown on television would spill if the television were turned upside down, many 3-year-olds said yes. These children appeared to believe that televised objects are literally inside the television set (Wright, Huston, Reitz, & Piemyat, 1994).

In a study by Wright et al (1994) on Children's Perceptions of Television Reality, results indicated that children as young as 4 have more refined concepts of television reality than most prior research in the field would lead one to believe. Children around the age of 4 seem to understand the difference between television and the real world due to the fact that they do not have enough life experiences. Due to this fact children tend to over-generalized the notion that nothing on television is real (Wright et al, 1994). However, they may not have a true understanding of the differences. Their limited amount of life experiences does not provide them with enough knowledge about television. If they have not seen a character on a television program before or cannot touch an object, such as objects on television, they perceive it as being fake. Once children have a basic understanding of the representation nature of televised images, they begin to differentiate between fantasy and reality like an adult differentiates between the two (Wright, Huston, Reitz, Piemyat, 1994).

Wright et al. (1994) found that 5 year olds have a perception that television is fictional and begin to recognize some connections between reality and fantasy. Children realize that the local news actually happened around the community and that movies are make-believe. As noted by Wright et al (1994) 5-year-olds clearly understood the unreality of cartoons. When children ages 5-11 were asked how they know whether television programs are real or fictional, they typically named content features that were physically impossible, such as people flying or one man destroying a whole army by himself (Wright, Huston, Reitz, Piemyat, 1994). Most children in this age span were also aware that their favorite programs were not based on real life and could make clear distinctions between real and fictional stimuli.

Wright et al. (1994) argues that young children have an over-generalized or default belief that television is fiction or that they learn cues for fiction earlier than those for factual content. They also found that children between the ages of 5 and 7 are more skilled at understanding the separation of fictional roles on television from real-life roles of the actors and more aware of the fact that television fiction is scripted and rehearsed than previously believed. However one study found that these children appear less able to differentiate between reality and fantasy when characters on television actually exist in the real world, such as police officers. When a child views violent movies involving police officers shooting hundreds and hundreds of people, she or he may perceive the show as being real (Josephson, 1995).

When turning to older children, such as children between the ages of 8 and 12, the difference among these children is that it appears they watch larger amounts of television due to the fact they can stay up later at night. These additional hours result in more hours

watching television at night when there is more violent programming. Children's long-term interests and behavior patterns emerge during this age span (Josephson, 1995). During this period children are developing their identities and discovering who they are, which lasts through out adolescence. It is hypothesized that at the age of 8 children have the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, and it is at this age that television has its greatest impact (Eron & Huesmann, 1985). Children who are 8 years are more likely to become aggressive after viewing aggressive behavior if they believe the program is real. However, most 8-year-olds have the ability to understand that programs that display people having superhuman powers are fantasy. When viewing aggressive behavior with people that have superhuman powers, children at this age are not as negatively influenced as when programs display this aggressive behavior without people having superhuman powers. However, children at this age still do not appear to completely understand the concept of characters in movies portraying real life people (Huesmann & Eron, 1986).

Adolescents are much more likely than younger children to doubt the reality of television content and much less likely to identify with television characters (Josephson, 1995). Children who continue to believe in the reality of television and identify with its violent heroes as adolescents are likely to display aggression, especially if they continue to fantasize about aggressive-heroic themes such as strength and power (Josephson, 1995). These individuals are the ones that society needs to be concerned about.

Adolescents that still believe in characters on television and make them their role models are likely to engage in copycat crimes or other acts of violence. Adolescents are likely to copy programs that demonstrate, in detail, how to commit a crime or aggressive behavior (Josephson, 1995).

