

Gladiators in Spandex: violence, masculinity and popular culture in British professional wrestling 1960-2015.

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Abstract

Since 1960 British professional wrestling (BPW) has been one of Britain's favourite working class pastimes. Due to its nature as a violent and masculine form of sports entertainment, BPW became engrained within working class popular culture. Due to its nature as neither wholly a sport nor entertainment, BPW has changed since the 1960s to reflect the working classes' perceptions of violence, masculinity and popular culture. However, because of this BPW has been impacted upon by wider social attitudes towards violence, masculinity and popular culture. By tracing BPW across three key periods: its 'Golden age' of 1960-1980, its decline, 'The Fall', between 1980-2000 and subsequent 'Resurgence' 2010-2015 this dissertation will look to not only highlight how and why changing views towards violence, masculinity and popular culture shaped BPW throughout its history but will aim to show how BPW has impacted on the working classes attitudes towards, violence, masculinity and popular culture. By using a variety of different sources, such as newspaper articles, visual sources and oral sources this dissertation will aim to tap into the historical evidence that has been made available to fans of BPW, and will look to apply these sources to the study of BPW to highlight how violence, masculinity and popular culture have shaped BPW throughout its history.

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List of Abbreviations

BPW:	British professional wrestling
ICW:	Insane Championship Wrestling
WWE:	World Wrestling Entertainment
WWF:	World Wrestling Federation

Introduction

In the ring, and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key to which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a justice which is at last intelligible (Barthes, 2009, p.14)

While for the most part the historical study of professional wrestling has been ignored, due to the common held view that it is ‘staged and ‘faked’’ (Chow, 2014, p.46), Roland Barthes, in his study on French wrestling, highlights the complex and undeniable relationship that Professional Wrestling shares with not only the fans, but other key themes such as masculinity and popular culture. While Barthes carved the way in the study of professional wrestling, his work was solely based on French wrestling and his theory based on the complexity and symbolic meaning of wrestling has yet to be applied to British professional wrestling (BPW). This dissertation will look to build upon and expand the idea, put forward by Barthes, that ‘Wrestling is not a sport it is a spectacle’ (2009, p.3) and will look to explain the unique relationship that BPW shares with violence, masculinity and popular culture.

Before continuing, it must first be made clear what is meant by the term BPW. In the first period examined by this dissertation it was a stand-alone style of All-in Wrestling, which ‘was introduced in Britain in the 1930s as a popular entertainment’ (Snape, 2013, p.1418). This style of wrestling is not the type of wrestling seen in the Olympics; rather it grew out of a long tradition of travelling shows. However, since BPW’s decline and resurgence this style of wrestling has become a hybrid of wrestling styles made popular by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in the 1980s. Due to its position as neither wholly a sport nor a set form of entertainment, BPW is forever changing and, by following the history of BPW through three distinct periods: the ‘Golden Era’ (1960-1980), ‘BPW’s Fall’ (1980-2000) and finally BPW’s ‘Resurgence’ (2010-2015) this dissertation aims to show how BPW acts as a window onto the public’s perceptions of violence, masculinity and popular culture throughout these periods.

Due to its complex nature of being caught in the boundaries between sport and entertainment, wrestling has been largely ignored by historians and because of this has a very limited historiography. Therefore this dissertation will look to create its own historiography by expanding on and applying historical theories based on other fields of study to BPW. Because of this, while this dissertation will offer a study into BPW, it will

also offer new insight into other fields of study, for example leisure and the study of masculinity. During the 1960s BPW emerged as one of Britain's favourite pastimes with up to '4,266,000' (Anon., 1964) people tuning in to watch weekly live shows, becoming part of British Saturday tea-time culture as a popular leisure activity. In her work on leisure, Julie-Marie Strange identifies that leisure and masculinity are entwined and despite many studies looking at this relationship, 'the relationship between masculinity and leisure is still fairly under-researched' (Strange, 2007, p.212). This dissertation will try to offer a new outlook for this issue by examining the relationship masculinity has with BPW.

