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**Grimes, William G. *Attitude Adjustment: The Impact of Professional Wrestling on Adolescents.***

**Abstract**

Adolescence is a period of change and development, both physically and mentally. Individuals in this developmental period are trying to identify an identity and meaning for their future. Within this developmental stage, adolescents are susceptible to peer pressure and media influences. One of the media influences within the American culture is professional wrestling.

Professional wrestling, and more specifically World Wrestling Entertainment has been a part of the American culture, becoming popular in the 1980's, and continuing to grow and expand to its current standing. With wrestling's larger than life characters and controversial storylines, adolescents are exposed to a variety of models which present stereotypical gender roles and unrealistic body images. Through the exposure to programming by World Wrestling Entertainment, adolescents are more likely to engage in acts of violence, both physically and verbally. Adolescents who watch professional wrestling are more likely to have issues and doubts about their body image. Recent developments within the past decade have brought into question the safety and overall health practices allowed by World Wrestling Entertainment, as evidenced by numerous deaths and overdoses of WWE wrestlers.

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## **Attitude Adjustment: The Impact of Professional Wrestling on Adolescents**

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

#### **Introduction**

Professional wrestling has become a cultural phenomenon within the United States over the past years. Professional wrestling organizations such as World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) have created a strong impact in the lives and entertainment of the youth of our society. On any given week, an individual watching cable television can watch six hours of professional wrestling programming (Lachlan et. al., 2009). World Wrestling Entertainment is the leading organization in the professional wrestling industry, and provides a variety of televised options for its viewing audience, including two weekly programs: “Monday Night Raw” on Monday nights and “WWE Smackdown!”, airing on Friday nights (“WWE Shows”, [www.wwe.com/shows](http://www.wwe.com/shows)). World Wrestling Entertainment also provides viewers two shows on their website which include: “WWE Superstars” and “WWE NXT” (“WWE Shows”, [www.wwe.com/shows](http://www.wwe.com/shows)). World Wrestling Entertainment is also planning the release of their television network, “WWE Network” in 2012. In addition to television programming, the elite professional wrestling organization features live shows throughout the year, pay-per-views, DVD’s, merchandise, action figures, and numerous books on the New York Times best seller lists.

However, the World Wrestling Entertainment has come under question regarding the appropriateness of their product and how the product is being distributed to the public. These issues can be related to three main issues that have been at the core of the professional wrestling industry over the last decade which include: violence, vulgarity, and sexuality.

The issue of violence within professional wrestling can be placed under the general umbrella about violence in our society and its portrayal and pervasiveness on television. One study found an average of about 31.50 incidents of violence within an hour of professional

wrestling television programming (Lachlan et. al., 2009). This same study also found that as of 2008, “Monday Night Raw” and “Smackdown!”, both World Wrestling Entertainment programs, were garnering over five million viewers per week (Lachlan et.al., 2009). The number of violent incidents portrayed on television is compounded by the number of people viewing them.

According to the Neilson ratings for the week of September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, “Monday Night Raw” received 4.4 million viewers. According the Neilson ratings, World Wrestling Entertainment’s highest profile pay-per-view, “Wrestlemania”, in its 27<sup>th</sup> installment, recorded a buy rate of over one million purchasers. These numbers give an indication as to the amount of exposure to violence the general public is exposed to on television within a specific wrestling program. The consequence on human behavior after watching violence on television is also of concern.

Children who watch violence have been documented to have an increased level of aggressiveness in their adolescent years, as well as into their young adult years (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Jodolski, Eron, L, 2003).

Professional wrestling is also unique in the techniques it uses to portray violence. On average, professional wrestling displayed the most examples of “unconventional weapons” used during a fight (Tamborini et. al., 2005). The most common of these examples was the use of a steel chair as a weapon (Tamborini et. al., 2005). Other examples used within World Wrestling Entertainment programs include sledgehammers, trash cans, pyrotechnics, ladders, tables, and whips (Tamborini et. al., 2005). In addition to seeing these weapons used in a fight, youth are also exposed to unique wrestling matches including “Hell in a Cell” and “Tables, Ladders, and Chairs”. These wrestling matches may have the ability to impact the thoughts and processes of developing adolescents and may have an impact on their perception of reality about fights in general.