Many psychologists who study the general effects of television violence on children relate their findings toward professional wrestling and say that it is bad for children, especially children under the age of eight (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 2000). They argue that children are too immature to differentiate between fantasy and reality. They suggest that children will perceive professional wrestling as reality, which will result in an internalized belief that disputes should be settled by fighting rather than other methods of compromising (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 2000). Professional wrestling is an extremely inappropriate model for children, says Howard Spivak, chairman of the American Academy of Pediatrics' task force on violence (Kantrowitz & Contreras, 2000). Kids do not always differentiate fantasy from reality, says Spivak and other critics, who point to 30 years of scientific research linking TV violence with increased fear and aggression in children. Finally, Holmstrom (1998) argues that young children who do not have the cognitive development to understand professional wrestling are confused because the wrestlers consider themselves skillful athlete-entertainers, not involved in "fakery" because injuries do occur.

Parental Influences

In some observational studies the relationship between viewing television violence viewing and the development of aggressive behavior is small compared to the relationship between other salient environmental factors, such as the influence of peers and predisposition towards aggression (MacBeth, 1996). MacBeth states that factors such as parental practices and peer relationships influence children more strongly than television alone. According to MacBeth (1996), viewing aggressive acts on television alone will not influence a child to be aggressive. She argues that the most important

component that determines aggressive acts among children is the family environment. Parents usually serve as the main socialization agents for young children (MacBeth, 1996).

Others would argue that whether a child's family environment is aggressive or authoritarian is more likely to influence children to imitate coercive approaches to solving problems than watching violent television programs alone (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). When a child's family environment provides opportunities to develop scripts for aggressive behaviors and when the child watches aggressive acts on television determine whether the child commits aggressive behaviors to memory (Huesmann, 1988).

Another important aspect of the family environment is how much television viewing by a child occurs with a parent present. Parents only watch 25% of children's programs (Wright, St. Peters, & Houston, 1990). They are not always aware of what their children are watching. If they do not know what their children are watching then they are missing the opportunity to moderate or teach their children what is real and what is imaginary on television. For example, whether a parent comments about the content and disapproves of the violent means used to solve problems makes a difference (MacBeth, 1996). Parents that approve of the displayed aggression may facilitate aggressive behavior in children and parents that disapprove of the displayed aggression may inhibit aggressive behavior in children (Durand, Berkowitz, and Leyens, 1984).

On the other hand, Levin (1999) argues that when parents watch professional wrestling with their children it promotes violence even further. When adults comment on the action during a television show, children may remember more and are more likely to

imitate what they have seen (Levin, 1999). While he has no data to support this premise, Danish argues in an article by Kantrowitz & Contreras (2000) that “if parents explain to children what is wrong with professional wrestling instead of telling them to avoid it will be more logical” (p. 52). Danish also states “that by telling children not to view something it will make it a forbidden fruit and in this process make it more appealing and more influential” Kantrowitz & Contreras, 2000 p. 52).

Summary

There are a few main themes across the literature on the impact of television violence on children. The majority of studies indicate that television violence correlates with aggressive behavior in children. Television violence may negatively affect children and may desensitize children toward aggression. Children may not have the cognitive ability to differentiate between reality and fantasy, and parental influences may affect how children perceive violence and how it influences their behavior. On the other hand, there is much literature arguing that children, especially those 8 years and older can differentiate between reality and fantasy and that television violence does not impact children as severely as previously believed. Other studies point to other variables that may play an important role in aggressive behavior in children, such as parental and peer influences and the ways that society is changing as a whole. It is not clear which of these views is correct, but what is clear, is the needs for further research in this area to clarify the findings of previous research.

The research on the effects of professional wrestling on children is also mixed. There is minimal literature on professional wrestling. The little research that has been done indicates that professional wrestling influences children to behave aggressively. On

the other hand, there are many child professionals that suggest that professional wrestling may not negatively impact children. However, much new research is needed to back up their statements. In the final section of this paper, a critical analysis of the previously reviewed literature will be presented. Criticisms of the research connecting professional wrestling and the negative outcomes in children will be discussed. Finally, implications for school psychologists and counselors will be provided.

