

In 1999, a company was established to foster the World Summit movement. The World Summit on Media for Children Foundation is a not-for-profit public company incorporated in Victoria, Australia. Its board of directors includes representatives of the principal host organizations of previous and future World Summits and regional summits. The board is responsible for overseeing the process by which specific countries and organizations are given the right to hold successive World Summits on Media for Children.

The foundation's objectives are to encourage and promote the World Summit, select host organizations for future World Summits, and assist those organizations to raise funds for and prepare for the World Summit. The foundation owns the intellectual property of the World Summit on Media for Children concept.

—Patricia Edgar

See also Computer Use, International; Entertainment-Education, International; International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth, and Media; Internet Use, International; Media Education, International

FURTHER READINGS

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WORLD WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT (WWE)

Scholars, parents, and social critics are becoming increasingly worried about children's exposure to professional wrestling programs, fearful that impressionable audiences will be adversely affected by violence, profanity, and sexual content that appears both in and out of the ring. World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), formerly known as the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) and currently the largest wrestling promoter in North America, has been the focus of this controversy.

BACKGROUND

WWE grappled its way into the American mainstream in the mid-1980s, when Chairman Vince McMahon

reinvented pro wrestling as sports entertainment and garnered national attention for his company by emphasizing colorful superstars such as Hulk Hogan and star-studded super events such as *Wrestlemania*. WWE programming has maintained a national following ever since, despite a period of competition from Ted Turner's rival promotion, World Championship Wrestling (WCW). Although WCW became the most popular wrestling company for part of the 1990s, the WWE reclaimed its industry dominance by introducing edgier and more risqué content at the end of the decade, known as the "attitude" era among fans. During this time, controversial superstars such as the foul-mouthed, beer-swilling "Stone Cold" Steve Austin won the affection of WWE viewers and contributed to the eventual collapse of WCW. The WWE media reach now extends to monthly pay-per-view specials and two popular weekly television programs, *WWE Raw* and *WWE Smackdown*. These shows feature scripted wrestling matches set amid interviews, talk segments, and soap opera-esque plots involving both wrestling superstars and provocatively dressed women referred to as *divas*.

CONCERNS ABOUT YOUTHFUL VIEWERS

In 2001, WWE events drew an audience of more than 50 million Americans every week, while another 6.8 million purchased pay-per-view wrestling specials. Both weekly hours of *WWE Raw* rank in the top 10 across cable programming, drawing about 3 million viewers. Audience data from Nielsen in 2003 indicate that about 627,000 children a week watch *Raw*, and about 847,000 watch the WWE network show, *Smackdown*.

The large, young audience drawn in by WWE programming has led to substantial discourse over the potential negative consequences to them. Despite a lack of empirical research in the area, some social critics have argued that professional wrestling rewards and encourages violence that would otherwise be considered inappropriate or unjust in routine social interactions. Brendan Maguire suggests that acts considered deviant in other social settings are looked at as normative in wrestling and that the notion of behavior that deviates from an acceptable social norm is barely existent in professional wrestling. John Campbell has further posited that professional wrestling characters frequently vacillate between "face" and "heel" (good guys and bad guys), creating a scenario in which

identifying particular behaviors as deviant or nonnormative is almost impossible.

In addition to the unusual construction of aggression as normative, critics have expressed alarm at the simple frequency of violence in the wrestling genre. WWE programming has consistently ranked among the least-desirable shows for family viewing according to The Parents Television Council, which has labeled it too violent for family audiences. Wrestling has been further condemned for encouraging physical violence among young, impressionable viewers and for portraying violence with no regard for human dignity.

CONTENT RESEARCH

Although there is a paucity of scientific research specifically examining the content and effects of wrestling programming, a few important studies are worthy of mention. As concern over wrestling content grew during the "attitude" era of the late 1990s, a study conducted at Indiana University received mainstream media coverage on the news program, *Inside Edition*. This content analysis of 50 episodes of *WWE Raw* reported nearly 1,500 uses of the word *hell* or *ass*, more than 1,600 instances of lewd gesturing, and more than 600 incidents in which potentially deadly weapons such as tables and chairs were used in interpersonal violence. Content analyses of British television by Barrie Gunter and colleagues revealed that 6 of the 10 most violent programs were WWE shows, and a later report suggested that the two most violent individual programs on British television were WWE productions.

A content analysis by Ron Tamborini and colleagues further suggested that WWE programming contains far more violence than conventional programming. These researchers examined 36 hours of *Raw* and *Smackdown* episodes from 2002 and found that they present violence as morally just, likely to go unpunished, and devoid of realistic consequences such as extreme harm to the victim. Additional analyses of the Tamborini data set reveal further attributes that may be problematic. Other researchers have found that violence in professional wrestling tends to be out of proportion to the events provoking it, leading to an escalating spiral of violence in which routine social interactions become bloodbaths in a very short amount of time. Studies also show that wrestling programs contain an extraordinary amount of verbal aggression (typically character and competence attacks) enacted primarily for the sake of amusement.

BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Concerns about the programs have been heightened by research in this area indicating that young children are more likely than adults or adolescents to perceive wrestling as realistic. Because realism strengthens the potential of television violence to increase viewer aggression, initial indications that young children are likely to perceive the violence as real make it important to learn more not only about the manner in which wrestling violence is portrayed but also about its impact on impressionable young audiences in terms of attitudes toward aggression and aggressive behavior.

Scattered empirical research on televised wrestling has examined gender differences in motivations for viewing, self-reports of behavioral imitation, and perceptions of wrestling realism among young children, adolescents, and adults. In two separate studies, Dafna Lemish reported that male children and adolescents frequently imitate fighting techniques used in professional wrestling and that more than half of a sample of elementary schools principals report dealing at least once a week with schoolyard fights involving children imitating wrestling. A report by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission also indicates that many younger children are unaware of the scripted nature of professional wrestling and believe the action to be real. Despite the alarming results of these studies, little if any additional empirical research has examined the impact of wrestling entertainment on children and adolescents. Although a sizable amount of social criticism has been levied against the genre, more scientific research is needed to substantiate these concerns.

—Kenneth A. Lachlan and Paul D. Skalski

See also Aggression, Television and; Sports Television; Violence, Experimental Studies of

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