

## WRESTLING

### **How do audiences perceive TV and video wrestling?**

#### REPORT ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Prepared for:

British Board of Film Classification  
3 Soho Square  
London  
W1D 3HD

Independent Television Commission  
Kingsworthy Court  
Kingsworthy  
Winchester  
Hampshire S023 7QA

Broadcasting Standards Commission  
7 The Sanctuary  
London SW1P 3JS

March 2001

Agency contacts: Arnold Cragg,  
Cheryl Taylor, Rhodri Gilbert

BBF179RP

## A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

### 1. Background

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC) have responsibilities in relation to what is available on video and/or is broadcast in the UK. With respect to the portrayal of violence, their guidelines variously indicate the following:

- that the portrayal of violence is of most concern when *“making violence seem a normal or legitimate way of solving problems; celebrating heroes who inflict pain and injury, often more brutally than the villains; increasing callousness towards the victims of violence; teaching violent techniques; encouraging aggressive attitudes; promoting sadism as a source of pleasure.”* (BBFC)
- *“there are some significant concerns [about the portrayal of violence].....These include the fear that repeated exposure to violence desensitises audiences, making them apathetic towards increases in actual violence or indifferent to the plight of victims or the copycat effect - outbreaks of violence similar to those shown on screen - which could be a consequence of showing it in detail...It could also encourage the view that violence is acceptable as the means of resolving disputes.”* (BSC)
- the Broadcasting Act (1996) which requires the ITC to draw up a code giving guidance as to the rules observed with respect to the showing of violence or the inclusion of sounds suggestive of violence states that particular concern must be given to *“violence portrayed on television [which] may be imitated in real life”* and *“[the] regular and recurrent spectacle of violence [which] might lead viewers to think violence in one form or another is acceptable behaviour and may encourage indifference to the suffering of victims of violence”*
- section 1.7 of the ITC Programme Code reads as follows:

*“Portrayal of dangerous practice and behaviour which is capable of and likely to be easily imitated by the public should be avoided unless it can be justified by the dramatic and editorial requirements of the programme... The portrayal of any dangerous behaviour easily imitated by children should be avoided, and must be excluded entirely at times when large numbers of children may be expected to be watching. This applies especially to the use in a manner likely to cause serious injury, of knives and other offensive weapons, articles or substances which are readily accessible to children.”*

Wrestling - currently broadcast on terrestrial, cable and satellite television and available for sale on video in the UK - poses particular problems for the regulatory bodies because its status as sports entertainment is unclear and there is uncertainty about how the viewing public perceives it. The following questions arise...

- is the violence perceived as real? do viewers believe that wrestlers who appear to be hurt, are really hurt? when there is blood, do they think that it is real blood from a real wound?
- are the outcomes of the bouts thought to be predetermined? is the action perceived as choreographed, at least to some degree?
- similarly, are the verbal exchanges between participants believed to be scripted and rehearsed?
- what is the nature of the appeal of wrestling for both casual and dedicated viewers? to what degree do perceptions of how real the violence is affect the nature and strength of the appeal?

Overall, a need was identified to learn more about how wrestling is perceived by those who watch it in order to inform thinking about how the regulatory bodies should deal with issues around its broadcasting and availability on video.

## **2. Objectives**

The BBFC, ITC and BSC commissioned qualitative research to explore the questions posed above. Specific research objectives were to:

- determine whether audiences consider the violence (and its consequences) in wrestling to be real
- identify the pleasures (i.e. uses and gratifications) associated with watching wrestling on television and video
- examine the differences between audience groups (by age, gender, frequency of viewing and dedication to the shows)
- explore differences according to the type of show watched (World Wrestling Federation, World Championship Wrestling, Extreme Championship Wrestling), scheduling, video classification and delivery platform (subscription vs terrestrial TV and TV vs video)

## **B. METHOD AND SAMPLE**

### **1. Method**

The project was entirely qualitative. Fieldwork was of four sorts:

- standard length group discussions (90 minutes)
- extended group discussions combined with observation of participants (120 minutes)
- individual interviews
- paired interviews (with two friends)

#### **1.1 *Group discussions***

Group discussions formed the backbone of the fieldwork. They were chosen to encourage interaction between participants. This, it was hoped, would generate candid and detailed responses and provide the right forum for projective and enabling techniques. We anticipated that these techniques would be useful in exploring thoughts and feelings that might otherwise be difficult to articulate. In the event, people appeared to have little difficulty talking candidly about wrestling and what they enjoyed about it, so these techniques were called upon less than anticipated.

In both standard length and extended group discussions an element of observation was used. The discussions varied in size - groups with those aged under 12 comprised five or six respondents, while groups with those aged over 16 comprised seven or eight respondents. Our experience has been that under 12s are more forthcoming if groups are smaller.

##### **1.1.1 Standard length discussions**

Six standard length discussions were included in the research methodology. Each lasted approximately ninety minutes.

In these discussions, five to ten minutes was set aside to review particular sequences which were thought by the commissioning bodies above to be especially interesting. All sequences shown were

appropriate to the age of respondents.

### 1.1.2 Extended group discussions

Four extended sessions were conducted. These sessions lasted two hours to allow for a period of observation. Discussion of key issues lasted approximately ninety minutes; the remaining thirty minutes were used to allow respondents to watch a videotape of wrestling (appropriate to the group being studied). During this time, researchers observed respondents' reactions to the material and their behaviour. These sessions were also video-recorded to allow further analysis at a later stage.

## 1.2 *Interviews*

The group discussions described above were complemented by a programme of six individual and four paired depth interviews. These gave researchers time to explore some of the issues raised in the discussions in more detail than was possible in the group environment.

Younger respondents (those under 16 years of age) were interviewed in pairs; in our experience, young people are more at ease and therefore more forthcoming when interviewed with a friend.

In all these interviews, five or ten minutes was again set aside to review video sequences.

## 1.3 *Projective/Enabling techniques*

As noted above, respondents were generally able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about wrestling without apparent difficulty, and the bulk of the interviewing process comprised direct questioning.

However, in some discussions, respondents were given sets of pre-selected words and images cut from magazines. All respondents had the same selection to choose from. They were asked to choose the images and words that they felt encapsulated something of the character and appeal of wrestling. Children and adults chose quite

different images and the two collages resulting are appended.

## 2. Sample

The various considerations informing the final sample design are detailed in Appendix 1. The design was as follows:

### Group discussions

Group	Age	Sex	S.E.G.	Interest	Location	
<b>Extended?</b>						
1	10-12	Female	C2DE	Dedicated	London	✓
2	10-12	Male	BC1C2	Dedicated	Cardiff	
3	16-18	Male	C2DE	Casual	B'ham	✓
4	19-24	Male	C2DE	Dedicated	N'castle	
5	19-24	Female	C2DE	Casual	London	✓
6	25-35	Female	C2DE	Casual	B'ham	
7	25-35	Male	BC1C2	Casual	Cardiff	
8	20-34	Mixed sex		C2DE	Dedicated	
	London	✓				
9	36-55+	Male	C2DE	Dedicated	E'burgh	
10	36-55+	Mixed sex		C2DE	Casual	
	London					

## Depth interviews

Depth	Age	Sex	S.E.G	Interest	Location	
	Delivery channel					
1	6-7	Male	C2DE	Dedicated	Cardiff	Multi-channel
2	6-7	Female	BC1C2	Casual	London	Terrestrial
3	10-12	Male	BC1C2	Dedicated	B'ham	Multi-channel
4	10-12	Female	C2DE	Casual	London	Terrestrial
5	16-18	Male	C2DE	Dedicated	N'castle	Multi-channel
6	19-24	Female	BC1C2	Dedicated	N'castle	Multi-channel
7	25-35	Male	C2DE	Dedicated	London	Multi-channel
8	25-35	Male	C2DE	Casual	Cardiff	Terrestrial
9	36-55+		Male	BC1C2	Casual	B'ham Multi-channel
10	36-55+		Female	C2DE	Dedicated	Edinburgh Terrestrial

Fieldwork was conducted by Arnold Cragg, Cheryl Taylor and Rhodri Gilbert of Cragg Ross Dawson between 30 November and 12 December 2000. Copies of the recruitment contact questionnaires used in the research can be found appended.

An initial presentation of findings was given by Arnold Cragg at the BBFC on 10 January 2001.



## C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Viewing*

1. On this qualitative evidence, most viewing of wrestling is of television coverage rather than of bought or rented videos. Even dedicated fans seem not to watch bought videos regularly although they may have a large collection (many received as gifts). A reason for this is that a major part of the attraction of wrestling is seeing what happens next - each broadcast is seen as developing an underlying story, somewhat like a soap. Videos seem to be bought as expressions of loyalty to favourite wrestlers as much as to watch.
2. Fans know that videos are available which show more extreme wrestling - with more (or more convincing) violence - than can be seen on TV (even late at night). Some respondents in this sample admitted seeing but not buying such videos (which are not classified in the UK) but they attracted little comment. Again, a reason for this is that most fans' interest centres on the fate of favourite wrestlers who do not feature on extreme videos.
3. Most serious fans watch both pre and post watershed wrestling, whereas many casual viewers (especially women) never watch wrestling late at night. Dedicated fans routinely video late night programmes and therefore circumvent the watershed. On the evidence of this research few parents seemed likely to police their children's viewing of wrestling, either on TV or video.
4. WWF appears to be much the most popular brand of wrestling, with the biggest stars, the best production values and the most imaginative storylines. The same WWF stars feature in both pre and post watershed broadcasts. Fans want to see *all* the action in which their favourites appear, partly out of loyalty but also to keep up with developments in the underlying plot. Children are therefore powerfully motivated to video late night broadcasts.
5. Families, especially fathers and sons, and groups of friends, especially boys, watch wrestling together. The atmosphere during bouts is

typically noisy, with laughter as well as vocal support. Some women fans seem not initially to have liked the idea of wrestling, but to have become interested in certain stars and by the underlying storylines. Some girls say they watch wrestling so that they know what the boys are talking about.

#### *How is wrestling perceived?*

6. Wrestling is consistently described as 'entertaining' and most viewers regard it as a branch of show business rather than of sport. Many adults remember 'British Wrestling' - widely perceived as amusing buffoonery (and only rarely associated with darker elements to do with violence and sex). Modern televised wrestling has a similar image but is perceived as having more sophisticated production values and much more glamour. For the young, wrestling is also very fashionable - everyone is watching it.
7. Unlike anything else but including elements of many different things, wrestling is seen as a unique entertainment. It invites comparison with boxing, pantomime, circus, and soaps but is not really like any of these.
8. With the exception of a few young children, people who watch wrestling do not regard it as a genuine sport. It is obvious to them that the referee does not fulfil a normal referee's functions, and that the wrestlers are remarkably unconstrained by rules. The majority believe that the outcome of bouts, and much of the action, is preordained. Many also believe that the fate of the wrestlers is orchestrated by 'scriptwriters' behind the scenes whose job it is to keep audiences interested by engineering tension.

#### *The appeal of wrestling*

9. Different people say different things about why they enjoy wrestling.... The main attractions they identify are...
  - it is amusing because it is over-the-top, burlesque, larger than

life, frequently ridiculous

- the wrestlers are highly skilled performers, worth watching for the skills they display
- it is exciting because of the atmosphere and because you want to find out who wins
- there is tension arising from the drama of the action in the bouts and the (apparent) intensity of the feelings of the protagonists
- many of the wrestlers of both sexes are physically attractive
- it is rewarding in the way both sporting fixtures and soaps are rewarding; each broadcast/bout tells you something you did not know before, and moves the action on

10. Young male viewers - boys of 12 and under - candidly acknowledge that they are most interested in the action - that is, what the wrestlers do to each other. The more dramatic and imaginative this is, the better they like it. Many enthusiastic adult male fans also acknowledge that the action is absolutely central to their interest, and that the more dramatic this action is, the more they enjoy it. More casual viewers, especially among the women, typically locate their interest more broadly in the atmosphere, the posturing, the storylines etc.
11. It seems to be assumed, and a few women laughingly confirm this, that wrestling has always had an element of sexual interest for women - well-muscled men grappling with each other. Male viewers, including boys of 10-12, often express enthusiasm for the participation of young female wrestlers, wives, and girlfriends. People do not recall women wrestlers and scantily clad wives or girl friends appearing in 'British Wrestling', and by comparison wrestling today has more on view to interest heterosexual men. There is an element of parody (as with much else in wrestling) in the sexual interest; it is unclear whether the audience is supposed to enjoy the parody or the titillation or both. Asked about the women, men often seem self-parodying as they embrace the stereotypical response of 'the more semi-naked women

the better'. Despite all the ambiguity, it seems likely that sexual titillation is increasingly part of the appeal of wrestling for some men. An interesting feature of this is that the atmosphere of the arena is open, family and circus-like and the men clearly do not feel furtive or uneasy about the sexual element.

12. The appeal of wrestling is ultimately difficult to pin down precisely. Many viewers seem to feel that their own reasons for watching it are not quite the same as other people's. Often they assume they are more sophisticated, more knowing, or more detached than they suppose most viewers are. This assumption is encouraged by the uncertainty surrounding what the audience is meant to be noticing and concentrating on. Wrestling is full of subterfuges and how much the audience is assumed to be in on the act is deliberately left unclear.
13. It is not possible to be certain of this, but our feeling is that the physical action between the wrestlers - the violence - is a more important and central part of the appeal of wrestling than some viewers recognise in themselves or like to acknowledge. In interviews with adults we often had the impression that respondents were less comfortable talking about the fighting itself than about other things - the intricacies of the underlying soap, the gymnastic abilities of the wrestlers, or the atmosphere created by the crowd. Yet observing them watching clips, it seemed that the more violent the action, the more acute most respondents' attention became. Some people, not all, seem to feel that it is more respectable in some way to be interested in the showmanship, the skills or the artifice than in the violence. This may be because at a rational level they believe the violence is not real, and/or because they feel uncomfortable morally or culturally enjoying the (apparent) violence to the extent that they do.

*Is the violence perceived as 'real'?*

14. The short answer to this question is that a large majority of people who watch wrestling are confident at a rational level that the violence and its consequences are not real. The exceptions include some young children, and a minority of more casual viewers, principally women. Even in this minority many people are clear that the violence in

wrestling is not what it seems. The question they ask themselves is - is it *all* feigned, or are there not some incidents and injuries that genuinely are brutal?

15. A large majority of viewers are persuaded that the violence is not real by a number of perceptions, among them...
  - in almost all bouts, *some* of the action is manifestly faked; fists and feet are seen not to connect
  - for many reasons, bouts are clearly not genuine sporting contests, they are therefore performances, and the violence has to be seen as a performance
  - the bouts are implausibly protracted given the apparent level of violence
  - the wrestler who appears to have taken the biggest beating regularly triumphs in the end
  - wrestlers who are taken away in ambulances may reappear within days apparently unscathed
16. Moreover, there is a strong underlying (though unexamined) confidence that neither the authorities on the spot, nor the broadcasting authorities would allow people to get seriously hurt in the name of either sport or entertainment. Viewers do not, unprompted, examine the relationship between their enjoyment of wrestling and the extent to which they think it is real. This in itself may be a tribute to their instinctive confidence that it is 'all right' - that is, not real - or it would not be allowed or made available to them.

### *Discussion*

17. It is plausible that viewers give themselves permission to enjoy violent scenes and apparent infliction of pain because (whatever they feel or think at the moment they see it) they *know* it is pretend. They would not enjoy gladiatorial combat in a modern day Coliseum because they

would not be able to say to themselves - 'it's all right, it's not real'.

18. On the other hand, the reactions of viewers (even dedicated viewers) to violent scenes strongly suggests that at the moment of viewing they suspend their disbelief and momentarily, at least, treat what they have seen as real. Instead of not believing because they know it is not real, they do not believe because what they are seeing seems so extreme. Their reactions are of the sort - OH MY GOD! - and they wonder if the action has got out of control.
19. A number of features of the puzzle deserve to be noted. Although many viewers say they are interested primarily in the background soap (and only secondarily, if at all, in the violence), one key purpose of the soap is making grudges seem more plausible and thereby encouraging viewers to think a wrestler may 'lose it' and go berserk. The soap is therefore intimately connected to the violence and it is probably not right to see it as an entirely separate and more innocuous focus of interest.
20. Viewers agree on the importance of novelty - of moves, props, and shenanigans generally. Novelty is of course appreciated because it stops the wrestling becoming repetitive and predictable. But novelty is also appreciated because it foments uncertainty about whether what is going on is 'real'; a new prop or weapon means that a higher proportion of the audience will be thinking - OH MY GOD, what's he/she doing?
21. Wrestling promoters appear to try to keep audiences guessing about the reality of what they are watching. On the one hand most bouts include instances when pretence is obvious - fists not connecting and the like. On the other hand, both building up the grudges and the incessant innovation encourage viewers to entertain the possibility that things have got out of hand.
22. Ultimately it seems to us unknowable how people's reactions to wrestling are mediated by their appreciation, at a rational level, that everything has been foreseen and is being controlled. People who

watch wrestling do not know this of themselves.

23. We are also uncertain how wrestling should be viewed in relation to depictions of violence in films, theatre, television and electronic games. Aggression and violence are quite central to wrestling in a way that is rare in film, theatre, etc; the 'plot' serves the violence, rather than the violence being essential to the plot. When they are watching films, people know that the pain and violence are pretended rather than real, but this does not of course mean that all sequences are therefore acceptable.
24. It will be important from a regulatory point of view to keep a close watch on where innovation leads. Novelty is essential to sustain the popularity of wrestling, which depends to a significant extent on shocking the audience. Wrestling producers will seek to maintain the incredulous reaction (the OH MY GOD! factor) by ambushing audiences with ever more extreme (looking) consequences and brutal (looking) props.