Adolescence is a developmental period of great change where questioning of identity occurs. People in this stage are constantly trying to mold their identities and establish their own views, truths, and values about the world (Graves & Larkin, 2006). Adolescents may find this to be a difficult and trying task when viewing their world based on professional wrestling. A research study found that the most displayed reason for violence on television is for personal gain, at a rate of 28% and anger was ranked closely behind at 27% (Tamborini et. al., 2005). The issue of whether the rationale for these behaviors along with the personal development of the youth, might influence future behavior and demonstrations of aggression later in life is one to be considered (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003).

Erik Erikson defined individual development as a series of stages that include certain tasks to be mastered within each stage. Erikson identified the period of adolescence in his Developmental Stages as Identity vs. Diffusion. The goal of this stage is to develop a consistent identity for one's self. At this point in their lives, adolescents are not only trying to make sense of their own ideas, but also deal with the changes taking place in their bodies as a result of puberty (Graves & Larkin, 2006). Often times, adolescents turn to the media to find role models as they establish their identity (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Research suggests that male adolescents who are exposed to images of the male body via media may be at risk of developing health problems, and a higher rate of body dissatisfaction (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). This research is further supported by the belief that professional wrestlers need to be, "big, strong, muscular" individuals (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). As adolescents seek role models to identify with, comparison between the professional body builders they see on television and what their own changing bodies look like may be a severe contrast (Soulliere & Blaire, 2006).



Female adolescents face their own challenges as they develop during their teenage years. Common disorders facing female adolescents during this time period include anorexia and bulimia (Fennig et. al., 2008). These eating disorders have also been related to the interpretation of body image through the media, including television (Fennig et. al., 2008). The “Divas” division of wrestling within World Wrestling Entertainment is currently filled with many former models and professional cheerleaders. These women do not reflect a generic body type of females within the country (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, 2005). For both males and females, professional wrestlers are seen as generally unrealistic role models within our world and may influence how adolescents view themselves and their changing bodies (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Adolescence is a trying time for individuals as they shape their identities and begin to mold their future selves. Adolescents enjoy watching, and partaking in professional wrestling. Professional wrestling portrays violent acts and images, vulgar language, and sexualized behavior. These behaviors have the potential to cause harmful effects on adolescent identity development and behavior; therefore it is in the best interest of school counselors, and other school staff to consider the potential impact of professional wrestling upon adolescents.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Professional wrestling provides sport and entertainment to a large portion of our society. This study will provide a literature review analyzing the impact that professional wrestling has on the development of adolescents, and give insight for professionals working with these adolescents. The literature review took place during the Spring of 2012.

## Research Questions

This literature review will address the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between watching professional wrestling and adolescent aggression?
2. What influence does violence and vulgarity within professional wrestling have upon among, adolescents?
3. What influence does professional wrestling have upon adolescent's body image?

## Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the information comes from accurate and valid sources, in which the views of the researchers are presented in an unbiased form. This research is also limited to research available through May, 2012. This literature review will focus on professional wrestling organizations currently available for viewing on network television, and does not consider adolescents who watch independent wrestling organizations, or attend professional wrestling events in person. Lastly, the literature reviews the age demographic of adolescents aged 12-18 only.

## Definition of Terms

In an effort to further aid the reader in the comprehension of this topic, the following terms are defined.