Critical Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis on the literature pertaining to television violence, specifically professional wrestling and its influences on children. It will also discuss the literature on professional wrestling in popular magazines by psychologists and other child professionals, since most of the information on professional wrestling is coming from this source. This critical analysis will focus on three areas: (1) laboratory research on television violence, (2) research done on professional wrestling, and (3) psychologists and other child professional's statements in popular literature about the impact of professional wrestling on children.

An argument will also be presented that additional research needs to make a distinction between television violence and professional wrestling. The majority of researchers have found a correlation between television violence and aggressive behavior in children. Social science research conducted over the past 40 years supports the conclusion that viewing violent television programming has negative consequences for children (Primavera & Herron, 1996). The fact most commonly found in the research literature is that media violence can encourage children to learn aggressive behavior and attitudes (Aidman, 1997).

Criticisms

My first criticism of the literature is on several reports related to the validity of making inferences about the impact professional wrestling on children from research data gathered on television violence in general. These inferences by psychologists and other child professionals appear no more than educated guesses about the impact of

professional wrestling. It is hard to argue the fact that television violence influences children to behave aggressively. However to generalize these findings to professional wrestling is a mistake because professional wrestling and television violence are two different constructs. In professional wrestling there is no murder, no attempted murder, no robbery, and there are not any rapes. Professional wrestling resolves their differences physically, in a wrestling ring. For instance when there is a conflict between two wrestlers they wrestle in the ring. They do not do engage in any of the previously mentioned acts of violence. The display of aggression lacks the killing and destruction of a Schwarzenegger or Stallone movie and other television programs that do have these components of aggression and violence.

In sum, there are over eighty articles alone that criticize professional wrestling, with references to psychologists and other professionals in this area. The majority of articles, books, and reports on professional wrestling have something negative to say about it. Few psychologists state that the connection between professional wrestling and aggressive behaviors is unclear. Yet there are only two studies that have actually been published with data establishing a relationship between professional wrestling and children's aggressive behavior.

One example of inappropriate inferences to professional wrestling is a study by Josephson (1995) that children may also identify with certain characters or victims that are involved in violent behavior on television programs. They may identify with aggressive heroes and engage in aggressive fantasies more than they identify with real people. Josephson (1995) found that children like these unrealistic characters because they are powerful, brave, and strong despite the fact that these characters display their

strength and power in violent ways. Josephson found these results by doing research on television violence not professional wrestling. Insufficient data exists to apply these results specifically to professional wrestling. Hence Holmstrom (1998) and others who review Josephson's research and other research and make negative statements in popular literature about professional wrestling are making an inference not supported by the paucity of research specific to the impact of professional wrestling on children.

Actual research on professional wrestling is too scarce to decide how it may be influencing children's aggressive behavior. Conclusions about the benefits or liabilities of professional wrestling must come from research, not opinion. Opinion statements in the current literature appear to only make this dilemma more confusing and suggest research has resolved what is a yet open question.

My second criticism of the reviewed is that the strongest evidence for the relationship between viewing television violence and aggression comes from laboratory research studies. There are limitations to these studies because we do not know that what occurs in the laboratory may generalize to what happens outside the laboratory. Kaplan and Singer (1976) concluded, laboratory studies may generate hypotheses but they cannot determine cause. Yet in the area of television violence and children, psychologists and other professionals are reviewing the data and generalizing it in their reports. Besides the fact that professional wrestling and television violence are two different constructs, psychologists may be inferring results that do not occur in the real world, especially in regards to professional wrestling.

Research by Freedman (1986) supports the above criticism that laboratory studies may not relate to real world experiences. He states that there is weak evidence that the

same effects actually occur in the real world and there is weak evidence that cumulative exposure to television violence leads to aggressive behavior outside the laboratory (Freedman, 1986). Freedman also argues that studies measuring aggression in a laboratory setting have no possibility of punishment or retaliation, as would aggressive acts outside the laboratory. A second criticism by Freedman (1986) is that the child be affected by a belief that the experimenter approved of the violent behavior in the film. A child may generalize this approval and think that the experimenter would also approve of their aggressive behavior. A third criticism by Freedman (1986) is that in a laboratory setting a child is exposed to violent behavior or they are not. In many lab experiments, children see hours of violent behavior continuously. This type of exposure will have stronger effects on children. Since, in real life there is a constant mixture of the two and other types of television programs (Primavera & Herron, 1996).