## D. FINDINGS IN DETAIL

### 1. What are people watching?

#### 1.1 TV viewing behaviour

The great majority of these respondents was watching WWF (see section 1.4 below for perceptions of the different 'brands' of wrestling) at various times both pre and post watershed.

Sky Sports One and Sky One were most popular on weekends amongst those with Multi-Channel Television (MCTV), while Channel 4 on weekends was often mentioned by those limited to terrestrial broadcasts. Channel 5 was also sometimes mentioned, particularly again by those without MCTV. Some respondents had either seen or were aware that Bravo included some wrestling late at night on MCTV.

It was difficult to pin down the precise times that people were watching: widespread video-recording (especially amongst dedicated males, aged ten and over) obscured the details of watching habits. The number of channels on MCTV also sometimes made viewing habits difficult to establish. Some younger respondents appeared eager to overstate their viewing.

*"HOW OFTEN DO YOU WATCH IT?"*

*"On Saturdays."*

*"I watch it everyday."*

*"It's not on everyday."*

*"Well, some days. Well most of the days. I definitely watch it on Mondays, Saturdays."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

*"Every Saturday on Sky One."*

*"Tuesdays."*

*"Wednesdays and Thursdays."*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

It was apparent, however, that children were often watching television broadcasts, including some post-watershed programming, with older siblings or parents. They were perhaps less likely to watch with their peers unless they had video-recorded a programme (see below).

*"WHO ELSE WATCHES IT?"*

*"My mum, my dad, my brother, my little brother who's eleven and even my little sister who is eight"*



*watches it. It has been in the house since I was little."*

D6: Female 19-24 BC1C2 Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

*"My deal with wrestling is with my lad. He watches it on Sky and on Channel 4. He likes to watch it so I watch it too."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

Most dedicated children (under 12s) claimed to have been watching professional wrestling such as WWF for as long as they could remember. Casual children (under 12s) sometimes began watching as a result of feeling left out of the conversations at school. This was perhaps especially true of girls who appeared keen to maintain their standing with the boys.

*"WHAT STARTED YOU WATCHING IT?"*

*"Just my friends talking about it."*

*"WHAT WERE THEY SAYING ABOUT IT THAT GOT YOU INTERESTED?"*

*"That it was really good and everything,"*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

*"WHY DO YOU WATCH IT?"*

*"It is fun."*

*"Everyone is watching it because my friends watched it and I went 'What are you talking about?' Now I know."*

*"It is good, you get to know the moves."*

*"I like to learn the moves."*

*"I know what they are going on about in school."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"My friend told me to watch it, Gabby. She has got a brother called James and he knows all about it."*

PD2: Female 6-7 BC1C2 Casual London Terrestrial

*"About six months ago we started watching it again when we moved to the new school where everyone watches it. So we watch it now because everyone was doing the moves and talking about it."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Many young boys claimed that they watched alone in bed late at night. This was supported by parents.

*"My boy watches it; he's got a TV in his own bedroom. I wouldn't say I watch it every week, sometimes I do watch it with him."*

G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

*"I watch at 12 or 2 o'clock in the morning."*

*"And it finishes about 4 o'clock."*

*"The main events are on Saturday nights at 1 o'clock."*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

On this evidence, girls under the age of 16 seemed much less likely to watch wrestling late at night, and had often not seen any post-watershed programming.

Dedicated viewers were much more likely to be watching late at night than casual viewers (see discussion of scheduling below).

## 1.2 Video

### 1.2.1 *Pre-recorded videos*

Videotape ownership was, unsurprisingly, more prevalent amongst dedicated viewers, but was much less the focus of discussion than television. This appeared to be partly because there was plenty of television coverage, and partly because television coverage was 'live', allowing viewers to keep up to date.

*"DO YOU PREFER THE VIDEOS YOU'VE GOT OR THE TV?"*

*"I prefer the TV, because it's all different. It starts to get boring when you watch the videos every time so I like the TV best."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

Respondents pointed out that each wrestler's status develops, the moves and action evolve, and 'the story' moves on with each new broadcast. You were not keeping up if you were watching videos.

It was noted that videos could be paused and advanced frame by frame enabling the viewer to interrogate the moves and spot the trickery. Some respondents were interested in this but others preferred to watch in real time and stay with the illusion.

*"On a video, you can pause it and you can see how fake it is."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Although bought videos were rarely mentioned spontaneously, many respondents owned them (ownership of videos had been a criteria for recruitment; see contact questionnaire appended) and parents often offered them as gifts.

Videos seemed in part talismanic; a way of registering allegiance to a

favoured fighter (for example, The Rock). Prized videos were more about a particular wrestler than a particular bout (more a case of Arsenal's Road to Wembley than Arsenal vs Spurs). It was important to own them, but not to keep on watching them.

A minority of dedicated adult males (with a C2DE bias) was more enthused about video. They referred to mail-order videos that they thought originated in America or Japan. They described these as depicting 'back-street fighting' or 'extreme fighting' and respondents expressed a strong suspicion that these fights were borderline-illegal. They were certainly thought to be too graphic for UK television. (It is very difficult to know precisely what is being referred to, but our understanding is that such video material is not classified in the UK, and is not legally obtainable here.)

Those who were familiar with these bouts appeared to think that they were unscripted, genuine contests, despite the widespread use of weapons, exploding rings, landmines, glass and nails, and even a chainsaw scalping.

*"I've seen a guy take a chainsaw to the top of this guy's head and scalp him. That was quite extreme. I've seen matches where the rings are barbed wire, nail beds, the outside covered in glass and the ring explodes after 15 minutes. There's landmines, there's the drawing pin matches where the whole bottom of the ring is covered in drawing pins; so when they hit the deck they're going to get stung."*  
G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

As evidence that these fights were real, respondents pointed to the absence of the showmanship that was such a conspicuous feature of televised wrestling. They also noted that the fights were over quickly and that there were no miraculous recoveries. It was very difficult to know exactly what videos were being talked about. One respondent would describe a video that he had seen at a friend's and had assumed had been bought by mail order, only to have another respondent say they had seen such a video in a local rental store. It seemed to be quite widely assumed that wrestling of a sort which would never be shown on television was available on video for anyone determined enough to look it out.

*"I've seen some Japanese videos of the really*

*extreme stuff. You see the real stuff and you see the fake stuff and you know (the difference). You've got that mental knowledge."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

**"WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT THE VIDEOS THAT ARE NOT SHOWN ON TV?"**

*"That is real wrestling, isn't it?"*

*"Full contact."*

*"Illegal."*

*"No stunts involved."*

**"DO PEOPLE GET HURT?"**

*"Absolutely."*

*"Stitched up."*

*"Bloody limbs."*

*"Broken bones."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"There was a wrestler from the extreme fighting who won the WWF. And then he went from like, probably fighting where he's going to be hurt to fake WWF."*

*"You wouldn't get extreme on telly I don't think. It will always be on video; I don't think you'd ever get it on telly, I don't think they'd allow it."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

**"PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME THERE ARE VIDEOS YOU CAN BUY MAIL ORDER THAT ARE EXTREME."**

*"The violence is unbelievable. They scatter the ring with drawing pins and slam them into it and hit each other with knuckle dusters. That wrestling is very hardcore, but it is available."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"Channel 5 wanted to show it for a bit but they were banned so they couldn't show it."*

**"ON WHAT BASIS DID THEY HAVE IT BANNED?"**

*"It was too violent."*

**"DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT?"**

*"To show on proper television, yeah. It was fights in car parks with glass in their hands and things like that."*

*"It gives people ideas, doesn't it?"*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

No-one in the sample said they had bought extreme videos, though some said they had seen them 'at a friend's'. The popular stance seemed to be that whilst they would not go out of their way to find such videos, they enjoyed watching them if they were readily available.

*"I'd watch these brutal contests that they have in America, I'd watch them. They're one on one and it's just like martial arts experts; they fight against each other to the death basically. I'd watch that. And I have watched it."*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

Most respondents, especially casual viewers, women and children

appeared to be entirely unaware of these videos.

### 1.2.2 *Video-recording*

Video-recording of late-night bouts was widespread, perhaps especially amongst dedicated boys. They often watched these bouts with their peers, and it seemed that parental supervision or intervention was minimal. This was supported by some parents' comments.

*"He will tape that. His cousin will tape it as well. His cousin used to tape it for us before we got cable."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

Video-recording late night bouts gave viewers access to post-watershed action (see following section) and enabled them to keep up with storylines and character development. It is important to note that the same wrestlers feature in both pre-watershed and late night broadcasts. Their 'story' is liable to move on whenever they fight, whatever the scheduling. Viewers, including many of the young, who were fans of a particular wrestler, were highly motivated to see *all* his bouts so as not to miss anything. Videoing late night bouts reflected determination to keep up with the storylines.

*"You can even get the American version that starts about 12 or 1 am and goes right the way through to about 4. That's when the video comes into play."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

Casual viewers were, unsurprisingly, less likely to video these programmes.

### 1.3 Scheduling

Dedicated viewers of all ages and a few casual viewers often watched post-watershed broadcasts (most notably Sky Sports One on Friday and Saturday evenings). These programmes were associated with more intense action, more (apparent) violence, greater use of props and a greater likelihood of bloodshed. They were also likely to feature more scantily clad women.

*"The late night one. It's a lot better wrestling. When they give them the forearm smashes in the late night one you actually see them go at one another."*

*"It's all acted but on a Saturday afternoon, it's just bad acting because they have taken the half decent bits out."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

Many casual viewers, especially women, appeared entirely unaware of the existence of post-watershed programming, and imagined that what they considered to be 'family entertainment' was the only wrestling programming available. Of the few casual viewers who were aware of this programming, the majority was not sufficiently interested to watch, and did not know to what extent it differed.

*"They're supposed to have an uncut version on sometime in the middle of the night aren't they, when it isn't bleeped? I've never got to watch one of them yet."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"DO ANY OF YOU WATCH THEM LATE AT NIGHT?"*

*"You get so much other TV on, like Eastenders."*

*"There is loads of better things."*

*"IS IT ANY DIFFERENT (LATE NIGHT WRESTLING)?"*

*"It is a bit ruder."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Broadcasters', or regulators', interventions to mask or cut the most violent moments were often mentioned spontaneously. The Channel 5 practice of using 'splats' was widely criticised by both children and adults.

*"WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE SPEECH BUBBLES?"*

*"They put them in the way of the chair."*

*"They shouldn't do that."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"DO YOU LIKE THAT, WHEN IT COMES UP WITH THOSE THINGS?"*

*"No, because we want to see it."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

*"You saw her being thrown, saw her on the floor. Obviously you think she's hit the table. She's obviously supposed to be unconscious so why not just show it?"*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

They argued that it was frustrating, that viewers knew what was happening, and that there was no point in not showing the moment of impact. It was also said that this practice could make the programme appear childish, and potentially reinforce the perception that wrestling

was essentially cartoon-like, and comic. Interestingly, all ages (including the six year olds) felt that cuts and splats were for the benefit of people yet younger than themselves.

*"They cut that. They stopped you seeing that, it is stupid!"*

*"WHY DO THEY DO THAT?"*

*"To stop five year olds watching it."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

The practice of freezing action used elsewhere also attracted complaint; again, it was clear what was occurring, so respondents wondered why broadcasters bothered to cut the action. A few suspected that in some cases it might be the programme makers who cut the action in an attempt to obscure moments where impact had too obviously *not* been made.

The practice of freezing and replaying action preceding cuts was sometimes thought to be counter-productive as it focussed heavily on the tantalising moment just before impact.

Despite widespread annoyance at the practice of cutting, there was no evidence that viewers attempted to reinstate specific cuts by looking on the Internet or at pre-recorded videos.

#### 1.4 Classification

There was no spontaneous comment about video classification, but many under 12s in the sample appeared to have seen 18 certificate action. When prompted, some parents said that they did try to monitor what came into the house.

*"I do abide by it (certificate) most of the time, and there are a lot of them that I wouldn't let him see. Because there are a few that even I don't want to watch. Wherever it comes from, I always try to find out or I look at it. I think when there is too much blood in them, it puts me off, so I would think it would put a 13 year old off too. He could probably handle it more than I could, but I just think 'No'."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

It was clear that older siblings frequently frustrated the purpose of classifications. The prevalence of video-recording late night programmes, and the tendency of boys to get together in each others'

homes to watch videos, made it difficult for parents to police what their children watched. Parents who were not dedicated fans tended in any case to assume that all wrestling was on roughly the same level and therefore saw no reason to prevent their children seeing late broadcasts. In this sample parents who were themselves watching late broadcasts rarely seemed to see it as important to police their children's viewing of wrestling.

## 1.5 The wrestling 'brands'

### 1.5.1 *World Wrestling Federation (WWF)*

Not all respondents made very clear distinctions between the different broadcasts. For instance, a minority of casual viewers simply said that they watched 'wrestling', and it emerged that WWF was the only one they watched and knew. Unsurprisingly, dedicated viewers generally specified more exactly what they watched.

WWF was easily the most widely watched and top of mind across the sample. It clearly dominated their thoughts on wrestling, and was viewed as the Premiership, the only one that really mattered, and the one where wrestlers would naturally want to be. WWF had the biggest names and the best atmosphere (the most razzmatazz and hype).

*"WWF has more popular wrestlers; people know the moves and stuff."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

It had the most compelling storylines, and was the most innovative in terms of action, props and storylines. Other brands were perceived as imitating WWF.

*"In WWF, there's a lot more talking than there is actually wrestling on the programme."*

*"There's a lot of things like managers and things like that in WWF. They'll come in and start fighting with the other wrestlers."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"(In WCW) You know the final outcome's already predicted, but you can never tell in WWF, there's always turning points."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"Suddenly loads of people pile in the ring, it's 'Oh*



*what's going on here?' Yet with WCW it seems as though they're trying to get the fight out of the way. Whereas in WWF it seems there's loads of twists, and you just don't know what's going to happen next. So it's interesting viewing in a sense."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

### 1.5.2 World Championship Wrestling (WCW)

World Championship Wrestling (WCW) was viewed very much as the poor relation. It was commonly dismissed as a wrestlers' graveyard, where ageing fighters were put out to grass, or a training ground for potential future WWF stars.

*"They (wrestlers) have popularity with the kids. Once that popularity wears off they move to WCW. That is where the old guys end up."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"The characters aren't that big stars. Most of the has beens go from WWF to WCW, and all the rising stars go to the WWF."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"I think WCW is like the third division football, it's the next step down."*

D5: Male 16-18 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

The wrestlers were often unknown, their attitudes towards their opponents were unknown, and this made the bouts very significantly less interesting for many viewers.

*"It's pointless watching because you won't know who they are and why they are fighting."*

D6: Female 19-24 BC1C2 Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

*"HAVE YOU GOT A LEAST FAVOURITE WRESTLING PROGRAMME?"*

*"WCW, if you don't know the moves it is boring."*

*"Or the wrestlers."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Some complained that it was 'just wrestling'. In WCW the wrestling was not perceived as embedded in an on-going drama of rivalries, treacheries, and alliances to the degree that it was in WWF. WCW bouts were accordingly felt to be less interesting and more predictable.

*"WCW is so boring because you know what's going to happen."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"WWF builds up to the matches doesn't it? The WCW is just plain matches straightaway but like on*

*the WWF it shows them arguing and stuff outside the ring.”*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

The atmosphere (the enthusiasm of the crowd) was typically more muted, and the excitement of the razzmatazz and hype were missing. WCW was also accused of being strongly derivative and of plagiarising WWF, but with cheaper production values.

*“The bloke with the hat on is copying a bloke in WWF. They copy names for moves and stuff as well.”*

*“They always copy the moves from WWF.”*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*“There’s hardly any people watching in the arenas and they just rip everything off the WWF.”*

*“They paint things on their faces and copy all the moves and re-name them and stuff like that. It’s boring to watch.”*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

It was also thought to be more difficult to suspend disbelief watching WCW than WWF, as it was more obvious that contact was often not made.

*“WCW, I’ll watch it but it’s not very real.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*“In WCW you get two blokes that enter the ring. They’ll come in against the champion and they’ll give him a bit of a beating and they take one beating back, and the wrestling is over. You know it’s all the same. It seems wooden, as in when they’re running in they like stop, wait for the moment and then go into it. WWF flows into the moves. It looks like they’re getting hit for a start. When you see it on WCW they stop.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

### 1.5.3 *Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW)*

Not everyone was aware of ECW, and those who were saw it as something apart. They described it as anarchic and claimed that anything was possible.

*“WHAT ABOUT ECW?”*

*“Just psychos.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

The distinction between what was real and what was simulated

seemed generally less clear than with WWF or WCW.

*"ECW is real, isn't it?"*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Some respondents seemed to believe that there was more genuine pain and suffering in ECW than in WWF or WCW; they pointed out that the action was more intense, more bloody and that there were more weapons.

*"DO YOU SEE PEOPLE GETTING REALLY HURT?"*

*"Oh yes."*

*"Yeah, it's proper wrestling."*

*"I think the only rule is you're not allowed to gouge the eyes."*

*"No biting, no eye gouging."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"The ECW, we get on Cable, and the WWF is different. It (WWF) is all showmanship, the way it is packaged it is great entertainment, but the ECW is pretty heavy stuff. These guys are getting stuck in. Some of these guys are getting hurt badly, it is violent."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

However, there was less interest in the storylines and the underlying soap. The only thing to like about ECW was the relative extremity of the action.

ECW generated some real enthusiasm amongst a few dedicated, boys (10-12), who appreciated what they called 'hardcore', 'extreme' action. They enjoyed the heavy use of props, and the emphasis on chaos and madness.

*"WHY IS ECW BEST?"*

*"It is hard core."*

*"WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?"*

*"They slam them through tables."*

*"They hit them with weapons."*

*"And hit them with ladders and everything."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

As noted above, many casual viewers and dedicated younger women had never heard of ECW (their reactions when shown clips of this wrestling are discussed in section 4.4).