While the spectacle of wrestling has been ignored, the relationship masculinity and wrestling share has been studied by historians and will be a focal point of this study. Due to the nature of wrestling, representing a battle between heroes and villains which emphasises physicality, athleticism and showmanship, wrestlers reflect the epitome of manhood and because of this provide a particular example of hegemonic masculinity. However, this dissertation will look to support the theory put forward by Raewyn Connell that 'masculinities come into existence at particular times and places' (2005, p.185), by highlighting the importance of the body in the study of masculinity. In her work on the body, Zweiniger-Bargielowska states that 'masculinity was inscribed on the body' (2011, p.193) and became a key factor in identifying men to hegemonic masculinity. The importance of the body has also been shown by Blair and Soulliere who highlight the impact that body-types have in relation to hegemonic masculinity, due to the emergence of wrestlers in America who were 'Herculean in nature' (Blair and Soulliere, 2006, p.278). This dissertation will look to test Connell's thesis that masculinities change, by providing empirical examples of how the body has impacted masculinity in BPW throughout these periods.

While the theme of masculinity will be key throughout this dissertation, it will not be the only historiography used. Due to its complex nature of being a hybrid of both sport and entertainment this dissertation will draw heavily from the limited historiography based on wrestling that is available. While the history of BPW is clearly under researched the study of American wrestling has grown in recent years, with focus put on the importance of its study in relation to popular culture, society, masculinity, violence and elements of the performance. While this dissertation does not look to cover all these areas of study, due to its main focus being placed on the roles of violence, masculinity and popular culture, it is because of wrestling's complex nature that overlaps within the study of wrestling must be expected. While this historiography is hugely important to this study, the issue remains that

most of the available history on wrestling is based on American wrestling and therefore may not provide an accurate reflection of BPW. In order to combat this, this dissertation will use primary sources to create a more accurate picture of BPW. By using visual and oral sources this dissertation will look to carve out a unique historiography of its own, one which is 'freed from overly deterministic models' (De Groot, 2009, p.1).

While these sources will be used to gain insight into the world of BPW, their strengths and limitation must be accounted for. Due to its limited history the issue arises that this dissertation may not be accurate due to 'the availability of historical evidence' (Tosh, 2002, p.54) being fragmented. However, this dissertation has sought to create its own historical evidence by using oral histories gained from interviews with professional wrestlers, from 'Grapple Wrestling School' in Leeds. Using oral history in the study of BPW is vital as it provides 'material that simply may not exist in any other form' (Peniston-Bird, 2008, p.106) and sheds light on a subject that for the most part little is known about. However, despite its strengths, oral history within the historical profession is still viewed sceptically due to the fact, as argued by Tosh it 'is naïve to suppose that the testimony given represents a pure distillation' of the past and is often biased as the 'presence of an outsider affects the atmosphere' (Tosh, 2002, p.303) and because of this may impact on what participants say. While these ideas highlight the negatives of oral history, this dissertation will aim to use oral history as a form of 'recovery history' (Peniston-Bird, 2008, p.106).

By combining both oral and visual sources this dissertation will look to recover the lost history of BPW. While oral history will be vital in doing this, this dissertation will also look to use film and images to aid in the 'recovery' of the history of BPW. Images archived on the *Wrestling Heritage* website, by fans of BPW, allow for this history to be recovered as they offer a visual record of what 'was once there' (Sayer, 2008, p.54) which is extremely useful as it provides hard evidence in supporting arguments this dissertation will make. As photographs contain 'a unique documentary authority' (Sayer, 2008, p.55). It is because of this, photographs along with oral histories can be combined not only to 'recover' BPW's history but to support each other as primary sources. Youtube will be used to provide video clips of wrestling matches, that would have been lost to history had it not been for fans of BPW trying to maintain BPW's history. These video clips will be used to highlight key themes and changes within the history of BPW. While similar to photographs with what they can offer, video clips are 'sources of objective historical evidence' (Richards, 2008, p.73) and can provide details that images and oral history cannot, such as

crowd reactions and the physicality of matches. By combining these three types of primary sources this dissertation will look to not only highlight the key themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture, but will also look to aid in the 'recovery' of BPW's history.