**Autonomy-** the ability of an individual to become independent of others

**Divas-** For the purpose of this paper, a diva is a female wrestler within World Wrestling Entertainment

**Face-** Within this paper, the term "face" is used to describe the good guy characters within wrestling

**Heel-** Within this paper, the term “heel” is used to describe the bad guy characters within wrestling

**Mandated-** Within this paper, the term “mandate” refers to a wrestler having a reason to commit a violent act against another wrestler

**Promotion-** The term promotion or “promo” within this paper refers to a segment within professional wrestling where a wrestler speaks to the crowd or another wrestler to further their character or enhance a storyline

**Vulgarity-** For this paper, vulgarity is the demonstration through either vocal or gesturing what is considered inappropriate within the American society.

**World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)-** A professional wrestling organization within the United States.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The chapter reviews what we know about professional wrestling and the cultural impact that it has had on the world, and what we know about adolescent development. It will review the development of professional wrestling to the point where it is at today, and how professional wrestling is tied to behavioral practices and belief systems of adolescents. An exploration of literature detailing the effects of adolescent development as a result of watching violence on television, with an emphasis on professional wrestling, vulgarity within professional wrestling, and body image of adolescents who view professional wrestling will be included.

### **Professional Wrestling Violence**

World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) is now known as the “worldwide leader in sports entertainment” (“WWE Corporate”, [www.wwe.com/corporate](http://www.wwe.com/corporate)). They feature “the longest

running weekly episodic programs” in television history; those being “Monday Night Raw” and “Smackdown!” respectively (“WWE Corporate”, [www.wwe.com/corporate](http://www.wwe.com/corporate)). WWE features “Superstars” and “Divas” portraying both good (faces) and bad (heels) characters, which often portray features associated with everyday people, as well as over the top characters. Their shows are easily accessible to the general public and utilize social media which are commonly used by adolescents, such as Twitter and Facebook.

Professional wrestling, and specifically World Wrestling Entertainment, has intensified the use and portrayal of violent acts. Until the 1970’s, professional wrestling could be described as innocent. With the development of WWE’s most prolific pay-per-view “Wrestlemania”, and more specifically the creation of iconic figures such as Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant, the wrestling industry began to morph into an industry as big as some of its characters. Gone were simple maneuvers such as headlocks and dropkicks, instead professional wrestling began to feature more dramatic, violent matches including such as bodyslams (Tamborini et. al., 2005). The development continued through the decades with the next major changes happening in the 1990’s and into its current state with the development of WWE’s “Attitude Era” featuring wrestlers such as “The Rock” and “Stone Cold Steve Austin”, both of whom constantly battled authority and revolutionized wrestling (Tamborini et. al., 2005). Though the groundbreaking and controversial “Attitude Era” is now over, the likes of characters such as John Cena and “The Miz” are the “standard bearers” of highly controversial characters in a profession that features celebrities, wrestler promotions, kidnappings, alcohol abuse, and nudity.

On average, a viewer watching professional wrestling on television would witness 31.5 acts of violence per hour (Lachlan et al., 2009). When adjusted to include commercials during these shows, the number rises to a rate of 49.82 violent acts per hour (Lachlan et al., 2009). The

majority of these acts of violence take place within the normal realm of wrestling, meaning within a wrestling match (Lachlan et al., 2009).

Research has explored the areas in which violence, “outside of the normal realm of wrestling” is presented. The most common form of violence demonstrated was “non-mandated attacks”, meaning that the wrestlers did not have an objective or an overall meaning as to why they were doing the act (Lachlan et al., 2009). The strong majority of non-mandated acts of violence conducted within WWE television shows are done by “heels” (Tamborini et al., 2005). Related research on this area concluded that the majority of non-mandated acts of violence tended to be for unknown or random reasons, at a rate of 44% per total acts of violence (Lachlan et al., 2009). Justified violence was the second most common form of a non-mandated violent act at a rate of 27% (Lachlan et al., 2009). Tamborini (2005) made observations through this same research; one being that “heels” were more likely than “faces” to do the violent act and not receive any retribution, and two, that as a feud between two wrestlers continued to progress, the more violent in nature and severity their acts of violence towards each other became. Research found that 94% of non-mandated acts did not receive any retaliation (Lachlan et al., 2009).