#### 1.5.4 'Sub-brands'

Different sorts of contest are given different names, and a number of these 'sub-brands' within wrestling were mentioned, for example 'Heat', 'Rebellion', 'Raw', 'Smackdown' and so on. Some dedicated fans had favourite sorts, but references to these were often fleeting and it was difficult for researchers to grasp what the various names identified, or to pinpoint distinctions.

## 2. In what spirit do people watch wrestling?

### 2.1 Early TV wrestling

The overall image of wrestling for many adults was informed by their childhood recollections about 'British Wrestling'. They spoke fondly about Saturday afternoons in the 1970s and early 80s spent watching ITV's World of Sport with the family. They recalled how the BBC had all the football, and ITV was left with more obscure and quirky sports such as wrestling. The programmes had, apparently, been popular with older family members, parents and perhaps especially grandparents.

*"We were brought up on it because me mum and dad used to watch it."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Many clearly associated this 'British Wrestling' with 'grannies' (the 'Bingo' crowd) who, reportedly, watched enthusiastically and were often strongly partisan.

*"My dad used to watch it a long long time ago, on Saturday. Old ladies bashing them at the sides with umbrellas."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"Older ladies. You'd see them round the ring in the days of Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

This wrestling was less obviously related to show business than the professional wrestling of WWF and there was some doubt as to whether 'British wrestlers' were paid or amateur, whether all matches

were rigged or whether some bouts were genuine contests.

*"They actually looked like they were fighting."*

*"It was more of a sport then."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"Oh it's a hell of a lot more glamorous now."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Although perceived as a little more like sport, less like show business than WWF, 'British Wrestling' was rarely regarded unambiguously as a genuine sport. Opinions on how 'rigged' it was seemed to depend on the degree of showmanship in any particular bout. When both wrestlers were dressed in wrestler's leotards and appeared to wrestle seriously the bout might be regarded as genuine. Wrestlers in costume with clearly delineated characters, and plenty of theatrical shenanigans (such as bouts with Catweasel, Big Daddy or Giant Haystacks), were not. These apparently different sorts of bouts might follow each other. The more theatrical performances tended to dominate people's memories and shaped viewers' perceptions of wrestling as a whole.

Many remembered a clear distinction between good and evil, typically played out in grudge matches between Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks, with Big Daddy the inevitable victor. Mick McManus was another well remembered character, famously tough. Although apparently remembered by most as uncomplicated fun, a degree of raw physicality was a more prominent part of 'British Wrestling' than of WWF and the like, in part because there was so much less emphasis on show-business - costumes, pre-match build-ups, etc. The physical grappling took up more of the show and was a more important part of the appeal. In the absence of weapons and props the action was more about large sweaty bodies. It emerged that the popular mythology of 'British Wrestling' included the notion that women liked it because they liked watching near-naked men fighting each other. Respondents indicated that they understood this to be the case without confirming that it was true for them or those in their families.

After 'British wrestling' disappeared from the screens, many adults (particularly casual viewers) reported a break in viewing wrestling until

their children introduced them to WWF many years later.

*“DID THEY (CHILDREN) GET YOU INTERESTED IN IT?”*

*“I must admit they did. But then as time went on I tend to watch it more than they do because they are out half of the time.”*

*“BUT YOU DIDN’T WATCH IT BEFORE THEY GOT YOU INTERESTED IN IT?”*

*“To be honest I didn’t really, although years ago I did watch it with my dad. Now that it’s on different channels, four and five, there seems to be a lot more of it now.”*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*“I watch it more recently because of my children.*

*But I used to watch the old wrestling with people like Giant Haystacks and all that lot.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

‘British Wrestling’ seemed to have bequeathed to most adult viewers an image of something to be regarded as light entertainment - antics fit for children as well as adults, with a strong element of farce.

## 2.2 Wrestling now

### 2.2.1 Overview

Professional wrestling like WWF on TV nowadays was regarded by almost everybody, at a rational level, as ‘entertainment’ rather than a genuine sport.

*“You have categories of what you watch on telly and this comes into my category of ‘entertaining bollocks’. Like things like Blind Date - things that are rubbish but you watch them anyway because it’s a giggle and it’s not taxing your brain.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Nevertheless, it was regularly, though usually unthinkingly, referred to as ‘sport’. It was perceived as related to sport, not least because it was ostensibly, at least, a contest. As with almost all sport, interest centred on the outcome - who would win.

*“You know who you want to win.”*

*“You want your favourites to win.”*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Some of the attributes wrestlers exhibited - a powerful and impressive physique, athleticism, exact timing and skill - were associated with

other sports. Training was widely agreed to be evident and important.

*"Because they're all body builders so that makes it sport in that respect."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Moreover, wrestling was usually broadcast in a sports slot (World of Sport and now Sky Sports): the programmers appeared to treat it as sport.

However, many things set professional wrestling apart from 'genuine' sports. The overall tone - set by the amount of time devoted to pomp and razzmatazz, the importance of the 'storylines', the characterisations, costumes, props and so on - distanced it from the vast majority of sports.

*"I used to see it as a sport when I was little, but now I don't know."*

*"It's more of a show, isn't it?"*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"Big fireworks, it is a big spectacle."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"IS IT A SPORT?"*

*"No."*

*"It's a show."*

*"There is sport involved though."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Flamboyant flouting of the 'rules' and the referee's authority were other factors distancing wrestling from genuine sport and especially from boxing.

*"Wrestling is completely fake like the WWF, WCW. Boxing is an art form really. Boxing's, like, there's your Queensbury rules."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Perhaps most important of all, wrestling was not genuine sport because it was not a genuine contest. The outcome, although a focus of intense interest, was 'fixed'. It was fixed in the sense that it was predetermined in accordance with many considerations which had little or nothing to do with what went on during the contest itself.

*"WHY IS IT NOT LIKE BOXING?"*

*"Wrestling they practise and practise the moves and they don't actually really hurt each other. Boxing is a contest where you don't know the outcome."*

*"You can get killed from boxing."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"I'd say years ago it perhaps was a type of sport, you know, but to me a sport is more competitive."*

*"You get a winner. With wrestling, I know you do eventually get a winner, but.. "*

*"It's a staged thing."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Professional wrestling was regarded as unique - unlike anything else but including elements of many different things. These elements are described below.

### 2.2.2 Soap opera

Professional wrestling, and particularly WWF, was frequently likened to a 'soap opera'.

*"It's just a complex soap opera."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Respondents regularly referred to 'storylines', although these seem much more basic and limited than the storylines in normal TV soaps. Some of the 'peripheral' activity in wrestling - for example, who stole whose wife, or the Stone Cold Steve Austin 'hit and run' - threads through a number of bouts over a considerable time and certainly becomes a focus of interest for many viewers.

*"Austin was out of wrestling for a year; he got run over after a match and broke his neck or something and it put him out for a year. It turned out it was Triple H who plotted it. They had one match with Austin and Triple H and they got Austin in a car and lifted him up really high and dropped it. I think he got*



*to the back seat and hid there. You saw the car come along and hit him, and he rolled over the car and was on the bonnet. He was then out for a year with neck injuries... I was looking forward to Austin coming back; he said he would go through every single wrestler until he found out who did it to him. And he did, he found out who done it in the end and got hold of him. One of them owned up to it, said 'I did it to help out the Rock' - he is an Indian, his dad was a chief - he helped the Rock get the WWF title. Then Triple H came in and gave him a good kicking and said 'I did it'; the cameras followed him round the ring and out to the car park and Triple H was waiting in the car for Austin but he couldn't find him anywhere. All of a sudden, you heard this crane lifting up the car and it dropped him down and the programme finished. That was it until the following Friday when they said Triple H has got a few injuries and that was it until Smackdown on the Saturday."*  
D7: Male 25-35 C2DE Dedicated London MCTV

*"There was one two years ago where a main wrestler called Stone Cold got run over and no one knew who did it. He was walking along by the arena and he got knocked down; then after four months he was tracing who knocked him over; he had to go through each wrestler and when he found out... I was interested in tuning in to find out how he was doing and what was going to happen about it."*  
D5: Male 16-18 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

There is ongoing interest also in the development of the wrestlers as characters, and in their relationships with one another (see also below). But this ongoing interest is perhaps flattered by the comparisons with TV soap operas. These of course typically feature a much broader social canvas and a wider range of emotions than does wrestling. The emotions aroused by wrestling tend to be from a certain spectrum - anger, aggression, fear, grievance, revenge, pride, lust, humiliation, jealousy and obsession. Forgiveness, compassion, love, loyalty, friendship and so on are much more rarely represented. Moreover the action in wrestling is of course centred around one activity rather than the variety of 'ordinary life' represented in most TV soaps.

It was clear that keeping track of broader developments engaged virtually all dedicated and many casual viewers. In this respect, WWF is perhaps more like a football league than a soap: with viewers tuning in to find out what happened on Saturday, and what the consequences of this might be. Like a football league, the 'story' evolves through contests, and the trials and tribulations contribute to the emotional

charge and encourage alliances.

It is very difficult to know how important the soap and the storylines are relative to the physical action. Clearly their importance varies in that different people are interested in different aspects of wrestling. We suspect that some respondents exaggerated the contribution of the storylines to the overall appeal of wrestling for them and understated the contribution of the physical action. This is more a hypothesis than a conviction and we cannot cite clear evidence in support. However those respondents who located their interest primarily in the soap often said they were not very interested in the wrestling itself and all three researchers felt they were unconvincing in saying this. It also seemed, when watching respondents watch clips of wrestling action, that most respondents' attention and involvement were extremely acute when the action was intense.

It is possible that some people are happier talking about the storylines (and the humour) than about the action because they feel it is in some way culturally less respectable to enjoy the physicality and violence of wrestling. Making storylines and humour the focus of interest allows some viewers to differentiate themselves from the lowest-common denominator audience. They present their interest in wrestling as at a remove - in a spirit sometimes as close to mockery as to genuine appreciation (rather as some people present their interest in gossip magazines like *Hello* and *OK*). This stance is encouraged by all the uncertainties and ambiguities in wrestling. It is often unclear what the audience's attention is supposed to be on, or what is to be taken seriously, what not. Of course the storyline packaging and the contrivances have genuine interest for many, but our impression strongly is that the physical action - indeed, the violence - is the core product and remains absolutely central to wrestling's appeal for most people.

It is important to note that storylines foment expectations of intensely violent, ruthless bouts and are largely responsible for the pre-eminence of the WWF. They make wrestling seem to be about personal grievance and provide a rationale for those sequences which go clearly beyond a professional or sporting contest. Perhaps most

importantly, they encourage the perception that things are getting, or may get, completely out of hand.

### 2.2.3 *Pantomime/circus*

Some respondents were reminded of pantomime or circus by the acrobatics, the slapstick action, the outlandish costumes and the characterisation in wrestling as well as the crowd participation and the similarities between the referee and a clown.

*“Clowns have fights at circuses.”*  
*“With custard pies and that.”*  
*“IS WRESTLING LIKE ANYTHING ELSE?”*  
*“Closest I could get would be a circus.”*  
G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*“It’s just like being at a circus.”*  
G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

The television programme *Gladiators* was often mentioned, bringing to mind the larger than life heroes and villains, the costumes, the stadium atmosphere, the crowd-pleasing antics, the foam fingers and the contest. The apparent size of the crowd and scale of the stadium contributed to the excitement for children and the fun for adults.

*“The enclosed space and banked crowds, the fireworks and the razzmatazz, they are very common now.”*  
*“It is showbiz.”*  
G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*“It is very visual; there are flashing lights everywhere and things like that.”*  
G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

It is perhaps worth noting briefly that despite the similarities, especially in the atmosphere, *Gladiators* contrasts sharply with wrestling in having a very conspicuous preoccupation with participant safety. The referee, and rules generally, are also respected in *Gladiators* in a way that is flamboyantly not the case with wrestling.

### 2.2.4 *Boxing*

The ring, the referee’s count, the importance of footwork, the apparent ‘contest’ and the grudges reminded people of boxing with its hype and

narrative.

*“One similarity with boxing is, because there is so much money involved, the pre-fight hype is similar to wrestling.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

There were also similarities in the light shows, pounding music and grand entrances which heightened anticipation, helped delay the action and developed the atmosphere. It should perhaps go without saying that wrestling was also perceived as very different from boxing. The latter was regarded as a genuine contest.

### 2.2.5 Cartoons

Professional wrestling was sometimes likened to cartoons. They shared the use of: household props; imperviousness to, and quick recovery from, apparent injury; unrelentingly hectic pace; chaos; and comic book characterisation.

### 2.2.6 Olympic wrestling

Interestingly, professional wrestling was regarded as only distantly related, if at all, to the wrestling seen by a few in the Olympics. These respondents were, with one or two exceptions, not interested in Olympic wrestling. It was perceived as boring because it lacked, among other things, the showmanship and ceremony associated with modern televised wrestling.

*“DO YOU WATCH THE OLYMPIC WRESTLING?”*

*“No, it’s boring.”*

*“WHY IS IT BORING?”*

*“Because it’s real.”*

*“There’s no story.”*

*“They don’t bring the snakes and nails and the girls going at it.”*

*“Everyone doesn’t get involved.”*

*“They have this tag team and they’ll turn against the one in the tag team. It’s like this big major thing and the crowd goes wild and you don’t get that at the Olympics.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*“I’ve watched amateur wrestling. It’s crap. They have to have their shoulders square on the mat to get a point of some description and even if it’s only off by half an inch or so it’s not a point; it’s very boring to watch, I wouldn’t watch it.”*

Some respondents were unaware that wrestling existed as an Olympic sport; this seemed utterly out of keeping with what they knew.

*"IS IT AN OLYMPIC SPORT, WRESTLING?"*  
*"No, I don't think it is. I don't think it is a sport."*  
D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

Occasionally, recalling Kurt Angle's Olympic credentials (he won an Olympic gold for wrestling) prompted some to make a link.

### 2.2.7 Collages

Words and pictures taken from a selection of magazines and newspapers were used in some sessions to give researchers another way of looking at wrestling and respondents another way of talking about it. Organised under various headings: women; men; action; words; miscellaneous (animals, colours, landscapes and buildings) respondents in some groups were asked to select images which they felt were suggestive of wrestling. Photographs of professional wrestlers and bouts were not included to encourage respondents to think about the feel and tone of wrestling, rather than constructing a rational representation of it. The same images were available to all. The materials selected were collated and organised onto separate boards, one for adult respondents (aged 16+) and one for children (12 and under).

Collage is useful because it gives respondents a different medium with which to express their feelings for the essence of a subject and can, thereby help bypass stock responses. In this case, the hope was that the appeal of wrestling might emerge differently and perhaps more accurately if it were expressed in pictures. The theory is that impressions conveyed in picture sorts are less mediated by rational considerations, partly because the exercise is unfamiliar, partly because pictures enable people to express what they may not (fully) understand themselves. This last point of course presents difficulties as well as opportunities; picture sorts and collages are open to different interpretations and it is impossible to be certain which is the right one.

The two collages emerging in this project look very different. It is striking that the adult collage appears slicker, glossier and more preoccupied by character, especially the projection of men, than that produced by children. Children seem to be more preoccupied by the portrayal of conflict, aggression and defeat.

Adults selected more conventionally glamorous and seductive images of women than children did. The female poses chosen by children are more aggressive and brazen, giving the impression that part of the appeal of wrestling, for them, is in the area of asserting independence, repudiating restraint, and, possibly, being as powerful as the men. However, in their spoken responses, female respondents, and especially girls, often referred to the women in wrestling as 'tarts' or 'prostitutes', that is, both sexually predatory and sexually submissive (see section 5.4).

Adult images of men represent a broad spectrum: stylish, sharp-suited shots; silhouettes of sportsmen; superheroes (Batman, Russell Crowe from the film *Gladiator*); villains (Jack Nicholson, the devil); musicians (Goths); heavily tattooed rock fans. Children's visuals are less varied, although they too felt that the image of rock fans was reminiscent of wrestling and, like the adults, selected a filmic villain (Robert de Niro) and balanced it with a hero (Russell Crowe again).

When it came to action, adults tended to limit their selection to representation through screen shots from computer games. Children also used these, but included a much broader range of images and different media, including cartoon, painting, photographs of martial arts and an image of a dead animal. This suggests that children are preoccupied by the different manifestations of conflict and aggression within wrestling and that this may interest some more than issues to do with character or plot (see section 3.1 below).

A copy of each of the collages may be found appended.

### **3. What's the appeal?**

### 3.1 Overview

The first thing to be said under this head is that people who watch wrestling really like it. These respondents were almost all, even the more casual viewers, really enthusiastic about it. It was regarded as 'very entertaining' and 'a great show'.

The enjoyment of wrestling seems to be multi-layered and multi-dimensional. Contributing to the enjoyment of these viewers was an appreciation of: the demonstrations of physical skill; the comedy/buffoonery; the inter-relationships of the various players; and the action and drama of the contest itself.

In part because it is multi-layered, but also for other reasons, the appeal of wrestling is hard to pin down. There are reasons to think that viewers do not always themselves know what really appeals to them. Certainly some viewers feel happier talking about some of their reasons for liking wrestling than about others. Amongst the various difficulties is a degree of uncertainty about what the audience is meant to be noticing or concentrating on. Wrestling is full of subterfuges and how much the audience is assumed to be in on the act is deliberately left unclear. Many viewers seem to feel they have a distinctive take on it, seeing themselves as apart from an audience of 'others' who they assume are impressed by the passion, the violence or the sex in a way that they themselves are not. Some viewers, even some children, certainly see themselves as more sophisticated, more knowing, than they think most viewers are.