The final aim of this dissertation is to show how BPW can be used as a window onto the wider study of violence, masculinity and popular culture. It will highlight how changing attitudes, within the working classes, towards violence, masculinity and popular culture were reflected in BPW and the changes that took place within BPW from 1960-2015. Chapter one will address the 'Golden Years' of BPW and highlight how wrestlers of this period reflected the pinnacle of masculinity and due to the violence and symbolic meaning of matches became the epitome of hegemonic masculinity between 1960-1980. Chapter two, will focus on 'The Fall' of BPW, which took place from 1980 until 2000 and will look to identify the impact that Americanization had on BPW and the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture. This chapter will focus on how the body became entwined with the way contemporaries of the time saw masculinity and highlight how the emergence of the 'bodybuilder image' became the new form of hegemonic masculinity. It will also examine the changes in popular culture which saw the desire for soap opera type storylines develop in wrestling. Chapter three will then focus on the 'Resurgence' of BPW over the last five years, 2010-2015. This chapter will discuss the idea of hybridity and will look to explain how, by becoming a hybrid show that has taken elements from all different forms of wrestling, BPW has created a new hybrid form of entertainment. This chapter will also address how the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture within BPW have also developed hybrid forms.

By focusing on these three distinct periods this dissertation will not only show how the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture have changed within the working classes of Britain, but will look to explain how and why these themes have changed in relation to BPW as a whole.

Chapter One: ‘Hello grapple fans!’ British Professional Wrestling’s Golden Era, 1960-1980

Before engaging with the ‘Golden Era’ of BPW it is useful to first begin with a narrative outline of the changes in BPW leading up to the period on which this study will focus. Wrestling first emerged in Britain at the start of the 20th century in music halls and circuses when strong men such as John Lemm, Georg Hackenschmidt and Eugen Sandow wrestled to prove their dominance and masculinity, over ‘lesser men’. These matches would take place all over the country and appealed to all forms of classes. Griffiths states ‘Between 1930 and 1945 wrestling could lay claim to being one of the most transnational sports moving across the Anglo-world’ (2015, p.38). However, by the 1930s wrestling began to be scrutinised by journalists claiming that it was more focused on the selling of the show, rather than the sport itself. In 1947, lifelong wrestling fan Edward Evans, the 1st Baron Moutevans and member of the House of Lords, formed a select committee to come up with a legitimate set of rules for BPW. In 1952 these rules were adopted by Joint Promotions, Britain’s largest wrestling promotion. During the Golden Era they would act as the back bone to the new form of BPW.

While the legitimacy of rules, gave BPW a body to stand behind it, it was the wrestlers themselves who contributed to the emergence of Britain’s most beloved and forgotten pastime. BPW truly entered its Golden Era during the 1960s when the feud between Jackie Pallo and Mick McManus sky rocketed and enthralled the nation, so much so that Mick McManus claims that on a cup final day he and Pallo ‘pulled figures of eleven to twelve million. It was accepted that more people watched us than the Cup Final’ (Garfield, 2007, p.56). However, the question still remains why were the British public so in awe of BPW during this period? To answer this question this chapter will enter the ring and look at how masculinity, violence and popular culture impacted on BPW in the decades between the 1960s and 80s.

Taking popular culture as the starting point, the importance and popularity of BPW can only properly be understood by accepting the idea put forward by Roland Barthes that ‘Wrestling is not a sport it is a spectacle’ (2009, p.3). When accepting this belief the drastic growth in BPW’s popularity between 1960-1980 can be used as a mirror to delve deeper into British society during this period. This chapter will explain the unique relationship that

BPW shared with the British public between 1960-1980, while highlighting how views within popular culture, primarily people's perceptions of masculinity and violence, were embodied within one of Britain's most beloved forms of entertainment.