### **Professional Wrestling and Adolescent Behavior**

Professional wrestling often gets its best ratings and viewership in the age category featuring adolescents, and more specifically among males ages 12-17 (Lachlan et al, 2009). Adolescence is seen as a transition time for a developing youth, and also a time in which they will be exploring new ideas and beliefs, with the ultimate goal being to reach autonomy (Graves & Larkin, 2006). Often times, youth look towards professional wrestling for guidance and see their characters as role models (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). A survey administered to middle school teachers in southeastern United States found that teachers identified 50.33% of their

students to be fans of professional wrestling (Bernthal, 2003). If high school students watch professional wrestling to find role models, they will be exposed to large amounts of violent behaviors.

It has been observed that adolescents tend to display these same characteristics in the escalation of violence, and increase in severity in their interactions with others (Lachlan et al., 2009). Additionally, it has been found that as adolescents continue in their escalation of violence, there is also a stronger chance that their violence will include a weapon of some sort (Lachlan et al., 2009).

More recent research has identified a relationship between the watching of professional wrestling and an increase in aggressive behavior (DuRant, Champion, & Wolfson, 2006). Survey research was done with more than 2,000 North Carolina high school students. The findings were that there was a significant association between males who watch professional wrestling on television and the rate at which they self reported bringing weapons to school (DuRant, Champion & Wolfson, 2006). There was also an association noted among males in regards to watching professional wrestling on television and an increase in both fighting at school and physical fighting with a date or a girlfriend (DuRant, Champion, & Wolfson, 2006).

### **Vulgarity & Profanity**

Along with physical altercations, professional wrestling involves many verbal altercations. Common reasons for these verbal altercations include calling out other wrestlers, promoting wrestlers, power struggles, announcing matches, and explaining actions. Through these verbal interactions, and more specifically the act of calling out or confronting another wrestler, there is a strong chance that vulgarity will be used. Common themes within verbal confrontations within wrestling include: attacking their character, weight concerns, associations

with others, fortitude, and strength (Tamborini et al., 2005). These themes parallel the common characteristics of bullying for adolescents (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011). Verbal bullying has been found to have a negative impact on adolescent development (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011). The researchers also noted a negative relationship between being bullied and school achievement, and identified that bullying can result in feelings of low self-esteem, fear, and self destructive behaviors (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011). Also, high levels of anxiety related to bullying after watching wrestling were noted in a study of 91 middle school students in a rural, mid-western United States city (Carney et al., 2010).

It is well documented that an adolescent watching professional wrestling on television will be exposed to consistent vulgar dialogue. Through examining 50 television episodes of "WWE Monday Night Raw", researchers quantified nearly 1,500 instances in which the words *ass* or *hell* were used (Tamborini et al., 2005). This same University of Indiana study also found, through examining the same episodes, 1,600 gestures of pertaining to crotch-pointing (Tamborini et al., 2005). These numbers share similar findings to a study of middle school teachers in southeastern United States (Bernthal, 2003). Bernthal (2003) indicated that teachers noticed problems and concerns with their middle school students, pertaining to watching and imitating professional wrestling, in three categories. The main area of concern was the use of language by their students which mimicked that of professional wrestling counterparts (Bernthal, 2003). The most common phrases noted were: "suck it", as demonstrated by the WWE group, Degeneration X, and "son of a bitch", as demonstrated by wrestler "Stone Cold Steve Austin" (Bernthal, 2003). Other teachers' reports within this same research indicated that aggressive or vulgar language could not confidently be related back to professional wrestling.