What respondents said they liked about wrestling varied across the sample, perhaps most notably by age. Adults, particularly, tended to account for their appreciation of wrestling in terms of the physical skill, comedy and the soap opera. They were less likely to refer spontaneously to the intensity of the action. However, it was impossible to observe respondents watching the clips shown in the research without concluding that the physical action was central to their enjoyment. If it was not necessarily essential for the action to appear to be real, it was essential for it to look dramatic.

The under 12s certainly perceived wrestlers as skilful but they were less likely than adults to say how much they admired this skill. Their interest was more openly in the physical encounter - what the wrestlers did to each other, how dramatic and apparently extreme their actions were. It seems possible that this was in part because they were less anxious than adults to say the right thing in public. Children were also less likely than adults to say they enjoyed wrestling because they found it funny.

### 3.2 Demonstrations of physical skill

Many people, usually adults (but including many children) referred, especially early on in interviews or discussions, to how skilful wrestlers were. They said that they admired their split-second timing and the meticulous practice that made the fluidity of the action possible.

*"I mean there is a lot of talent in it. I couldn't do all these backflips and things they do."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"They're very athletic."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

This agility was all the more impressive when performed by the 'big guys'.

*"They're quick, even some of the bigger guys. Like that Rikishi, he's very quick and it is amazing how quick some of them move for the size of them."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

For most adults, part of what they were admiring was explicitly the skilful moves and subterfuges which made the action *look* dramatic, but ensured that nobody was really hurt.

*"I like the choreography. It must have taken a long time to learn those moves. That bit where they throw themselves off the ropes must hurt. The quality of some of the moves, they are doing back flips, double back flips sometimes and landing on a bloke in the middle of the ring. I think if you are a 16-17 stone man that is going to hurt. You have got to get that right as well. Whatever level you watch it, it is impressive."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*"I watch it with a different perspective to the kids. How 18-20 stone blokes can throw each other*



*around like that and not get injured is beyond me, the timing is phenomenal. It has got to be.”*  
D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

### 3.3 Sex

As already noted, it seemed to be regarded as axiomatic among some of the older male respondents that women had enjoyed ‘British Wrestling’ because they got some sort of sexual buzz from watching the big, well-muscled men. This sexual element in the appeal of wrestling seemed to be part of its myth but, like so much else in wrestling, was difficult to pin down. Many older respondents were happy to go along with the idea that wrestling was sexy without really confirming or denying that it appealed to them personally in a sexual way.

Some female respondents laughingly said they enjoyed watching half naked men, and a few said they fancied particular wrestlers, notably The Rock. In general it seemed that the women felt that the sex in wrestling was no more to be taken seriously than anything else - it was all over the top, and ridiculous.

The bikini-clad wrestlers, wives, girlfriends and general hangers-on seemed more conventionally titillating for many of the men. Many male respondents, including most of the young lads, expressed hearty enthusiasm for this relatively recent development - the more ‘babes’ the better.

*“HOW WOULD YOU MAKE WRESTLING BETTER?”*

*“Rip off the ladies’ dresses.”*

*“Because their boobs come out.”*

*“Take all the crap men out and put all the nice women in there.”*

*“Show off their boobs.”*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

*“With women dressed like that you’re not going to turn it off when that comes on are you.”*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“HOW WOULD YOU LIKE WRESTLING TO CHANGE?”*

*“Give us more girls.”*

*“Aye obviously. Better girls and more.”*

*“And less clothes on the girls.”*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"Women wearing basically tiny little tops with their boobs sticking out...it works. It does for me."*  
G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

However, male attitudes towards young women in wrestling, in the research situation at least, were determinedly jocular. The atmosphere of wrestling was too open, too family and too circus-like for the men to feel at all furtive or uneasy about the sexual element.

### 3.4 Comedy

Many adults and a few children argued that the primary appeal of wrestling was essentially comic. Wrestling was regarded as slapstick or burlesque and some clearly held the view that to take it more seriously was to miss the point.

*"You just look at it and pick holes in it. That's what I do at home."*  
G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"I take the mick."*  
D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

For adults, the comedy was grounded in hyperbole: the overblown commentary; the crudely engineered and melodramatically expressed grudges; the outlandish costumes; the parody of a referee and the consistent sense of the ridiculous derived from the unconvincing acting and improbably unrestrained behaviour of the wrestlers.

*"WHAT ABOUT THE COMMENTATORS?"*  
*"I can't believe any adult of sane mind and body would get in such a state. I just laugh at it."*  
D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*"I think it's the wrestlers themselves, they tend to make it more interesting. You get a laugh at it as well."*  
D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*"It's so stupid it makes you want to watch it because it's funny."*  
*"IS THERE ONE THING THAT KEEPS YOU WANTING TO WATCH IT?"*  
*"It's just so funny."*  
*"So stupid."*  
*"It's so funny it's addictive."*  
*"It's so over the top, you think none of this can be real."*  
G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"I think it's funny; I like the storylines behind the wrestlers, all the shit behind the ring. It makes me*

*laugh."*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

For some, the predictability of the outcome of contests was another source of amusement.

*"When you watch a James Bond film, James Bond will come and stop the bomb from going off with two seconds left. You know he's going to save the day. Same with wrestling. You know what's going to happen next, but you still watch it."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Almost all respondents had seen wrestling which involved domestic items such as rubbish bins, ironing boards and chairs and tables (and more rarely sledgehammers, nails and so on). The use of these props and the slapstick action they encouraged, added significantly to the enjoyment. For some, unconvincing props afforded an opportunity to see the 'strings being pulled' which was amusing, and perhaps helped them to relieve tension. (Props are discussed in more detail in section 4.3 below).

*"WHY IS THAT ENTERTAINING?"*

*"Because that guy is pretending to hit that guy with barbed wire; and it looks as if it is real and I think that is great, really well done."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

Children were less likely than adults to say that they enjoyed wrestling as comedy, but observation of children watching wrestling suggested that they appeared to be amused by the action much as they would be amused at the violent action in a cartoon. They often appeared most amused when props were introduced.

### 3.5 The on-going underlying drama

In addition to admiring the physical skills and enjoying the comedy of wrestling, many people referred to the 'storylines' (see above). They claimed to follow wrestling (almost always WWF) much as they would a soap opera - to see how the plot might develop and what would happen next.

*"You do get caught up in it and while you are watching it you think 'What is he doing?' But you know, deep down, it has all been scripted; it is the soap opera of it."*

*"The story has a lot to play; if you forget that you have got two guys hitting each other in a ring, the story makes the characters, it makes the WWF."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"Why are Coronation Street and Eastenders so popular? How come in Eastenders, somebody gets shot, somebody gets killed, that just wouldn't happen in real life? You know it's fake but you watch it because it's entertainment. It's all about how cleverly it's produced isn't it? I know it's a total opposite thing, one's just constant fighting and Eastenders can be just normal life, but it's all just script writing. If it's good script writing and it's good viewing, everybody's going to watch it."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHO THE CHARACTERS ARE?"*

*"Yeah."*

*"And know what they've been up to."*

*"It's like a soap."*

*"Yeah, you always have your favourite (character) in a soap."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Part of the pleasure here appeared to be interpreting developments and second-guessing the plot-makers behind the scenes.

*"They don't always give you what you are expecting. You expect The Rock to win and if they made that happen, they would not get to the next step. The other person has to win so that you look at it again, go back and watch it again and see what is going on. It is part of the story."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Those who enjoyed doing this often seemed to have a sense of superiority; they were on the inside track - aficionados who were more knowing and more detached from the action than the average Joe. They claimed to be as interested in interpreting the arcane, gothic machinations of WWF as in the action itself. They seemed to identify with the 'scriptwriters' as they tracked the evolution of goodies into baddies, winners into losers, rising into fading stars.

*"Some of the things they come up with are great and interesting. I like to watch it because I like to think about what they are going to do next, and see if I am right."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*"I think one of the funniest parts of it, and I don't know if it's meant to be funny, is trying to picture them writing the script before; I'm trying to imagine them sitting round in a room, how do they come up with it? Where did the idea come from?"*

For these respondents, the interrelationship between the characters was continually shifting, but not simplistically along a dimension of good and evil, but in other subtler and less predictable ways. Wrestlers who might appear to be on the side of justice one week, were mired in controversy the next. Wrestlers who were the victims of treachery were expected to seek revenge but would muddy the waters by hitting on the wrong guys. The playmakers behind the scenes seemed to be continually trying to wrong foot or bamboozle the audience, and it was this complexity and unpredictability which, they said, fascinated the more dedicated viewers, especially the men.

*"It's goodies and baddies isn't it? And then the goody might be a goody this week and a baddy next week, because they swap around. I see wrestlers that I saw ten years ago and all they've done is changed names."*

D7: Male 25-35 C2DE Dedicated London MCTV

As we note elsewhere, children, and especially boys, often said their main interest in wrestling was in the physical action. However some were also imaginatively engaged by the background machinations, and the wrestlers' personas. Just as they concentrated hard on the detail of the wrestling moves, they followed closely the ins and outs of the stories and the changing fortunes of the characters.

*"Stone Cold got run over by Rikishi; Triple H told Rikishi to do it. He paid him and in the end they had a match, because Stone Cold was out for a year and he came back."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*"He is The Undertaker's brother. There is a story that says he set light to his mum's house when he was little and she died. He was so badly scarred his dad locked him in a basement and when he came out The Undertaker was there. They hated each other because The Undertaker was the one who started the fire. So that is why he wears a mask."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Many believed that this arcane world comprised a cast of thousands. It was not only the wrestlers and referees who were actors playing out roles: the police, medics, crowd (parts of it, and individuals within it), commentators, and administrators were all usually (though sometimes uncertainly) seen as 'not real' - not what they seemed, there to

advance or lend credibility to the action.

*"HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANY WHERE THE POLICE HAVE BEEN CALLED?"*

*"I have. When Stone Cold was going to beat up Rikishi the police came and stopped them and dragged him off."*

*"DO YOU THINK IT WAS THE REAL POLICE?"*

*"No."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"VINCE MCMAHON?"*

*"He pretends to be the owner of WWF."*

*"I wouldn't imagine him as the person who's pulling the strings.. I don't expect this big body builder to suddenly say, 'Right I'm the president now, I'm going to beat you all up.'"*

*"They're all just puppets basically."*

*"They're doing a job."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

The wrestlers were perceived by most respondents across the age spectrum as well paid professionals who adopted personas as a form of branding but also to help build the tension by increasing the scope for larger-than-life grudges and conspiracies.

*"DO THE WRESTLERS EVER REALLY GET ANGRY?"*

*"No, they can't afford to get angry. They'd hurt each other if they did."*

*"I think if they do, it's probably more personal, out of the ring, and not to do with the whole thing. But when they're cursing each other on the screen, it's not real."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"He's just another actor anyway. (Vince) McMahon's just another actor."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"They are all actors and good athletes. They have got charisma and personality. They can't just be good at wrestling and have no charisma. It is the whole package."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

However, some respondents, especially among the children but also some casual viewers, were clearly less confident that they knew the boundaries of the WWF world. They often did not know what to believe.

*"WHAT DO YOU THINK HE'S LIKE WHEN HE'S NOT WRESTLING? HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THAT?"*

*"They all sleep in the wrestling place."*

*"Yes, The Rock definitely does because in his room I saw his bed."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

*"ARE THEY THE REAL POLICE, DO YOU THINK?"*

*"Yes."*

*"I don't know."*

*"I don't think so."*

*"I am not sure; they don't seem real, they have not got the right gear."*

*"WHY NOT?"*

*"They arrest them and they (wrestlers) come back."*

*"They only get arrested for two minutes."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*"THE AMBULANCE MEN, WHEN TRISH GOT PUT THROUGH THE TABLE, ARE THEY REAL?"*

*"I don't know."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

### 3.6 The action; what the wrestlers do to each other

The skill, the comedy and the soap opera were certainly important to the appeal of wrestling, but the contest itself, the 'bout' was the hook on which everything else hung and which remained (possibly to a greater extent than some adults would admit) the core attraction.

*"It's an escape from reality. I mean I wouldn't go out and kick a girl in the street but when you see the girls fighting on there I think 'Yeah, go on!'"*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

What wrestlers did to each other was expected to be compelling to watch; the best wrestlers were not only those with the best developed personas, but the most skilful and/or imaginative physically.

Periods of observation of viewers suggested that their attention usually appeared to be most acute when wrestlers were making their moves, and particularly their often unique finishing moves.

*"Finishing moves when they jump really high from the corner, off the rope, that is better."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

It was in the moves (including moves involving props) that innovation was most appreciated. The more dramatic, that is, extreme and/or surprising, the action in a match, the more it was enjoyed.

*"The managers join in and the referee joins in."*

*"They start fighting each other."*

*"That's when it can get quite addictive."*

Children, especially boys, watched these moves very carefully, often with a view to learning them so that they could incorporate them (or pretend versions of them) into their repertoire of moves in playground and bedroom tussles. All dedicated and many casual children knew the names and nature of the moves, especially the finishing moves of their heroes (see also section 5.1 below).

*"I like all the moves in wrestling."*

*"I like all the moves and I like to practise them so I can be the strongest man in my class."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

*"YOU LIKE HIM BECAUSE HE'S THE BEST DO YOU?"*

*"And Stone Cold because he knocks them out by his stunner. And The Rock can knock them out by his bottom."*

*"Rock Bottom."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

### 3.7 What makes a good bout/broadcast?

First, there was a consensus that the best wrestling featured wrestlers you knew, the big names. Part of the pleasure of watching wrestling was seeing the wrestlers you liked, or supported, in action. Almost everyone knew a core group of WWF wrestlers. The members of this in-crowd (Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, Triple H, The Undertaker and a few others) had signature moves, and trademark idiosyncrasies.

*"When they interview the wrestlers after the fights, their catch phrases are so corny you just have to laugh. The Rock's catch phrase is 'Do you smell what The Rock is cooking?' That is the biggest seller in the states, just to bung on the back of a T shirt and sell it."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Most people, regardless of age, had favourites from amongst this core group, and their involvement fuelled anticipation of a good bout.

*"Like in soaps you get a favourite character and watch the soap to see what is happening to them - it is the same with wrestling."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Women and kids often liked The Rock (he had sex appeal for the



women, and was described as cool by the kids).

*"WHY DO YOU LIKE THE ROCK?"*

*"He is gorgeous."*

*"He has attitude."*

*"I think people like 'Can you smell what The Rock is cooking?'"*

*"One eyebrow goes up and one goes down."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Men often preferred Stone Cold and the Undertaker. These two were admired as hard, masculine, powerful, fearless, intimidating and cunning wrestlers.

*"He (Stone Cold) doesn't care about anything."*

*"It's his mood."*

*"He doesn't trust anyone or anything."*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Many other wrestlers were familiar to a majority: The Dudley Boyz, The Hardy Boys, Chyna, The Jericho Brothers, Trish Stratus, Owen Hart, Rikishi, Kurt Angle amongst others. Interestingly, Kurt Angle was widely disliked by men. He was often criticised as arrogant (perhaps a function of his Olympic gold) and underhand, incapable of winning on own merits, but was perhaps disliked because he was perceived to be less masculine than the likes of Stone Cold.

Second, the best bouts were those with plenty of physical action. This action might be gymnastically dramatic or impressive, big men moving fast and flying through the air. Or it might be intense in the sense that one or more wrestlers would appear to be *in extremis* - getting a beating which was unusually severe or being inflicted in some unusual way.

Third, the best bouts kept the audience on the edge of their seat by including unexpected elements such as new weapons, deceits and twists and turns in the narrative. 'Title matches' were often expected to feature some novel element - a new prop, a new move, a surprising shift in character.

*"It is a big match so something major could happen."*

*"Although I knew something would happen, I didn't expect them to throw them 40 feet under a truck. I didn't expect that to happen at all."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"If there is a belt on the line it is a better match."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Fourth, the best matches were those which generated real dramatic tension. In part this depended of course on the status of the wrestlers, whether a title was at stake, the intensity of the action and so on. It could also depend on the format or context of the event. For example, 'tag team matches' provided more opportunities for dirty tricks, unfair contests, duping the referee, changing the pace of the action and for intense action.

*"Also, if there is a tag team match there are more guys in the ring, it is more entertaining."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"If it is a tag team there is more energy."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

'Last man standing' also promised relentless action and drama; this equated to a 'to the death' contest, through which a true and deserving champion would supposedly emerge.

'Hell in a cell' cage fighting was atmospheric and dramatic. There was appreciation of wrestlers contained as beasts, and the belief that there was no escape clearly heightened expectations of desperate and intense action.

*"HAVE YOU GOT A FAVOURITE CLIP IN YOUR HEAD?"*

*"They used to have a cage and they used to fight on top of the cage and in the cage and they couldn't get out. This cage was high and they used to be teetering on the edge and you thought they were going to fall off."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

'Table matches' suggested an explosive contest, and heightened expectations of a dramatic conclusion - 'someone is going to go through the table'.

Grudges were a vital element in generating tension. These grudges were built up during the various pre-bout rituals, and by apparently clandestine footage of shenanigans in dressing rooms, car parts and elsewhere. They often involved the wives or girlfriends of wrestlers. Grudges of course encouraged emotional involvement and led the audience to expect fierce, unrestrained action on the part of wrestlers

who appeared to have plenty of reason to be incensed.

*“I quite like the arguing at the beginning; you know at the beginning they have like a video footage.. I’m going to kill you.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“Usually one of them comes into the ring first, gets the mike and that’s when they hurl abuse at the other one; and then all of a sudden the other one comes out. I suppose in the long run it’s better that way because you’re going to get a better match.”*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*“A lot of the stuff is like outside the ring as well. There’s always some big thing going on between one or other of them. Someone dissed someone’s bird and all that.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*“It’s not always about the beating up. It’s about the grudges they’ve got against each other, who’s going to win the title. Quite often it’s more the stuff outside the ring that has you entertained, like the interview and who’s got a grudge against who.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Finally, for some respondents a good bout was one that developed the underlying ‘plot’. The action, or the outcome, was a surprise and shifted the intricate balances within the world of WWF. A good bout set up new possibilities and conflicts. ‘Title matches’, ‘Last Man Standing’ and ‘Tag team’ were commonly mentioned in this context. These bouts developed the complex structure of power relationships, of winners and losers, and tested and broke allegiances between wrestlers.