British professional wrestling the television spectacle.

The main growth of BPW came from the emergence of television, especially ITV, where wrestling was given a platform to build from: 'Wrestling provided to be a long-running feature of ITV' (Ellis, 2005, p.43) and as shown in the *Daily Mail* article '*Like it or not, wrestling is here to stay*', the public became addicted: 'Every Wednesday night 4,266,000 families tune in to Independent TV's pre-recorded programme; 3,202,000 to the Saturday afternoon live show' (Anon., 1964). Wrestling became ITV's centre piece maintaining a weekly slot on ITV's World of Sport (Fig. 5) while television offered the public access to BPW as, 'by the end of the sixties the large majority of British homes had a (television) set' (Malchow, 2011, p.255), it was the characters the wrestlers portrayed that truly drew audiences in.

While television brought wrestling to the public it was the battle between the heroes (Faces), who 'represent an idealised conception of what humanity can and should aspire to be' (Llinares, 2011, p.1) and the villains (Heels) that drew the audience in. The 'spectacle' (Barthes, 2009, p.3) of BPW is driven from its romanticized battle between heroes and villains, and the eternal struggle between good and evil. The purpose of these matches was to take the audience through an emotional battle, aiming to allow the fans to feel and believe in the struggle they saw before them. Roland Barthes emphasises this by stating that 'the function of the wrestler is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him' (20007, p.4). It was here where the relationship between the fan and the wrestler began to form as 'Men see the ring villains as their bosses or rivals' (Anon., 1964).

Jones suggests that heroes can be seen 'as sites within which we can find evidence of the cultural beliefs, social practices' (2007, p.440); this too can be applied to villains. The villains of BPW often represented the perception of 'the man' always bringing down, and trying to keep down, the hard working honest hero, by using underhanded methods such as low blows and eye rakes, moves made infamous by Jackie Pallo (TheWrestlingVideos, 2008, 2:20-2:30). It is the symbolic value of these actions that the fans truly related to. They saw themselves as the heroes, hardworking, honest and always abiding the rules, only to be brought down unfairly by those above them highlighted by

Campbell who states a hero must face some levels of ‘humiliation and degradation’ (Campbell, 1996, p.129) in the face of defeat. While to modern day standards this may not seem villainous Campbell states that ‘conceptions of good and evil in wrestling can depend on what a particular generation sees as being good or evil’ (Campbell, 1996, p.128) this can be further seen by the outfits the villain wore. Mick McManus, (Fig. 3) was one of BPW’s main villains. His all-black trunks, boots and dyed back hair embodied the widely held views the working classes had towards villains during this period. The idea being that black was bad something associated with evil and villains.



Fig. 3 Mick McManus: *Wrestling Heritage Photo Archive*

The Wrestler look, wrestlers and their bodies.

Masculinity also played a huge role in BPW although its impact is difficult to define. Historians have long debated the topic of masculinity. However, recent developments in the study of masculinity have led to historians moving their focus away from traditional characteristics which make up masculinity ‘such as will power, honour, and courage’ (Mosse, 1996, p.4) and instead focusing on the male body and its change throughout history. Historians such as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Soulliere and Blair have begun to study the male body and its relationship with masculinity. As seen in (Fig. 1) wrestler’s bodies, mainly their physiques have been intertwined with wrestling since its origins. In its simplest form wrestling is a battle of physical manliness where two men compete to assert their dominance over each other and prove their manliness, meaning strength and power are needed.