## Body Image

Professional wrestling has featured larger-than-life characters throughout its years of entertaining the public. Early performers, including “Andre the Giant”, the original giant of wrestling, listed at 7’4” and weighing 500 pounds (“Hall of Fame, [www.wwe.com/superstars/halloffame](http://www.wwe.com/superstars/halloffame)) and current wrestling giants such as “The Big Show” and “The Undertaker” both of whom are listed at seven feet tall, and “The Big Show”, weighing 485 pounds (“Big Show”, [www.wwe.com/superstars](http://www.wwe.com/superstars)) have reinforced exaggerated body size. Throughout their years, World Wrestling Entertainment has also featured former professional athletes such as “The Rock”, Brock Lesnar, Jack Swagger, and Alex Riley; and Olympic competitors such as Mark Henry and Kurt Angle, all of whom have larger-than-life characters and body size to match.

Professional wrestling does not provide adolescents with a realistic view of body image, in comparison to these superstars. Until recent development of a wellness program, wrestlers were able to use performance enhancers such as anabolic steroids (“WWE Talent Wellness Program, [www.wwe.com/inside/news/wellnesspolicysuspensions](http://www.wwe.com/inside/news/wellnesspolicysuspensions)). Performance enhancers allowed wrestlers to become bigger and stronger than what would previously been imaginable. World Wrestling Entertainment has been under high scrutiny as a result of the actions of late wrestler, Chris Benoit, after he took the lives of his wife and son, as well as his own in a double murder-suicide in 2007 (Bonisteel, 2007). An autopsy of Benoit indicated that Benoit had a high level of testosterone, indicating that he had been using testosterone enhancers, shortly before his death (Bonisteel, 2007). Though this has been the most public example of a professional wrestler’s difficulties with the aftermath of taking performance enhancers, sadly there are many other examples in recent history. Former superstars such as “The Macho Man” Randy Savage,



Eddie Guerrero, “Road Warrior Hawk”, and “Crush” have died from heart failures, which are believed to be linked to previous steroid use (Ankner & Haralson 2004). Other wrestlers have faced the difficulties of addiction to pain killers leading to suicide, as was noted for Mike Lockwood, known as “Crash Holly”, and Brian Pillman where the autopsy revealed an overdose of painkillers (Ankner & Haralson, 2004). In all, there have been sixty five former wrestlers who have died at, or before the age of forty five (Ankner & Haralson, 2004). Even with these overwhelming statistics and casualties, there are still violations of the WWE Wellness Policy in regards to testing positive for performance enhancers, with the most recent occurrences being by “Heath Slater” and “Evan Bourne” during 2011. (“WWE Talent Wellness Program, [www.wwe.com/inside/news/wellnesspolicysuspensions](http://www.wwe.com/inside/news/wellnesspolicysuspensions)).

Within American society, males are socialized to believe that to be “masculine”, one should be strong, muscular, lean, and also big (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Research is beginning to show a link between the portrayal of acceptable and ideal body image to the impact of the media (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). World Wrestling Entertainment projects this through their weekly broadcasts through numerous statements involving the belief that being bigger and larger is advantageous (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). With the overwhelming popularity of World Wrestling Entertainment, and through their numerous shows, many adolescents are exposed to body images and displays of masculinity being presented through wrestlers within the organization. This same research by Soulliere and Blair (2006), also analyzes the relationship between the media’s portrayal of ideal body image upon the self esteem of adolescents. Their findings indicate that males of all ages, especially adolescent aged youth, would like to have the same body images that are portrayed by the media. Their recent research indicated that adolescent boys are more likely to strive for these physical traits (Soulliere & Blair, 2006), which have been identified by

researchers as an impossible dream (Stout & Frame, 2004). This impossible dream increases the chances that adolescents will turn to anabolic steroids or other performance enhancers in order to achieve the societal view of what is desired for male body image, while ignoring the long term consequences on individual health and development (Stout & Frame, 2004).