#### **4. How people see the violence**

##### **4.1 Is it ‘real’?**

When asked if the action in wrestling was what it appeared to be, the great majority of the dedicated viewers and a clear majority of the casual viewers said that it was not.

They believed that most or all of the action in wrestling was ‘fake’. By this they meant that they thought bouts were choreographed to some degree. Some thought that they were choreographed completely, and that wrestlers rehearsed the whole bout in advance. These people

believed that the outcomes and results of bouts were all predetermined, and that the contests were never genuine.

*"I just totally disbelieve anything about wrestling and I think it is all staged, totally. The reason it works so well is because it is a very, very well practised show."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Others suggested that the direction and outcome of the fight were planned, but that the moves were agreed between wrestlers as the bout unfolded.

*"DO THEY REHEARSE IT BEFOREHAND?"*

*"Mostly, they might do a bit of ad libbing."*

*"You can see them talking to each other all the time."*

*"They take turns at winning."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"It's not rehearsed. I read an article in the paper a couple of years ago. What they do is, when they're on the plane they rehearse, and say 'I'll win at the beginning, you win at the end.' They've been told the outcome, who's going to win, but then they just say 'Well, I'll do this'."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

The majority was confident that when wrestlers appeared to be in pain, or to be inflicting pain, this was a pretence. They believed that there was no real pain, or the level of pain suffered was a fraction of what it appeared. Even some young children were certain of this.

*"WHEN THEY HURT EACH OTHER AND THEY'RE ON THE FLOOR, ARE THEY HURT BADLY?"*

*"No, they're faking."*

*"SO THEY NEVER HURT EACH OTHER EVER?"*

*"No."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

Most respondents were also confident that behind the action, the emotions displayed were either exaggerated or counterfeit, and that outbursts of temper leading to 'violence' were feigned. Adults believed that there was little room for improvisation and no place for genuine aggression. This would be too dangerous, both in terms of increasing the likelihood of accidents, and because wrestlers' places in the WWF depended on them being in control and arriving at the prescribed outcome in each bout.

Where real pain and/or injury was inflicted this majority believed that it

was accidental. Many cited Owen Hart's death here, which was regarded as a tragic accident.

*"DO YOU RECKON THEY GET INJURED LESS IN WRESTLING THAN THEY DO IN FOOTBALL?"*

*"Oh, definitely! Definitely!"*

*"I don't think they get injured."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"They might get a prang now and again. Except that bloke who swung down and broke his neck. That is a tragedy."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*"They can get injured in WWF when stunts go wrong."*

*"There has been a death as well."*

*"He fell."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

They often contrasted the events surrounding Owen Hart's death with the broadcast treatment of other wrestling 'injuries'. Typically when wrestlers were faking serious injury, the programme would show the events unfolding; the medical team would arrive, attention would be given to the wrestler, and this would be accompanied by a dramatic commentary. When Owen Hart fell, some claimed that the programme was stopped immediately, and the events not shown.

A majority believed that behind the scenes sequences, some filmed as though clandestinely, or by amateurs, were just as feigned as action in the ring. They regarded these sequences as 'hype' designed to arouse and involve the audience. As evidence they sometimes pointed to the implausibly convenient positioning of the cameras and argued that real skulduggery would happen off-camera.

Although the majority had a robust belief that wrestling, including the pain, was fake, a minority, in which children and casual viewers were prominent, was much less confident. While they did not believe that *everything* was 'real', they were clearly uncertain about the level of pretence and pain, and the degree to which wrestlers colluded. In general, children were more likely than adults to believe in looser choreography, and in genuine outbursts of anger and loss of control.

*"DO YOU THINK THE WRESTLERS KNOW WHO'S GOING TO WIN BEFORE THE MATCH STARTS?"*

*"I don't know."*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

*"IS IT REAL?"*

*"I don't know exactly, but it can't all be made up, can it?"*

*"They've got to get hurt at some point haven't they?"*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"There's no doubt they get hurt, because you see blood."*

*"IS THE BLOOD REAL?"*

*"I think sometimes it is."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

This minority included some female dedicated viewers who shared doubts about the degree to which aggression and pain were fake.

*"HAS ANYONE GOT DOUBTS IN THEIR MIND?"*

*"I think it is fixed"*

*"Some of it isn't though."*

*"Sometimes they do hurt each other."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"I don't know whether it's put on or not, I can't tell."*

*"It looks like they hate each other on TV, but when you see them interviewed on normal TV, they say they don't. But I don't know, it's hard to tell."*

*"When they get hurt, I think that is real. I think the temper is put on."*

D6: Female 19-24 BC1C2 Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

*"IS ALL OF IT FAKE?"*

*"No. I wouldn't say all of it, because sometimes you can really see their faces; they can be very aggressive just looking at each other. But I could be wrong, that could be play acting as well. But to me it doesn't look like it. I think a lot of them do hate each other; but then again maybe a lot of them are friends as well, I don't really know. I would say a lot of them do hate each other."*

*"AND REALLY TRY TO HURT EACH OTHER?"*

*"Yes."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY FALSE?"*

*"It looks like they've made it up completely. And yet at other times when there is maybe two different ones on, or a tag team it's fine and I get carried away with it. But there are certain ones that do look false."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

Some viewers suggested that action outside the ring, especially in changing rooms, car park and so on, was perhaps 'more real' - that the anger, confusion and insistence on vengeance must to a degree be real.

*"HAVE YOU EVER SEEN IT WHEN YOU THINK THEY REALLY HAVE BEEN HURT?"*

*"I think the one in the car park really got hurt."*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

Some children certainly believed that some, if not all, of what they saw was real and that wrestling involved significant pain. Some believed this despite what their parents or older siblings had said.

*"DO WE THINK IT IS REAL OR ORGANISED BEFOREHAND?"*

*"I think it is real."*

*"I think it is organised."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

For a few of these younger viewers it was clearly important to believe that the action was real. Their enjoyment was to some degree contingent on their believing it to be real.

*"IF IT WAS MADE UP WOULD YOU ENJOY IT LESS?"*

*"Yes."*

*"WHY?"*

*"It would be no fun anymore, it wouldn't be very good because it is not real."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

It is perhaps interesting to note that younger respondents without children often assumed that children believed that the violence of wrestling was real, whereas many parents said their children understood it was not. It is common for people who watch wrestling to imagine that other people are less knowing.

*"DO YOU THINK KIDS THINK IT'S ALL STAGED?"*

*"No."*

*"I think kids think they're really hurting them."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"I think the kids who watch wrestling don't understand."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"My friend's son, he's only seven years old and he swears blind that everything is real. He hasn't got the knowledge to see that it's not real."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"They're trying to be the wrestlers, trying to carry out the moves; because to them, they don't know that it's fake. They don't know the danger either."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

Fuelling the uncertainty of some adults was a widespread belief that

certain moves (notably table slamming and throws involving height) must necessarily cause *some* pain. That these moves were at least a little painful and risked injury seemed at odds with the glib notion that it was 'all fake'.

*"ARE THEY EVER IN REAL PAIN DO YOU RECKON?"*

*"Not always, it's got to hurt to a degree, but it looks worse than it actually is. I wouldn't want to be bounced from like ten feet up in the air onto a canvas. Even though I'm going to bounce and you know it's going to break the fall, it will hurt to a certain degree. But these are big strong blokes aren't they, they can take it."*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

*"There's a guy six foot eight and he's got his hands above his head...he throws him on the floor. The ring's pretty bouncy, but it will still hurt. I mean they are athletes really; seriously fit, strong blokes."*

G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

*"DO YOU THINK THEY EVER ARE HURT?"*

*"They must get hurt in some way. They must! You couldn't do all that without hurting something; the way they slam them on the ground they must hurt something. And you hear them saying that so and so is out because they have done something to their shoulder, leg or knee. They must do something to themselves."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*"I'm sure it's got to be quite a workout for them, doing the show. They'd expect to pick up a knock here and there, and occasionally they'd time something wrong."*

*"YOU THINK THERE MUST BE SOME PAIN INVOLVED?"*

*"There must be, because they jump from those ladders."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

For some respondents, therefore, appreciation that the skill and courage involved were real enough discouraged perception that the action was 'fake'. Performing the moves that wrestlers performed, and ensuring that no-one got hurt, was remarkable. It did not seem appropriate to dismiss as 'phoney' contests which featured action requiring very refined skills and split second timing.

*"I respect the fact that they are twenty stone blokes and they are slamming each other around; if they get that wrong they break their necks... The timing is so good; if it wasn't, there would be far more injuries."*



A few respondents referred to accidents as an exciting or tantalising possibility.

*“He came flying across...the other one was having a scrap and just missed him by a fraction. It’s fantastic dancing, but you still watch it; because you think you just might see somebody get really hurt.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

But the majority of respondents seemed satisfied with apparent agonies. They admired the skill and it did not seem that they were secretly hoping something would go wrong.

#### 4.2 Why are most viewers confident the violence is not real?

The majority’s confidence that wrestling was not ‘real’ was based on a number of perceptions. First, it was said to be frequently obvious that all sorts of blows, particularly punches, stamps and kicks, did not connect with any force, yet the ‘recipient’ typically reeled and yowled.

*“If people think it’s real you should record it and play it back in slow motion to see how many people they’ve missed.”*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*“YOU SAID IT LOOKS REAL, DO YOU THINK IT IS REAL?”*

*“No, because you can tell it’s not. Sometimes when they go to kick them, they take both feet off the ground, but they stomp with this one.”*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

Second, it was frequently evident that wrestlers were waiting for the next move, often positioning themselves in a way that facilitated that move.

*“Sometimes you can see them going into the moves; telling them and pulling them close before they do the moves.”*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Third, there was a pattern to many bouts; whichever wrestler appeared to have been the most severely bruised and battered (and the most in danger of serious injury) was very often the wrestler who triumphed in the end.

Fourth, it was not plausible that wrestlers could be as resilient as they appeared to be - they took what seemed to be severe punishment for protracted periods and yet recovered to inflict energetic punishment on someone else. It was argued that if the action was really what it appeared to be there would be more serious injury, particularly given the props with which wrestlers were beaten and against which they were thrown.

*"People get hit over the head with a sledgehammer and just get back up. That's how you know it's fake."*

G3: Male 16-18 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"They have dustbins, and you think 'What the hell have they got a dustbin underneath the ring for?' And they'll be cracking each other with a dustbin. It would kill you, wouldn't it?"*

G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

*"If somebody's been stamping on your head for ten good stamps then you're going to be concussed. You're not going to be getting up in two minutes and go 'Woo.'"*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"In wrestling they can carry on for fifty minutes and the bloke will get up, run all over the place and you think, 'Well if you've been hit as much as you were, you wouldn't get up.'"*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"There is no way they could do it three or four times a week if it hurt too much."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*"No one is really getting hurt."*

*"If they were really getting dropped on their heads they would have broken spines."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*"They throw their head against the stairs and just get up and walk out. That's where you see it's so false, when they slam their head down on metal steps and rap them over the head with chairs."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DID HIT HIM WITH THIS PROPERLY?"*

*"It'd hurt a lot, he'd be dead."*

*"Most of them would be dead by now if it was real; they have to be acting."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

A fifth and related point was that wrestlers who one week seemed to have been seriously beaten up, even taken to hospital, looked fresh, unscathed and ready to go the following week.

*“When Steve Austin had this big thing with the supposed owner of WWF, Vince McMahon, he had a neck collar on and he was supposed to be near death. He got carried out on a stretcher.”*  
*“They get so beaten up and the next week they’re back.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Steve Austin had apparently been forced out of wrestling for a year, and audiences had been invited to suppose that he had sustained a serious injury. However, most respondents were quite confident that this was part of the script; he had not been injured at all, but had wanted to take some time off.

Sixth, casual and younger female viewers, who had not seen post-watershed programming, noted that there was no blood in the wrestling they watched despite the apparent ferocity of the action. Again, the feeling was that if the action was ‘real’ - if the wrestlers were hitting each other with any force - there would be blood. (The reaction of casual viewers to post-watershed action containing bloody scenes is described in section 4.4 below).

A seventh point of a different nature concerned the atmosphere of most televised bouts. There was so much circus-like razzmatazz in every department - costumes, characters, actions, props, commentary and so on - that it was impossible to regard the action as anything other than performances intended to entertain.

*“The wife wouldn’t jump in and try to knock Mike Tyson, out. It’s all a bit of a performance.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“Now, if this was real wrestling, and they could choose weapons, they would not be choosing ironing boards as weapons.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

In addition to all this evidence, many viewers had a more generalised confidence that wrestling would not be *allowed* if it really were what it often appeared to be. Instinctively they were confident that the authorities on the spot would not allow bouts to continue if a wrestler were getting really hurt (they compared wrestling with boxing here).

*“With boxing, they have lines and rules and they know when to stop it. You wouldn’t be allowed to watch things like that if they were really serious.”*

They felt they knew that broadcasters would simply not show images of people being badly hurt. The death of Owen Hart was sometimes mentioned as evidence of this; the moment it had become clear that there had been a tragic accident, the cameras had moved away. There had reportedly been no images of medics or ambulances although it was often pretended in broadcast wrestling that these were needed.

Most under 12s in the sample said that their parents or older siblings had told them that wrestling was not 'real'.

*"HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S ONLY ACTING?"  
"Because my dad told me, and he's been watching it  
since he was a baby."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

They often presented themselves as not needing to be told, and quoted many of the arguments described above in support.

(We should note parenthetically that anyone looking at internet material on wrestling carefully would learn that the action is not 'real', the contests are not genuine and the blood is fake. "In the WWF storylines he [Kurt Angle] definitely is tormenting The Rock at every turn but outside *the fictional reality of the squared circle*, he has nothing but respect and admiration for his WWF colleague." "There will be blood spilled -- *no doubt a few capsules worth* -- tomorrow at No Way Out. That is because Stone Cold Steve Austin will meet the hateful Triple H in a match to settle their feud -- for now." [Italics added.] There were no spontaneous references from these respondents to internet sites but we have been told since the fieldwork that they are popular, amongst young boys especially, and that they play a significant role in developing the WWF storylines and characterisation.)

Finally, many viewers said that they knew wrestling was 'fake' because they had seen programmes about how it was done - the various subterfuges. The most memorable of these were pre-planned moves, co-operative throws, communication between wrestlers and the referee, cushioned posts, microphones under the ring and doctored

props.

*"It's all choreographed. I've seen on Sky a few months ago they had a thing on about the wrestling and they were saying the secrets of it. They show all the ring is set up and it's all sprung loaded underneath and the wrestlers are talking to each other as they're fighting; it's all choreographed. It's all sorted out beforehand."*

G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

*"There was that programme a couple of months ago..like magic secrets revealed, but wrestling secrets revealed. It showed you whenever they do a move it's the wrestler who is getting slammed who's actually doing it. He's slamming himself really."*

*"There's no way you can pick somebody up and do some of the moves that they do, no matter how strong you are."*

*"It's clever."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*"There was one thing with how they do wrestling, and they showed you how they slam them through the tables that are made of sawdust so it doesn't hurt them."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

Many respondents, especially among the dedicated viewers, said that these programmes had simply confirmed what they had already assumed and filled in various details. The learning was *how* it was faked, not *that* it was faked. The most surprising single fact in these programmes for many dedicated viewers was that the live audience was given banners and messages by the organisers. Many had assumed that audience reactions were real. A few seemed to have enjoyed feeling superior to what they saw as a typically over-the-top American crowd.

Unsurprisingly, casual viewers were more surprised at other elements of the subterfuge and had learnt more by watching these programmes.

#### 4.3 Props

The use of props was one of the frontiers of wrestling, and many respondents expected them to be more and more a feature of wrestling.

*"The fact there is more stuff being introduced. There have been that many instruments in the ring to use."*

*In about three or four years' time that will be a regular occurrence."*

D5: Male 16-18 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

There was speculation amongst adults and children as to whether the props used in wrestling were real, and how real they might be. While little was certain, almost everyone suspected that at least some of the props were not as they seemed.

*"SO IF YOU SEE SOMEONE IN WWF WITH A PIECE OF WOOD WITH BARBED WIRE AROUND THE END AND STARTS HITTING SOMEBODY, WHAT'S HAPPENING?"*

*"He's hitting, but he's not actually connecting properly. Maybe just slightly, so the other one makes a movement to make it look as though he's been hit."*

*"Or the barbed wire just looks real."*

*"Or the barbed wire's on the end, but they're not being hit with the end, they're getting hit with the middle of the bat."*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

For some respondents (especially those who had seen broadcasts which revealed the secrets of wrestling) every prop was fake, or was used in a specialised way to minimise pain.

*"ARE THE TABLES AND CHAIRS REAL?"*

*"No."*

*"When they're hit they fall apart."*

*"They're all props that are set to fall apart and stuff."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"WHEN THEY DIVE OFF AND HE GOES THROUGH A TABLE, HAVE YOU SEEN THAT?"*

*"Yes, that's fake; it's a fake table."*

*"IS IT?"*

*"Yes, when the man comes down it just breaks quickly."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

Casual adult viewers, females in particular, had often not seen the use of non-domestic items (trophies, barbed wire-on-a-stick and so on); this was probably because these items were limited to videos and post-watershed action. When they were shown clips of these props in use, some were alarmed. They were uncertain whether the props were real and worried that the action seemed out of control.