In sum, two good reasons exist to question the validity of the articles and literature on professional wrestling. One reason relates to the mixed results found in laboratory research on television violence and its impact on children. The other reason is that there is evidence that results from laboratory may not apply to real world experiences.

My third criticism concerns the studies conducted on the impact of professional wrestling on children. Although O' Sullivan (1999) did differentiate between television violence and professional wrestling, there are flaws in her research. O'Sullivan's study only consisted of 16 boys that were in the first grade from Bronx, New York. This sample size is not sufficient to provide conclusive results. Also, O' Sullivan's (1999) study concentrated on children's behavior immediately after viewing professional

wrestling. The effects of professional wrestling or any other entertaining program will be “fresh in the minds” of children, resulting in more extreme responses. She may have had the same results if she would have surveyed children after watching a professional basketball game. Children may imitate Michael Jordan immediately after they watch him do spectacular moves on the basketball court. They may also feel invincible or stronger for a short time after watching a basketball game as well. However, the question remains whether these findings could have been replicated six hours, six days, or six months later. The small sample size and the failure to provide more than immediate data are significant weaknesses of this study.

Another study on the impact of professional wrestling on children was conducted in Israel (Rosellini, 1999). Professional wrestling was first introduced in Israel in the nineties and children started to mock wrestle. The people in Israel had never seen professional wrestling before and they were not exposed to the amounts of violence children in the United States are exposed to. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to children in the United States where the majority of professional wrestling is watched.

Implications for Further Research

As previously mentioned, much additional research is needed that differentiates professional wrestling from television violence. There has to be a movement toward actually conducted research on professional wrestling rather than making educated guesses. Research on professional wrestling must actually include children as well. More specifically, the focus of research must be children in the United States, since this is where professional wrestling is extremely popular. There also needs to be studies done

on professional wrestling that include a larger number of subjects so results can be generalized to the general population and have more conclusive data.

Implications for School Psychologists and Counselors

School Psychologists and counselors need to be aware of the increasing popularity in professional wrestling, especially with school violence becoming so prevalent. Violence in the high school and among younger age groups is a concern for everyone not just psychologists and other mental health professionals. In fact, youth violence, especially male youth violence, has become a major concern in our modern society. School psychologists and other helping professions should realize that the information on professional wrestling is not conclusive data but rather educated guesses. The effects of professional wrestling on children's behavior and their perceptions of professional wrestling is yet to be determined. However, they should be aware of the fact that professional wrestling may be influencing children when developing intervention strategies toward aggressive behavior. Due to the lack of much needed research, there is minimal evidence to support or disapprove of professional wrestling's influences on children.

Conclusion

There are significant amounts of literature on television violence and its influences on aggressive behavior toward children. The majority of the results indicate that there is a correlation between television violence and aggressive behavior in children. The research also states that children have difficulty differentiating reality and fantasy. The strongest evidence supporting this data are from laboratory research settings, which may or may not relate to the real world.

There are limited studies that have been conducted on professional wrestling. However, the results of this research supports the notion of the majority of research on television violence in general. That is that television violence impacts children's behavior. It also supports the statements made by psychologists and other child professionals in articles about professional wrestling. However there are flaws in the research done on the impact of professional wrestling on children. The majority of information on professional wrestling comes from inferences made by psychologists and other individuals in the helping profession in popular literature. This information has not come directly from professional wrestling research instead it has come from research conducted on television violence. Due to these factors, professional wrestling needs a greater number and more in depth studies conducted to determine its actual influences on children. Such research must be done to clarify the many opinions on professional wrestling so professionals working with children can determine if professional wrestling is causing aggression in children.

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