As previously mentioned in the research pertaining to violence within wrestling, adolescence is a period of exploration and identity formation. Since the majority of adolescents will not be naturally and physically able to reach the body type presented in professional wrestling, the impact of being exposed to this “impossible dream” needs to be further explored. One impact of this “impossible dream” that has the potential to arise, is a decrease in self esteem. Adolescents are susceptible to media influences, and through comparison of self to an idealized, professional wrestler, the adolescent is likely to feel insecure and inadequate about their self, and their body satisfaction is likely to decrease (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Related research has indicated that decreased levels of body satisfaction resulted in males having a higher risk for eating disorders, as well as increased in signs of depression (Botta, 2003). Adolescent males are also more likely to internalize, nor report their feelings about their body image nor their signs of depression as compared to females (Pruitt, 2007).

### **Female Adolescents**

Adolescent males are not the only gender who may be impacted in regards to body image while watching professional wrestling. Female adolescents are also susceptible to being impacted through viewing professional wrestling. The female division of World Wrestling Entertainment, otherwise known as the “Divas” division, has transformed throughout the years and now has a much higher emphasis on sex appeal than on wrestling in its purist form. Within the World Wrestling Entertainment roster in 2011, of the twelve divas listed, five had previously been

models before joining the WWE, two were cheerleaders for professional sports teams, and two were former world class fitness trainers (“Divas Roster”, [www.wwe.com/divas](http://www.wwe.com/divas)). Similar to males in professional wrestling, these female wrestlers do not reflect the typical body image as the “norm” within the American society. The body image being presented by these “divas” is considered to be what is desirable for females by the media (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). According to research conducted by Lemish (1998), female youth placed more of an emphasis on female body images being presented through professional wrestling in comparison to the characters and storyline being presented in the World Wrestling Entertainment programming (Lemish, 1998). Female youth were also more likely to use professional wrestling as an example of desirable male and female body types as they continue their development (Lemish, 1998). Young females also identified more with the female body image being presented on WWE, in comparison to the female standard body image that was being presented during the same television broadcasts (Lemish, 1998). The females within this study also noted the infrequency in which female wrestlers had matches during the television shows of professional wrestling. Surveys found that female wrestlers were more likely to spend the majority of their time during the television show either being a manager for another male wrestler, or interacting in a promotion in the backstage areas (Lemish, 1998). These observations are reflected in further research which indicated a lack of female presence within the realm of sports, or portrayed females as an accessory to male sports, as well as within the sports entertainment industry (Koivula, 1999).

Female adolescents have both similarities and differences when compared to males at the same age regarding preferred body image and its impact on adolescent development. As previously discussed, the male ideal for body image is to be big and strong, while conversely the ideal body image for females is to present a thin body (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Although there

has been an increase in eating disorders for males, female adolescents have consistently shown higher rates of anorexia and bulimia at a higher level (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Recent research with female adolescents has noted a relationship between female adolescent body image and their positive view of celebrities (Maltby, et al., 2005). Many of the World Wrestling Entertainment “divas” would be considered celebrities and model a body image desired by female adolescents. This research indicates that the more closely associated with the person or celebrity an adolescent is, the greater the comparison the adolescent makes to their own body image. The comparison of body image has also been shown to impact adolescent’s self-esteem (Maltby, et al., 2005).

### **Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations**

This chapter summarizes the literature findings as well as discusses the potential impact that professional wrestling has had on adolescents. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for teachers, coaches and counselors about how to approach the topic of professional wrestling while working with adolescents.

#### **Summary**

The popularity of professional wrestling with adolescent viewers has been well documented. More importantly, the impact of the sport upon adolescent behavior, use of vulgarity and profanity, and body image has gained significant recognition over the past decade. The development and progress of the most known and popular professional wrestling organization, World Wrestling Entertainment, has helped mold what is seen within our society as culturally acceptable, popular, and desired. The main on adolescent development is the demonstration of violence, vulgarity, and body image within the product.