*"I don't believe in them using things (props). I must admit I don't think they should be allowed. I would have to turn away on parts of that."*

*"SO YOU DON'T ENJOY WATCHING THIS?"*

*"Not when they are using things like that. To me*

*that could cause a lot of problems for somebody; that could really hurt somebody, and I don't like that. Look at the state of him! I would turn away in parts of that."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"I haven't seen that before; I can't think for the life of me what they would do with that. Is it genuine barbed wire or just a prop? I think youngsters are too impressionable."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

However, for most casual female viewers, assumptions that these non-domestic props were fake or doctored followed very quickly; they appeared to become increasingly comfortable with the notion of these props being used in wrestling even within the short duration of the research sessions.

#### 4.4 Blood

As already noted, not all respondents had seen wrestling which featured bloodshed; casual viewers, females and young girls in particular had not seen it. Amongst those who had seen bloodshed, there was some uncertainty concerning whether or not it was real. Some argued that it could not possibly be real. A few cited the modern practices of rugby and boxing where bleeding participants received immediate attention to minimise the risk of infection.

Others equivocated and said they thought that blood was perhaps sometimes genuine, but was more often staged. The more copious it was, the more they suspected trickery.

The most dedicated adult wrestling fans were generally confident that *everything* in wrestling was fake including all the blood. However, for a majority of the sample, including some dedicated viewers, seeing blood seemed to be interpreted as an escalation of realism rather than of pastiche or pretence. Those in this majority were generally taken a little aback by blood and became, at least momentarily, uncertain about what was really going on.

When shown bloodshed in the research situation, few respondents seemed entirely clear whether it was real or not. These few tended to be dedicated viewers (often male), who confidently asserted that it was

fake.

*“WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE BLOOD?”*

*“I know it is not real, so it doesn't mean anything to me at all, he gets up and back into it.”*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Many of the more casual viewers, notably women, believed that the wrestling they were used to seeing was fake, but were far less sure about some of the excerpts they were shown in the research. The bloodshed in some of these excerpts was an unpleasant surprise to them, on two fronts. They found it shocking and ugly to look at, making them feel squeamish, and it also made some of them wonder if they had been right to assume wrestling injuries are 'put on'. How could Triple H's profuse bleeding have been simulated? Initial exposure was often accompanied by animated discussion about whether or not the blood was real. Some of this was very critical of the sequences.

*“I think that is disgusting! I have always said it is entertainment. There is no entertainment in that; it is barbaric! To the narrow minded people who believe it, that is dangerous.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*“As soon as he split his head that did it for me. That took it beyond entertainment.”*

*“DO YOU THINK THAT WAS REAL?”*

*“Yes, the head wound. They weren't stopping the film and putting on a load more paint, you could see his head.”*

*“I think that was make believe.”*

*“I didn't enjoy it. I didn't think it was real. I almost spotted where he had something in his hand and he popped it on his head. Plus you get blood in rugby and if that was real blood there is no way you'd get that all over and in your mouth.”*

*“Yeah, there's all sorts...hepatitis. I didn't enjoy that at all, it was just a bit sick.”*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*“I think it was real blood but he cut himself doing something and they carried on.”*

*“The stuff I've seen is almost like slapstick in comparison to that.”*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*“I've never seen the blood before.”*

*“I just wouldn't like to watch it so much I don't think.”*

*“That looks more violent and in normal rules you'd have thought the ref would have stopped it straightaway.”*

*“First impression, it looked very real.”*

*“Yes, it did when he got his head stuck in that railing.”*



*It looked like that could have happened by accident.”*  
G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“Where is the medical attendance? There’s no sign of them!”*

*“Was it real?”*

*“Was it real?”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“IS IT REAL BLOOD?”*

*“There’s so much contact that at the moment I’d say yes, it probably is..it has got to be real blood, they can’t really pretend blood.”*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

Sight of a wrestler bleeding made some of them think again about pain and injury; might these also be real?

*“DO YOU THINK THIS MAN IS REALLY BEING HURT?”*

*“Well, yes if you’re bleeding you must be hurt, or you wouldn’t be bleeding would you? I think your head is the worst place and of course your head bleeds more; so maybe he isn’t hurt. But to me when there is blood like that he has to be hurt. And that’s not the wrestling I like to watch. I wouldn’t turn it off, but I would have to look away on certain parts of it.”*

*Maybe if it got too bad, I would go and make a cup of tea or something.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“DO YOU THINK THAT GUY ON THE GROUND IS REALLY SUFFERING?”*

*“Yes, it looks real because of the blood. Sometimes, if there is no blood, all of a sudden they’ll get up and they’ll be fine. I don’t think he is putting that on. It looks too real.”*

D6: Female 19-24 BC1C2 Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

*“That is a video nasty. It should be banned. That is appalling. That is not what wrestling is about, that is disgusting. They say boxing is barbaric, but I have never seen a boxer with a face like that; any blood and they stop it.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

It is difficult to be certain about this, but the capacity of bloodshed to shock respondents seemed short-lived. Feelings of revulsion or alarm, which initially appeared to be genuine and strong, seemed to dissipate rapidly. Moreover, second or repeated sequences with blood seemed to have much less impact than the first. In part this is because the emotional reaction gives way to speculation about how the effect was achieved. People seem to stop feeling shocked by the injury and start asking themselves if the blood is fake and where it has come from. Emotions that would be appropriate to ‘real life’ are quickly steadied by

the reflection that this is wrestling and special rules apply - nothing is what it seems. This transition - an emotional reaction quickly tempered by rational analysis - is characteristic of the way wrestling is watched.

*"I have never seen anything like that before; something has gone wrong. I don't think there was any intention to do that. I suppose it adds to it. I think he is hurt, he is cut... There is still a part of me thinking it might be stage blood. He went into the crowd where he could have picked something up with his hand."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Some of the viewers who initially appeared to have been shocked by seeing blood went on to say that they found this 'new level' of wrestling more real and more exciting. Blood increased the tension by making them wonder, if only momentarily, if they were witnessing really dramatic events, in other words, real violence.

*"I preferred it with the blood."  
"It makes it look more real."  
"Even though you still think, 'That isn't real.'"  
"You're kind of shocked seeing blood aren't you, on wrestling. So you think it isn't real, but could it be?"*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"WAS THE BLOOD REAL ON THAT ONE, DO YOU THINK?"*

*"Yes it made it more interesting."  
"I thought that was more entertaining."  
"Because I've never seen the blood before, it just took wrestling to a higher level."  
"AND IT'S AN IMPROVEMENT? IT'S A BETTER LEVEL THAN YOU'VE SEEN BEFORE?"*

*"Definitely."  
"SO YOU'D WATCH THAT OVER THE OTHER STUFF THAT YOU HAD BEFORE?"*

*"Yes, I would."  
"It's definitely moving with the times. Definitely moving with the times."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"SO THE MORE UNSURE YOU ARE THE BETTER IT GETS?"*

*"Yes."  
"I think so."  
"Yes."  
"Yes, definitely."*

*"Because it's the anticipation and not knowing what's going to come next, the not knowing."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*"To be honest, most of the time on Channel 4 it has not got as much blood as that; so what I normally watch is more toned down. But this is more*

*gripping.”*

*“You just have to look.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*“YOU SAID YOU THOUGHT IT WAS MORE INTERESTING FOR YOU.”*

*“It is more real.”*

*“That one isn’t as funny, but I found it more interesting, in a sick kind of way.”*

*“I only watch it for the comedy aspect.”*

*“SO IF YOU WATCH FOR THE COMEDY WHAT DO YOU GET FROM WATCHING THAT?”*

*“I like horror films as well. It’s like a road accident; you don’t want to look but you just have to.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

#### 4.5 Getting further away from the ring

The action spilling out of the ring was no longer of course, a novelty, but the programme makers seemed to be continually testing how far away from the ring (and some semblance of ‘traditional’ wrestling) they could go. The more the action took place outside the ring, the greater the impression of spontaneity and chaos, and the more the audience was invited to believe that things might be getting completely out of control.

Reactions to action in settings beyond the ringside seats seemed to differ significantly by age. Children and some adults enjoyed action in dressing rooms, car parks and so on as this provided more scope and space for novelty and subterfuge. Conversely, it appeared to irritate a minority of older dedicated viewers, who complained that it was just plain silly. Some of these respondents also disliked wrestlers fighting in street clothes. They seemed to find it a little too far from the pretence of ‘sport’ and the psychological ‘safety net’ this provided.

*“Now they go into the parking lot which they didn’t used to. I don’t like that because it is showing you how unrealistic it is. It is wrestling, they are supposed to stay in the ring.”*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*“WHAT ABOUT THE FIGHTING OUTSIDE THE RING?”*

*“I don’t like that.”*

*“It’s too over the top; then they run them down and things. It’s rubbish.”*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*“WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT? WHAT ABOUT THE FACT HE WAS IN JEANS?”*

*“It was stupid.”*

*"They get too hot."*

*"They can't move."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

One or two clips from ECW shown to some adult respondents featured action in dressing rooms and some casual viewers, particularly women, found them disturbing, partly because the usual 'comforters' such as crowd and commentators were missing. The impression that this was caught on 'amateur' video footage also contributed to uneasiness, and several viewers manifestly believed that what they were watching was genuine and unscripted.

*"WHY DID THAT LOOK REAL AND THE OTHER STUFF DOESN'T? WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THAT?"*

*"It was like police footage that was."*

*"It wasn't a show. There was a lot of swearing."*

*"And it was three on to one."*

*"It wasn't a show because you didn't have the audience and it was more like a secret bullying thing."*

*"And he didn't like the video being filmed at the end because he swore at the cameras to get out."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

There was also some discomfort amongst both dedicated and casual viewers at the scene (shown in a clip to respondents over 18) in which a male wrestler drags a female dressed in casual clothes through the dressing rooms and appears to flush her head down the toilet. Some respondents were anxious that this would seem to suggest that domestic violence against women was acceptable.

*"I think it's just seeing a man do that to a woman, I think that puts me off, it really does. Oh God, I've never seen anything like that before. I have never seen anything like that before."*

*"WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?"*

*"It sickens me a wee bit to think that this could happen. I have honestly never seen anything like that before."*

*"AND ARE YOU SHOCKED BY IT?"*

*"I am actually, because I think that is true, and I think it did happen and it's the thought of a man doing that to a woman that puts me off completely. The other women that go into the ring are different, they are wrestlers, they can fight back, but to me she isn't a wrestler."*

*"IF I SAY TO YOU IT'S ALL BEEN REHEARSED, DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL HAPPIER ABOUT IT?"*

*"No, not really because just watching it, even if it is rehearsed it doesn't look very nice. I don't think I would like my sons to see a man hitting a woman like that even if it wasn't true. Even play acting it*

*doesn't look very nice."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

There was some feeling amongst one or two of the more thoughtful respondents that moving the action further and further from the ring (and using more and more 'weapons') would be the downfall of wrestling.

*"When I first watched they were just fighting; then the chairs got introduced, then the tools. It does progress and it will get worse, until there'll be nothing else to do."*

*"It is actually getting worse because...trying to run people over and actually kill them now."*

*"It'll come to the extreme and it'll get burnt out or just get banned."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

## 5. Concerns about wrestling

A large majority of these respondents had no real concerns about wrestling. They said they regarded it as harmless entertainment.

*"Wrestling is more fun, less gritty than films."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"It's just entertaining isn't it? You can see it's all rubbish but it's just a spectacle. It is very entertaining. When I sit there with the kid it's a good laugh. You start screaming and shouting and cheering on the favourite one. It's just nice to see."*

*"Also with your kid you can interact a bit."*

*"Yes, it's a good bonding thing."*

*"He gets you in the old head lock like."*

G7: Male 25-35 BC1C2 Casual Cardiff

The sample was of course composed entirely of people who watched wrestling frequently and it would perhaps be a little surprising if, as frequent viewers, they took a negative view of it.

However, a substantial minority, chiefly among the casual viewers, were alarmed by some of the clips they were shown in the course of the research, which they regarded as untypical of wrestling generally. Such concerns as there were related chiefly to children.

### 5.1 Re-enactment by children

As noted elsewhere, dedicated children, and males in particular, were

especially excited by the action of wrestling - what the wrestlers did to each other. Most boys and a few girls appeared more intensely focussed on this action than on the storylines and introductions. These were not without interest, but many children were impatient to 'get on with it'.

*"Slam them down!"*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*"You are waiting for him to hit him!"*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"HAVE YOU GOT A FAVOURITE CLIP IN WRESTLING?"*

*"Fully Loaded, where Rock gets busted open and there is blood pouring down his face."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

When the clips were shown in the research situation, and the action began children, and boys in particular, became very animated, excited and involved. They seemed unable to sit still, called out and grappled with each other. The wrestling arena did not appear to be far removed from the rough and tumble of the school playground, and the moves lent themselves well to territorial game-playing.

*"HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING WRESTLING?"*

*"You feel you really want to do it on somebody."*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

*"At school when there is a fight you see all these people rushing to watch it."*

*"If you know if won't turn nasty you watch it."*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

*"Well, there's other people and we come together in a team..."*

*"And then we go like this..."*

*"I rub my bum in their face."*

*"And then you go bang, and then you go bang, bang."*

*"We do all the wrestling moves."*

*"HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WATCH IT?"*

*"Mad."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

*"At my school everyone fights."*

*"They put their head between their legs."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

Boys in particular were eager to learn the names of the moves and how to execute them.

*“WHAT MOVES ARE THEY?”*

*“Spine buster. You get someone’s head and bust it down against their leg and they fall on the floor.”*

*“HAS ANYONE ACTUALLY GOT HURT?”*

*“I have, I was under a Rumble.”*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

Almost all boys, including a few older teenagers, and some girls, said that they practised these moves frequently at home and at school, with family and friends. There was also some anecdotal evidence of children using or threatening to use household items to re-enact scenes - reportedly stools and grill pans. Light grill pans were thought particularly suitable for re-enactment because they made an impressive noise on contact without causing any real injury.

*“We don’t hit each other hard, it is just playing. You know those silver trays you put in the oven? We hit each other with those because they don’t hurt; but they make a good noise when you hit each other with them.”*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*“You try to do some of the moves on your brother, you just can’t get them.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

*“DO YOU DO WRESTLING WITH YOUR BROTHERS?”*

*“We get into power fights. I don’t hit them with weapons though, just my stool.”*

*“Ian always batters me. He thinks it is playing but it is really hard.”*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*“I beat my little brother up all the time; I do some of the moves and they just never work. I can’t get them to work.”*

G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle

There was widespread anecdotal evidence of minor playground injuries. Some impetuous re-enactments, one ending in tears, occurred in the research situation itself.

*“Some people get a bit cut or whatever but not much.”*

*“It is mainly bruises.”*

*“And they go to medical and get a bit of ice on it.”*

*“Sometimes they actually fight and do the moves.”*

*“There are normally about five of them doing the moves and one will get an elbow.”*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*“YOU WATCH IT WITH YOUR BROTHER AND UNCLE, WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU WATCH IT?”*

*"I fight with my brother and my sister; I kick them. My sister does a trick on me, she puts her foot on my foot and pushes me down."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

Girls were absorbed by the action, but were perhaps more distracted by the characters and stories than boys. They were certainly less animated when watching the clips, and were less interested in learning the moves with a view to performing them. They did not grapple with each other in the research situation. At school they were, reportedly, more likely to sit back and watch than become involved.

*"There's a boy in my class that does it on this other boy in my class and I don't think that's very nice. I think girls just like watching it instead of like doing the moves and that."*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

*"It is the boys that are the problem."  
"It is. Because girls understand it is not real, but boys take it more seriously and hurt each other."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

One or two girls expressed anxiety that boys seriously hurt each other by imitating wrestling moves.

*"They should have warnings about the choke slam because people in school used to pick people up by their neck."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

As did one or two parents.

*"Sometimes you see the blood. I wouldn't want them to watch it till they were older."  
"I'd be worried they would go in the school and try out all these moves and it came out worse than what it should do."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

But the majority of parents appeared unconcerned about this. Many pointed out that children inevitably copied the things they saw on television, but that this was not something to worry about.

*"When Superman first came out there were kids jumping off walls pretending to be Superman and flying. Kids mimic anything they see on telly. I don't think it is true that if they watch violence they will be violent."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

*"When Turtles were in you got swords."  
"They pick up weapons and start bashing each other"*



*and pretending to have swords.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“I think that kids mimic it in the playground. Kids play fight anyway, they mimic their idols. If they are into wrestling they mimic it. My boy wrestles with his cousins.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*“I think I am open minded. I remember a few years ago they had the Power Rangers and they were fighting when it was on.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

However some parents were concerned about some of the post-watershed clips they were shown, particularly when wrestlers used objects or weapons.

*“You know strangling, hanging someone by a rope, that’s so easy for kids to do isn’t it? And they will copy it.”*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

*“WHAT ABOUT THE PROPS?”*

*“I don’t like that either. Youngsters might think they can use a chair and that the other person is going to walk away. I worry a bit about that.”*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*“AND HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR KIDS WATCHING THIS?”*

*“I wouldn’t be very happy about them watching that; when they are hitting them with something.”*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

A particular danger identified by a few was that children might be dangerously misled into imagining that inflicting injuries was not serious because victims reliably got up right away.

*“But there is a serious side to it. Kids do take it seriously. When they’re six they probably think that they actually do hit each other; and when they see them jump straight back up they must think that’s okay. Then they’re doing it in the playground.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

However, respondents did not believe that re-enactments of wrestling action, whether or not it involved weapons, could have resulted in accidents to children or they would have heard of them. They are not aware of any significant accidents attributable to children imitating wrestling. (Reports of a child convicted of murder whose victim’s death was connected by lawyers to re-enactment of a wrestling programme emerged after the fieldwork for this study had been completed.) They

concluded that whatever nervous parents might imagine, wrestling-related accidents could not be a significant problem. As further evidence, some pointed out that they themselves had watched these kinds of programmes when they were children, and had not had any problems as a result.

*"It's never been in the paper that there's been an accident or someone has really been hurt."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"All these things you are mentioning happened ten years ago when we watched it as kids, but it didn't turn us into horrible people."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

It is difficult to know what to conclude about the dangers of re-enactment. Most of the boys of 12 or younger in the sample said they watched the moves carefully with a view to learning them, and they claimed to practise them at home or at school. Girls confirmed that boys often enacted wrestling moves. Certain wrestlers were regarded as heroes and it would perhaps be surprising if boys did not attempt to replicate their trademark moves, or were not attracted to using similar sorts of props when these were available. On the other hand, boys have grappled with each other in playgrounds and at home for a lot longer than wrestling has been popular. Moreover, the parents in this sample were not worried about wrestling-inspired injuries or accidents principally because these were not much talked about or reported. In so far as they thought about it, their conclusion seemed to be that whilst boys might see themselves as executing daring and dramatic moves, the reality was a lot tamer and more innocuous.

## 5.2 Habituation to violence

When they were prompted on the possibility that wrestling might condone or encourage violence, most respondents were very sceptical. They did not believe in a link between wrestling and real-life violence. They repeated their beliefs that wrestling was not real and, moreover, that everyone who watched it appreciated that it was not real. A few conceded that it might conceivably influence some people, but these would be in some way unusually susceptible and just as likely to be influenced by something else.

*"I think it's why so many Americans are killing each other. If you're perfectly normal I think all the research shows that it won't actually affect you; but I think a lot of people who are a bit on the edge or doped up or boozed up all the time might think, 'Well, that's all right'."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"A wrestling programme is not going to change the values of society. It's not going to change anything. It's just a wrestling programme. You could say Eastenders is going to change things."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Very few parents expressed any spontaneous concerns about the effects of watching wrestling violence on their children. First, they were confident that their children appreciated that they were watching a 'show' and could readily distinguish between this and real life.

*"It doesn't affect me as long as he doesn't grow up to be violent, which is my job. He just likes seeing blood and gore."*

*"It is down to the parents to guide them and tell them it isn't real. My kid doesn't do wrestling moves with his friends, only me. He has got the message."*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

Second, it was argued that wrestling was no more damaging or influential than Power Rangers before it and whatever was likely to come after. The fighting, nudity and angry outbursts featured in wrestling programmes were no more graphic or worrying than what could be seen in many a film, soap opera or sports event. It was even argued that wrestling was wholesome in comparison with other popular viewing for children, for example confessional television like Jerry Springer, Rikki and so on.

*"There are far worse programmes before the watershed they can get worse lifestyles from."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"My twelve year old, she's the one that watches it; and if it was a toss up between her watching that and a programme like Jerry Springer, where the girls are pulling each other's hair out, I'd rather she watched the wrestling. She sits and laughs at it. But if you see two people really wanting to go for it with each other, that is far worse."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

Some casual viewers (mainly but not exclusively female) were sufficiently unsettled by their first exposure to bloody injuries that they wondered about the consequences of such images for society

generally. They thought that there would, inevitably, be people who would take what they saw at face value, and the effect might well be to make violent behaviour seem more acceptable.

*"I am shocked that is out there... I think I am worldly wise enough to know it is a show; but there are people out there who believe this shit and think that is acceptable behaviour in sport. That is dangerous. What they are displaying, in the wrong hands it is ludicrous. There are strange people out there, aren't there? It is baying for blood. I am convinced people who view it will like that. It is terrible."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*"I am really shocked. I know realistically there is no way a doctor would allow that to go on but there are people out there who will believe it and think it is entertaining."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

These respondents were particularly anxious that children should not see gruesome scenes. Several were prompted to say they were going to monitor what their children were watching more closely.

*"I will watch it more carefully, certainly, and make sure there is nothing like that in it."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

### 5.3 Enjoyment of pain and the infliction of pain

Many respondents, especially amongst the dedicated male viewers, said that the more apparently violent, chaotic and savage the wrestling was, the better they liked it.

*"If a viewer sees blood it is more entertaining. People will watch it more if they see blood."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Many of the children in the sample were especially enthusiastic about ferocious action - the more ferocious, the more vivid the props, the better.

*"If there isn't any blood it's just so boring; if you see blood like, you go, 'Oh cool'."*

G2: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Cardiff

*"IF YOU COULD CHOOSE HOW TO MAKE WRESTLING PROGRAMMES WHAT WOULD YOU DO?"*

*"No rules, just plain beating the other person up."*

*"Just blood splattering everywhere."*

*"WHY?"*

*"It is funny."  
"It is just funny when they get hit with a chair."  
"You see them smashing everywhere and blood everywhere."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*"I think the referee should have let him use that bar thing."*

*"WHY WOULD THAT HAVE MADE IT MORE INTERESTING?"*

*"I don't know. It's just more things other than just fighting; because usually all they use is chairs and tables."*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

*"DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE CLIP OF WRESTLING?"*

*"I think it was when they went into the boiler room. I like it when that happens. In the ring it is small and in the boiler room there is space and they hide and hit each other with poles. I do like it when they hit each other's heads across the table."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"I think it was Iron Man... the nails were in his face."*

*"It is fun!"*

*"I like the blood."*

*"I like seeing people get hurt."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

In the course of discussion about the violence in wrestling a number of respondents, most of them men, said that they enjoyed seeing people get hurt. As evidence, they said that they enjoyed boxing matches, and the more bloody and brutal the bout, the more they liked it.

*"I like watching people get hurt; I enjoy boxing."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"I love seeing two people going in a ring and punching the hell out of each other basically."*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

*"IF THE COLISSEUM WERE STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS, WOULD YOU BE QUEUING UP?"*

*"I certainly would."*

G7: Male 25-35 C2DE Dedicated London MCTV

They argued also that the more convincing the violence and injuries in wrestling, the more they liked it. Several men referred in this context to the genuine violence they thought they had witnessed in 'extreme fighting' videos.

*"I forget what video it is called now, but anything goes. I think it is Extreme something and you have a boxer versus a wrestler, or kick boxing, anything. All punching and kicking and you can do anything until someone submits. That is good, I like watching*

*that for the blood and I like people getting kicked the hell out of them. That is completely different to (WWF) wrestling. You can do anything in that. People really get hurt there."*

D7: Male 25-35 C2DE Dedicated London MCTV

*"It is just the thrill of him getting hurt."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

Asked whether they thought they would enjoy watching wrestling yet more if the wrestlers really did get badly hurt, several respondents said that they would, though others demurred. One young girl seemed to say she would prefer real injuries to the appearance of injuries.

*"WHY WOULD YOU ENJOY IT MORE IF IT WAS REAL AND NOT JUST LOOKING AS IF IT WAS REAL?"*

*"Because it would be more funny and it would look more real with all blood and everything."*

PD4: Female 10-12 C2DE Casual London Terrestrial

It may not, of course, be right to believe those respondents who claim they would like to watch people really getting hurt. There is a lot of braggadocio amongst men about fighting (even about watching fighting from the couch). And many respondents, certainly a large majority of the women, were quite clear that they would not like to see people getting hurt. Their underlying confidence that things were not what they seemed - the violence was not real, the pain was not real - was what gave them permission to enjoy wrestling.

We should also note that WWF is substantially more popular than is ECW, although the latter is widely believed to offer more extreme fare in terms of blood and injuries. While this is perhaps an uneven playing field due to the relative accessibility of WWF in terms of scheduling, there is a strong argument that the strength of characterisation, the showmanship and the on-going soap of WWF are more attractive than the raw violence of ECW.

Many respondents, especially among the women and casual viewers, were shocked by some of the post-watershed material shown in the research. For them, this material, especially that depicting bloodshed, looked too real.

The extent to which seeing pain, and pain being inflicted, contributes to the appeal of wrestling hinges in part on how effectively, and for how

long, viewers suspend their disbelief. The evidence of this research is that a large majority of people who watch wrestling are confident that things are not what they appear. At a rational level, they would certainly include the violence in this illusion - the apparent pain is feigned, in whole or in part. However, watching people watch wrestling makes it clear that at a more immediate or emotional level many viewers react to the action, at least momentarily, as if it were real. Dramatic action produces an 'oh my God!' moment, and many of the contrivances of the wrestling producers are dedicated to deepening and prolonging this moment. The development of apparent grudges and feuds encourages viewers to think that wrestlers have gone berserk. The introduction of new moves, new weapons, new locations for action similarly encourage belief that the action has transcended the script and become real.

Whether or not the violence is perceived as real was not always regarded as the crucial issue. Some of the clips shown in the research, (all post watershed TV or video material classified 18) were said by a minority of respondents to be unacceptable whether real or not. Included amongst these were Rhino's dressing room assault on The Sandman's wife, when he appears to push her head down a toilet, and the bloody combat between Triple H and Cactus Jack involving barbed wire. The issue with these scenes was not whether the action was real, but conceptual - the behaviour depicted was vivid and disturbing and certainly should not be seen by children, perhaps not by anyone.

*"Barbed wire again."*

*"They wouldn't allow that in the boxing ring, the ref would stop that and get a doctor there. There is no way they would allow it there. It is terrible, that is, putting that in front of kids. I have never seen anything like that. I would not be happy with my boy watching that. Look at that! That is too bad, I don't know about 18, that is video nasty, that is. I can't believe anyone would take their kids to see that. I am convinced it is not genuine but that isn't the point."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

#### 5.4 Gender issues

The distinction between female wrestlers and the entourage of wives,

girlfriends and groupies who frequently became embroiled in the action was typically blurred.

With the notable exception of Chyna, female wrestlers were generally considered to lack the skill and impressive moves of their male counterparts.

*"When Chyna fights a woman it's not the same. I don't mind watching her though actually. She is a good wrestler."*

D5: Male 16-18 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

In this, wrestling was equated with football, where, respondents said, the women's game was slower and less skilful than the men's. No-one in the sample had a woman as their favourite wrestler.

*"Two women fighting against each other, it gives another appeal doesn't it to people? But they're not quite as technical as the men you know."*

D8: Male 25-35 C2DE Casual Cardiff Terrestrial

*"Chyna is okay. She's like an athlete."*

*"Yes, she's all muscular."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"ARE THERE ANY WRESTLERS YOU WOULDN'T BE?"*

*"Stephanie McMahon, she is rubbish, has rubbish moves."*

*"She does a kick in the belly and a slap."*

PD3: Male 10-12 BC1C2 Dedicated Birmingham MCTV

*"DO YOU SUPPORT THE MEN OR THE WOMEN?"*

*"The men."*

*"WHY?"*

*"Because the men are better at fighting."*

*"I just support the boys because they always win."*

PD2: Female 6-7 BC1C2 Casual London Terrestrial

*"When the men fight and a woman comes into the ring, the man goes and beats the women and makes it look like women are weaker than men."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"I'm not keen on the women, I must admit I'd rather watch the men."*

D10: Female 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh Terrestrial

*"The women are tamer, they are not as vicious as the men."*

D6: Female 19-24 BC1C2 Dedicated Newcastle MCTV

Nevertheless, some female viewers enjoyed the spontaneous 'cat-fighting' that they said often erupted amongst the women. They found



this action particularly vicious, and believed that it was quite likely to be the result of genuine grievances.

*"DO YOU ENJOY WATCHING WOMEN FIGHTING?"*

*"Yes."*

*"It is more spiteful."*

*"They pull their hair."*

G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London

*"WHAT ARE THE BEST BITS OF IT?"*

*"The women joining in."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

There was a wider view (certainly amongst all adult viewers and boys) that the presence of women spiced up the action, sustained interest and added another dimension to the appeal of wrestling. They also allowed more interesting development of characters and stories.

Generally, however, women in wrestling seemed to be appreciated mainly because they were conventionally titillating - big breasted and scantily clad - just as women in programmes like *Baywatch* were. In the research situation, many men were quite happy to acknowledge that they enjoyed seeing the women. (See also section 3.3 above)

*"Nice women, fit."*

*"Bikini matches are great. They sometimes have them on."*

*"Sex sells and if they can get sex into wrestling then all the better."*

*"It is why most of them don't wear very much so you see more flesh."*

*"They definitely wear less than they used to."*

G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London

*"It is getting better now there are women involved in it."*

*"The women are practically naked though, aren't they?"*

G9: Male 36-55+ C2DE Dedicated Edinburgh

The women in wrestling are certainly appreciated as sexy. It may be that some male viewers also enjoy their submissiveness and their vulnerability to superior male strength. The Trish table match clip shown in several groups was familiar and very well liked. Some scenarios involving women seemed open to the interpretation that they sometimes deserved to be physically punished; they 'asked for it', usually by dressing or acting provocatively.

*"Look at Trish."  
"Yeah, you think 'Yeah, smack her!'"  
"She deserves it."  
"They bring it all on themselves, people like them."  
G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London*

However, in the mixed-sex bouts, women were generally felt to 'give as good as they get', and it did not seem to have occurred to respondents that the action might encourage domestic violence or be viewed as condoning violence against women.

It was readily acknowledged that women were projected in wrestling as sex objects...

*"Women in WWF are seen as sex symbols; you have him walking down with two beautiful women on his arms to the ring."  
G8: Mixed sex 20-34 C2DE Dedicated London*

But this was very familiar from many different contexts. Scantily-clad women were unexceptionable, appearing even in boxing.

*"I mean you only need look at Baywatch. You never have fat birds running on the beach do you? So you get that in everything."  
G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham*

*"From the kids' point of view you might say 'Is it a really good image for kids?', but they're everywhere aren't they? Kids look at all the pop stars, the Spice Girls, Britney in her red leather outfit. Is she any better? I don't think so."  
G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London*

*"It's the same as boxing when they bring the women into the ring and do the rounds."  
G4: Male 19-24 C2DE Dedicated Newcastle*

Some younger girls (the under 12s) derided the women in wrestling as stupid and weak; they lacked ability at fighting, dressed revealingly in tight clothes and were variously described as tarts and prostitutes.

*"She is a tart."  
"Yes, a tart and she is kissing and like 'I'm so cool'.  
"She looks like a prostitute. I am not being rude but she does."  
G1: Female 10-12 C2DE Dedicated London*

But some older girls and women seemed to believe that the gender roles in wrestling reflected social realities: women relied strongly on their sex appeal and achieved what they wanted through guile and

manipulation of men; men achieved status and women through power.

*"I think it emphasises the basics."*

*"If you look at the top men in this world and the best jobs and if you look at them and look at their wives, it's exactly the same."*

*"So whether you like it or not that's the way the world goes isn't it really?"*

*"Like Jim Davidson for instance. I don't know if anyone saw the newspapers today; if you saw him in the high street you'd think, 'No', wouldn't you? But look at his wife, she's twenty-two!"*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Others thought it was absurd to imagine that anyone could be influenced by male and female wrestlers as role models. They were parodies, much larger than life.

*"If you're not going to take it seriously, as in think it's serious wrestling, you can't look at the women and get on your high horse and say 'I think it's degrading.' They are very over the top, almost cartoony."*

*"It's a real testosterone world, it's all the big men with muscles and the women who adore them."*

*"It's Action Man and Barbie."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

On consideration a few respondents did become more concerned about the sorts of ideas and behaviour wrestling might encourage.

*"It's very manipulative."*

*"If you beat up the one then you get the missus."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

**"WHAT DO YOU THINK AN ALIEN WATCHING WRESTLING WOULD THINK OF WOMEN?"**

*"I think they'd think they were sexy."*

*"That women are beautiful."*

*"Full of silicon."*

*"Manipulative, I think because she wants the best."*

*"It's like animals isn't it? They only want the leader of the pack."*

**"WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY'D THINK ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER?"**

*"Women as trophies."*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

Perhaps the most remarked upon clip shown in the research situation in the context of gender roles was the Godfather (Pimp Daddy) sequence. In this clip, women were described as 'hoes' (prostitutes) and references were made to 'pimping'. When prompted, some parents felt that this was unpleasant, and inappropriate for young

teenagers, although the objection was sometimes to what they regarded as strong language, rather than to the portrayal of women as prostitutes.

*"I suppose it's glamorising pimps.."*

G10: Mixed sex 36-55+ C2DE Casual London

*"That was fine until he started mentioning he was a pimp. It is hypocrisy though, because there was kids in the audience."*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

*"They were talking about the 'hoes' and that, talking about the girls. All the boys could then start calling the girls hoes. It gets out of control then."*

*"It shows men dominating women rather than an equal."*

*"And he's like 'Come 'ere!' and they jump and run to him."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*"An 18 year old should know what a pimp is. I wouldn't want a 16 year old watching it."*

*"I'd just feel ashamed. The girls and him, I could expect that in America but in England?"*

*"I wouldn't take my kids to see it."*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

Boys clearly enjoyed the powerful projections of men; it was how they wanted to be and be seen - 'hard', 'cool', admired and invincible.

*"WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE WRESTLERS WHEN YOU GROW UP?"*

*"Because I'm going to be real and kill them all."*

*"Just go..boom boom boom boom."*

*"I'd like to whack them with the metal ball and metal chair and the table."*

*"My favourite one would be the ladder."*

*"WELL, YOU KNOW WHEN YOU DO IT IN SCHOOL, IS EVERYONE ACTING THEN OR NOT?"*

*"No, because we like it to be real."*

*"And we like to beat up people."*

PD1: Male 6-7 C2DE Dedicated Cardiff MCTV

## 5.5 Other concerns

A few parents, but only after prompting, expressed a number of concerns about what their children might pick up from watching wrestling. Several of these were about what might be termed 'fair play'. In wrestling it was commonplace for a wrestler to be kicked whilst he was down, or for three people to gang up on one, or for someone to be jumped from behind. There was speculation that

children might come to believe that it was acceptable to continue fighting someone already bleeding and apparently seriously injured.

*“That is telling you to keep hitting someone after they are bleeding; because people might be seriously injured.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

Or, alternatively, wrestling might suggest that bleeding does not indicate serious injury, or that the violence does not cause serious injury.