Research on violent acts being portrayed and understood within professional wrestling helps to show the amount of violence that occurs within a given television show of World Wrestling Entertainment (Lachlan et al., 2009). Their findings showed that there are approximately 31.5 acts of violence per hour within a given broadcast of World Wrestling Entertainment. Research by Tamborini et al. (2005) helped to further analyze the violent acts that are demonstrated by analyzing the acts by reasons and character. Their findings indicated that the majority of acts of violence were done by the bad guys and their acts were done for personal gain (Tamborini et al., 2005). DuRant, Champion, and Wolfson (2006) discovered a potential relationship between the watching of professional wrestling and an increase in aggressive behavior.

Tamborini et al. (2005) also analyzed the amount of vulgarity and violence within professional wrestling, identifying findings of over 1,500 words of vulgarity and 1,600 bodily gestures. D'Esposito, Blake, and Riccio (2011) connected that the bullying being presented through professional wrestling can result in bullying among adolescents along with traits of low self-esteem, fear, and self destructive behaviors (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011).

Professional wrestlers provide a larger than life appearance. The body images being presented by both male and female professional wrestlers is not the normal appearance among developing adolescents. When adolescents compare themselves to, and idolize professional wrestlers, they are at a greater risk for developing lower self esteem and a lower opinion of their own body (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Adolescents are also susceptible to developing eating disorders in order to acquire the same body type of professional wrestlers (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Unfortunately, the professional wrestler body type has often been created with assistance from steroids and other performance enhancements.

## **Critical Analysis**

World Wrestling Entertainment has done an excellent job of evolving to meet the demands of an ever changing, social media-based society. It is important for future counselors and those professionals working with adolescents to be aware of the variety of programming and ease with which adolescents are able to connect to professional wrestling. World Wrestling Entertainment garners over five million viewers per week (Lachlan et al., 2009). Counselors, teachers and coaches need to be aware of its popularity within society and the potential impact it may have on their students.

Watching professional wrestling has been linked to an increase in aggressive behavior for adolescents (DuRant, Champion, & Wolfson, 2006). Adolescent viewers of professional wrestling are at a higher risk to develop eating disorders, and may experience a decrease in self esteem, as well as depression about their own body image (Soulliere & Blair, 2006). Counselors need to be aware of these outcomes and determine if their students may be viewing of professional wrestling. They should talk to their students and remind them that professional wrestling is for entertainment purposes only. The wrestling traits, characters, and images portrayed throughout professional wrestling are fictitious, unrealistic, and potentially harmful to adolescent development.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research about the impact of professional wrestling upon adolescents needs to be conducted. Research should continue to analyze the impact violence and vulgarity within professional wrestling has on developing adolescents. The growing popularity of wrestling among adolescent females needs to be analyzed, and outcomes on their development documented. Additionally, future researchers will have the opportunity to analyze the growth and

impact of World Wrestling Entertainment as it transitions to a TV-PG program. Greater numbers of younger adolescents may be exposed to the professional sport of wrestling as a result of this transition. Professional wrestling has become a prominent social media outlet. Future research needs to analyze the impact social media has on viewership of wrestling, as well as documenting the occurrence of negative social behaviors that occur among adolescents, including relational aggression and cyber-bullying.

There is a strong need for further research pertaining to the role of females within professional wrestling, and the impact that their characters and practices can have on developing adolescent self-esteem and body image. Further research may also help influence the opinions and beliefs of adolescent wrestling fans about the benefits of a wellness policy for professional wrestlers. A wellness policy could impact the development of wrestlers within the entertainment business and influence the use of performance enhancing drugs such as steroids, thus benefitting adolescent development.

Finally, although professional wrestling is meant to be a source of entertainment for viewers, when a source of entertainment negatively impacts adolescent self-esteem and body image, it may be time to place some boundaries on the amount and kind of violence that occurs in front of adolescent eyes. It is important for professionals who work with adolescents to become more observant about the kind and amount of vulgarity and profanity that adolescents express which may be influenced by the kind and amount of professional wrestling programs they watch. Future researchers need to analyze and document the impact of professional wrestling upon adolescent identity development, body image and social behaviors.

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