*“The point is that his face is supposedly smashed up, but it is okay for him to keep hitting him... I don't agree with showing that; you get kids hitting each other thinking they will be fine afterwards.”*

D9: Male 36-55+ BC1C2 Casual Birmingham MCTV

Taunting and name-calling was another concern. At least one of the clips shown to many adult respondents included swearing (“I’ll fucking kill you”) and spitting, and this attracted negative comment. It seemed that the inclusion of swearing encouraged the perception that the scenes were genuine; swearing and spitting were real-life intrusions in the make-believe world of wrestling.

*“The thing I noticed about the wrestling is they try and kick the crap out of each other, but they don't normally swear.”*

G5: Female 19-24 C2DE Casual London

*“WHAT EFFECT DOES THE SWEARING HAVE, DO YOU THINK?”*

*“It makes it more violent.”*

*“Yes, makes it more aggressive.”*

*“Takes the edge off the entertainment.”*

G6: Female 25-35 C2DE Casual Birmingham

*“THAT WAS ECW, WHAT DID YOU THINK?”*

*“I didn't like that wrestling.”*

*“I preferred it without the swearing.”*

*“It seemed more real. It's more real.”*

*“That last bit was a bit, you could imagine that couldn't you, three on to one, I didn't like that last bit.”*

*“DID ANYBODY LIKE THAT LAST BIT?”*

*“No.”*

*“No.”*

*“I didn't really.”*

*“WHY NOT?”*

*“That was too real that was; like three on to one and one poor bloke's getting beat up.”*

*“That last bit seemed a bit too realistic to me.”*

*“It's not showtime is it? It's not a show.”*

*“It gives the wrong message.”*

## **APPENDICES**

1. *CONSIDERATIONS INFORMING SAMPLE DESIGN*
2. *RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRES*
3. *VIDEO STIMULUS BY AGE GROUP*
4. *COLLAGES*

## APPENDIX 1: CONSIDERATIONS INFORMING SAMPLE DESIGN

### Age

According to BARB figures, wrestling is watched by all ages from age four upwards. However, depending on the programme, between 73% and 91% are aged 16+ and of those aged 16+ (adult viewers) between 75% and 89% are aged 24+.

In order to ensure that the sample remained manageable and that the groups were sufficiently homogenous both to encourage free flowing discussion and to aid analysis, this broad age range was broken down into six age brackets: 6-7 year olds; 10 to 12 year olds; 16-18 year olds; 19-24 year olds; 25 to 35 year olds and 36-55+ year olds.

Although these do not correspond exactly to the breakdowns used by BARB, we felt that these would probably represent the key age breaks.

The research brief indicated that the sample should contain a demographic mix to reflect BARB profiles. Although not directly representative of the proportions identified in the figures, the sample was biased towards those groups who make up the majority of the audience for wrestling in the UK.

There are some specific points to note about these age breaks: brackets become larger as age increases because the differences between consecutive ages - especially those which might influence group dynamics - become less marked the further up the scale one goes; the scale began at six years of age because of the complications of interviewing younger children, both in terms of their understanding of the issues and their ability to comment on them, and in terms of gaining parental consent; within the age brackets, a range of ages was represented in the group discussions.

### Sex

The sample was biased towards males as we were given to understand that they typically comprised between 62% and 76% of the audience for wrestling on UK television. However, the sample included females in order to explore their perceptions and to highlight any similarities and differences according to gender.

Because of the limited number of groups, and in order to explore male and female attitudes, some groups of older respondents included both males and females. Although, often, it is unwise to mix genders, we felt that the sharing of an interest in wrestling would produce an acceptable level of homogeneity and that group dynamics would not be adversely affected. This appeared to be borne out by experience.

Amongst younger respondents, we decided not to mix the sexes. First, it was

envisaged that finding female fans of wrestling would be more difficult. Second, bravado and awkwardness can hinder productive discussion. We therefore conducted single sex groups with those under 24 years of age.

### Socio-economic group

Audience figures for wrestling showed that individuals from socio-economic groups C2DE represent the majority of viewers: proportions are between 60% and 72%. This was reflected in the sample design.

Due to potential recruitment difficulties (typically it is very difficult to encourage attendance at group discussions by those in group 'A'), the broader socio-economic groups BC1C2 was suggested as the comparison group to those from C2DE.

### Level of interest in wrestling

The sample was controlled for levels of interest in watching wrestling. It seemed likely that dedicated followers would have different views from those whose interest was more casual. Subsequent discussion with the BBFC, ITC and BSC suggested that these definitions of 'dedicated' and 'casual' viewers should include consideration of both the frequency of viewing wrestling and the breadth of programmes and delivery channels viewed. The definitions were also adjusted to reflect the likely difference in viewing habits across the different age groups. For instance, it did not seem sensible to require that six and seven year olds watched the same amount of wrestling, or across the variety of different channels that 25 to 35 year olds did.

With the above in mind, the following definitions emerged:

*Casual viewers (under 16)* watched wrestling on terrestrial and/or satellite/cable/digital (multi-channel) television on average at least once every two or three weeks but no more than twice in one week. They owned no more than two videos of wrestling. They agreed with the following attitudinal statement:

*I like watching wrestling but it is not my favourite thing on television. I don't really know all the wrestlers' names and I am not bothered if I haven't seen a wrestling programme for two or three weeks.*

*Casual viewers (16+)* watched wrestling on terrestrial and/or multi-channel television on average at least once or twice every two weeks but no more than twice in one week. They owned no more than two videos of wrestling and agreed with the following statement:

*I enjoy watching wrestling but I don't follow it especially.*



*Dedicated viewers (under 16) watched wrestling on terrestrial and/or multi-channel television at least once a week. They also watched more than one type of programme. They owned at least two videos of wrestling and could own any number. They agreed with the following:*

*I love watching wrestling and wouldn't miss my favourite wrestling programmes. I know all the wrestlers' names and like to follow them through watching videos, reading magazines or looking at websites.*

*Dedicated viewers (16+) watched wrestling on terrestrial and/or multi-channel television at least twice a week. They followed a number of different programmes and owned at least two videos of wrestling and could own any number. They agreed with the following:*

*Watching wrestling is one of my favourite pastimes and I don't like to miss out on any of my preferred programmes. I follow my favourite wrestlers through watching videos, reading magazines, looking at websites or attending live events.*

#### 2.1.5 Delivery channel

In each group there was a mix of those who watched wrestling on terrestrial television, on satellite/cable/digital television and on video to explore the differences in perception according to platform. At least three in each group watched wrestling on multi-channel television and at least two owned wrestling videos.

In the sample of depth interviews the main delivery channel was specified in order to explore in more detail the issues around where individuals watch wrestling. Respondents were recruited according to the channel through which they most often watched wrestling.

BBFC179

NOVEMBER 2000

RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE - AGED 12 AND UNDER

Name:

.....

Address:

.....

.....Tel:.....

Sex: Male ( ) Female ( ) Age: 6-7 ( ) 10-12 ( )

Occupation (HoH): .....

SeS: B ( ) C1 ( ) C2 ( ) D ( ) E ( )

---

HELLO, I WORK FOR A MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY AND WE ARE CONDUCTING SOME RESEARCH ON PROGRAMMES YOU WATCH ON TV. MAY I ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS?

QA Do any of your family work in any of the following industries now or have they ever done so in the past? SHOWCARD A

- Advertising ( )
- Marketing ( )
- Market research ( )
- Public relations ( )
- Television services ( )
- Video production ( )

CLOSE IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, OTHERWISE GO TO QB.

QB Have you been to a market research discussion before?

- Yes ( ) TO QC
- No ( ) TO Q1

QC What did you talk about at the other discussion(s)? WRITE IN BELOW.

.....  
CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.

Q1 Which of the following do you watch on TV nowadays? SHOWCARD B

- Pokemon ( )
- Other cartoons ( )
- Blue Peter ( )

- Linford's Record Breakers ( )
- Newsround ( )
- Football ( )
- Wrestling ( )
- Other sport ( )
- None of these ( )

ALL RESPONDENTS TO TICK WRESTLING. TO Q2 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q2 How often do you watch wrestling nowadays? (either on TV, video or live events). Which of the following is most accurate for you?  
SHOWCARD C

- At least twice a week ( )
- At least once every two to three weeks, but no more than once a week ( )
- Less often ( )

'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 1 AND 2 AND DEPTHS 1 AND 3** SHOULD WATCH WRESTLING AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK.

'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - **DEPTHS 2 AND 4**, SHOULD WATCH WRESTLING AT LEAST ONCE EVERY TWO OR THREE WEEKS BUT NO MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK.

TO Q3 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q3 Do you own any professional wrestling videos and if so how many?

- None ( )
- One ( )
- Two ( )
- Three or more ( )

'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 1 AND 2 AND DEPTHS 1 AND 3** MUST OWN *AT LEAST TWO* VIDEOS OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING.

'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - **DEPTHS 2 AND 4**, SHOULD OWN *NO MORE THAN TWO* VIDEOS OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING (IF ANY).

TO Q4 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q4 Which of the following better describes you? SHOWCARD D

- A "I love watching wrestling and try not to miss my favourite wrestling programmes. I know the wrestlers' names and enjoy watching videos, reading magazines or maybe looking at websites

or attending live events" ( )

B "I like watching wrestling but it is not my favourite thing on television. I don't really know all the wrestlers' names and I am not too bothered if I haven't seen a wrestling programme for two or three weeks" ( )

'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 1 AND 2 AND DEPTHS 1 AND 3**, SHOULD AGREE WITH STATEMENT A. TO Q5 IF APPROPRIATE.

'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - **DEPTHS 2 AND 4**, SHOULD AGREE WITH STATEMENT B. TO Q6 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q5 '**DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS ONLY**. How many types of wrestling programme do you watch nowadays? (e.g. WWF, WCW, ECW)

One ( ) CLOSE  
Two or more ( ) TO Q6

Q6 And do you most often watch wrestling on.....

Channel 4 ( )  
Channel 5 ( )  
Satellite, cable or ONdigital ( )  
Video ( )

IN THE **GROUPS**, PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH TERRESTRIAL TV (CHANNEL 4 AND 5), THOSE WHO WATCH IT THROUGH MULTI-CHANNELS (SATELLITE, CABLE, ONDIGITAL) AND THOSE WHO WATCH IT ON VIDEO. AT LEAST THREE IN EACH GROUP MUST WATCH WRESTLING ON MULTI-CHANNEL TELEVISION.

RESPONDENTS FOR **DEPTHS 1 AND 3** SHOULD MOST OFTEN WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH MULTI-CHANNEL TV.

RESPONDENTS FOR **DEPTHS 2 AND 4** SHOULD MOST OFTEN WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION.

RECRUIT IF APPROPRIATE.

**N.B. PLEASE OBTAIN SIGNED PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR RESPONDENT TO TAKE PART IN DISCUSSION/INTERVIEW.**

**BBFC179**

**NOVEMBER 2000**

**RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE - AGED 16 AND OVER**

Name:

.....

Address:

.....

.....Tel:.....

Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )

Age: 16-18 ( ) 19-24 ( ) 25-35 ( ) 36-55+ ( )

Occupation (HoH): .....

SeS: B ( ) C1 ( ) C2 ( ) D ( ) E ( )

---

HELLO, I WORK FOR A MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY AND WE ARE CONDUCTING SOME RESEARCH ON PROGRAMMES YOU WATCH ON TELEVISION. MAY I ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS?

QA Do you or any of your family or close friends work in any of the following occupations or industries? SHOWCARD A

Advertising ( )  
Marketing ( )  
Market research ( )  
Public relations ( )  
Journalism ( )  
Television services ( )  
Video production ( )

IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, CLOSE, DO NOT RECRUIT. OTHERWISE GO TO QB.

QB Have you ever attended a market research group discussion or interview?

Yes ( ) GO TO QC  
No ( ) GO TO Q1

QC How long ago was the last market research group discussion or interview you attended?

Within the last 6 months ( ) CLOSE  
Longer than 6 months ago ( ) GO TO QD

QD What subject(s) have you ever discussed at a market research group discussion or interview? WRITE IN BELOW

.....

CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.

Q1 Which, if any, of the following do you watch nowadays? DO NOT PROBE. SHOWCARD B

- Football
- Tennis
- Rugby
- Wrestling
- Boxing
- Racing
- Other (specify) .....

IF WRESTLING TICKED, TO Q2. OTHERWISE CLOSE.

Q2 How often do you watch wrestling (either on TV or on video, or live events) nowadays? Which of the following is most accurate for you? SHOWCARD C

- At least twice a week
- At least once every two to three weeks, but no more than once a week
- Less often

**'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 4, 6, 8 AND 9 AND DEPTHS 5, 6, 7 AND 10 SHOULD WATCH WRESTLING AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK.**

**'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 3, 5, 7 AND 10 AND DEPTHS 8 AND 9, SHOULD WATCH WRESTLING AT LEAST ONCE EVERY TWO OR THREE WEEKS BUT NO MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK.**

TO Q3 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q3 Do you own any professional wrestling videos and if so how many?

- None ( )
- One ( )
- Two ( )
- Three or more ( )

'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 4, 6, 8 AND 9 AND DEPTHS 5, 6, 7 AND 10** MUST OWN AT LEAST TWO VIDEOS OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING.

'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 3, 5, 7 AND 10 AND DEPTHS 8 AND 9**, SHOULD OWN *NO MORE THAN TWO* VIDEOS OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING. IN THESE GROUPS, AT LEAST TWO RESPONDENTS SHOULD OWN WRESTLING VIDEOS.

TO Q4 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q4 Which of the following better describes you? SHOWCARD C

- A "I love watching wrestling and try not to miss my favourite wrestling programmes. I know the wrestlers' names and enjoy watching videos, reading magazines, maybe looking at websites or attending live events." ( )
- B "I enjoy watching wrestling, but would not say it is my favourite television programme. I don't really know all the wrestlers' names and I am not too bothered if I haven't seen a wrestling programme for two or three weeks." ( )

'DEDICATED' RESPONDENTS -- RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 4, 6, 8 AND 9 AND DEPTHS 5, 6, 7 AND 10**, SHOULD AGREE WITH STATEMENT A. TO Q5 IF APPROPRIATE IF APPROPRIATE.

'CASUAL' RESPONDENTS - RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 3, 5, 7 AND 10 AND DEPTHS 8 AND 9**, SHOULD AGREE WITH STATEMENT B. TO Q6 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q5 '**DEDICATED**' RESPONDENTS ONLY. How many types of wrestling programme do you watch nowadays? (e.g. WWF, WCW, ECW, WWF)

- One ( ) CLOSE
- Two or more ( ) TO Q6

Q6 And do you most often watch wrestling on.....

- Channel 4 ( )
- Channel 5 ( )

Satellite, cable or ONdigital  
Video

( )  
( )

IN THE **GROUPS**, PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH TERRESTRIAL TV (CHANNEL 4 OR 5), THOSE WHO WATCH IT THROUGH MULTI-CHANNELS (SATELLITE, CABLE OR ONDIGITAL) AND THOSE WHO WATCH IT ON VIDEO. AT LEAST THREE IN EACH GROUP MUST WATCH WRESTLING ON MULTI-CHANNEL TELEVISION.

RESPONDENTS FOR **DEPTHS 5, 6, 7 AND 9**, SHOULD MOST OFTEN WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH MULTI-CHANNEL TV.

RESPONDENTS FOR **DEPTHS 8 AND 10** SHOULD MOST OFTEN WATCH WRESTLING THROUGH TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION.

RECRUIT IF APPROPRIATE.



### APPENDIX 3: VIDEO STIMULUS BY AGE

#### 6-7

Extended footage of WCW Worldwide, bout featuring Vampiro and Crowbar

#### 10-12

As above

#### 16-18

Extended footage of C4 WWF Heat/Backlash (Trish Stratus and Bubba Ray Dudley table match)

WWF Hell in a cell

WWF Male/female fight (featuring Chyna and Kurt Angle)

WWF Heat (introduced by *'Don't try this at home'*)

TBS Cat/dog fight

WCW/NOW Superstar series - Diamond Dallas Page Feel The Bang (wrestler uses bull rope to strangle opponent and hang him from cage)

WCW Uncensored (throat hold with foot, cut from final work)

WCW (double ear clap, cut from final work)

WCW (wrestlers use a variety of household items in ring)

Best of WCW/NOW (wrestler accepts money from opposition team and turns on tag team partner)

#### 19-24, 25-35, 36-55

Extended footage of C4 WWF Heat/Backlash, Trish Stratus and Bubba Ray Dudley table match)

WWF Hell in a cell

WWF Male/female fight (featuring Chyna and Kurt Angle)

WWF Heat (introduced by *'Don't try this at home'*)

TBS Cat/dog fight

WCW/NOW Superstar series - Diamond Dallas Page Feel The Bang (wrestler uses bull rope to strangle opponent and hang him from cage)

WCW Uncensored (throat hold with foot, cut from final work)

WCW (double ear clap, cut from final work)

WCW (wrestlers use a variety of household items in ring)

Best of WCW/NOW (wrestler accepts money from opposition team and turns on tag team partner)

ECW Anarchy Rulz (18 certificate advertisement for Playstation game)

WWF Rebellion (18) (Godfather enters ring with a number of scantily clad women posing as prostitutes)

WWF Stone cold (18) (bloody confrontation between Stone Cold and Hitman Hart)

WWF Royal Rumble (18) (Cactus Jack attacks Triple H with a lump of wood wrapped in barbed wire & Cactus Jack sprinkles thumb tacks on ring floor and attacks Triple H)

ECW Hardcore Heaven (18) (Dudley boys rant and rave backstage)

ECW Heatwave 2000 (18) (wife of wrestler is abused inside and outside ring)

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## APPENDICES

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