In their work on how the male body is portrayed in wrestling today, Soulliere and Blair coin the term ‘hyper-male’ (2006, p.268). In this they identify wrestlers as ‘above average in height, weight, and musculature’ (Soulliere and Blair, 2006, p.278). While Soulliere and Blair focus their study on wrestling today, this theory can be applied to the Golden Era of British Wrestling, in particular wrestlers such as Jackie Pallo (Fig. 2). As can be seen in (Fig. 2) Pallo appears larger in stature than most men of this period. However, while he was only five foot six the emphasis of Pallo’s stature can be seen in his shoulders, arms and core. This most likely came from the fact that Pallo’s family owned a boxing gym where Pallo trained. Pallo’s exercises and training lead to him appearing as this decade’s image of a Greek half-god, ‘lean, muscular and strong’ (Soulliere and Blair, 2006, p.270). Pallo embodied the fit male body of this era, which was highlighted by Zweiniger-Bargielowska who states, ‘The iconic status of the fit male body became a powerful national symbol’ (2010, p.193) because of this it is clear why Pallo was seen as a masculine man.



WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF
Jackie Mr. TV Pallo

Fig. 2 Jackie Pallo: *Wrestling Heritage Photo Archive*

While Pallo embodied the definition of ‘the fit male body’ (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2010, p.193) other wrestlers of this era maintained different body types. For

example Mick McManus, (Fig. 3) a villain of this era built his body differently. Being a villain McManus's body didn't share the same physical look as Pallo's; instead he opted for a more rugged look, while not muscular still, 'bullish, and still rather menacing' (Garfield, 2007, p.9) as can be seen by his more menacing and hardened look. McManus's masculinity may have stemmed from the fact during this period 'A tougher manliness was in fashion' (Mosse, 1998, p.182) as can be seen by his rugged look. Further reason for these differences may have been highlighted by Gattario et al, who look at how men conform to masculine norms and how men's bodies have changed due to these norms. They state that 'violence predicted their body image' (Gattario et al, 2015, p.345); with McManus being a villain his drive to establish this rugged body type may have altered his training and diet plan as he needed to come across as more dominant than visually pleasing.

While wrestler's bodies represented the ideals of manly bodies during this era, both rugged and muscular, they were not the sole reason for wrestling popularity. Mick McManus believed that 'There was a certain sexual attraction' (Garfield, 2007, p.13) between the fans and wrestlers, 'Women see in the muscular giants the men they would have liked their husbands to be: forceful and dominant' (Anon., 1964). While this may have been true wrestlers' bodies were much more complex. Wrestlers' bodies of this time were the pinnacle of manliness as they embodied all characteristics of hegemonic masculinity during this time, from rugged men as suggested by Weber, to the athletic fit muscular man as highlighted by Zweiniger-Bargielowska. Wrestlers' popularity came from this as people looked up to them as the pinnacle of men. However, not all wrestlers matched these norms.

Wrestling with masculinity: the wrestling countertype.

While nearly all wrestlers embodied the muscular or rugged build, there were a small number of wrestlers who exhibited feminine features, appearing as countertypes to the hegemonic masculinity of this period. While Jackie Pallo embodied the definition of masculinity he had a ponytail, which was seen by many to be a feminine feature, never before associated with masculinity. However, the most extreme of all these wrestlers was Adrian Street (Fig. 4). Street was unlike anything the British public had ever seen. With bleached blonde hair, make up, fake tan and spandex, Street portrayed the first 'homosexual' wrestler. While Street makes it clear that this persona was just an act, its

place in this study is vital as it shows further changing views towards masculinity: ‘I was getting far more reaction than I’d ever got just by playing this poof’ (Garfield, 2007, p.71).



Fig. 4 Adrian Street: *Wrestling Heritage Photo Archive*

In her work Raewyn Connell studied the emergence of gay men in British society stating that the long held view in the public eye was that ‘gay men: they lack masculinity’ (2005, p.143). This was expanded on by Street, as he stated: ‘The fans hated it, but you could see they were intrigued’ (Garfield, 2007, p.72). As shown by Street, homosexuals in British society during this time were still not fully accepted, especially amongst working class culture, and furthermore were seen as anything but masculine. Yet, Street stresses that over time, once people got used to his image, ‘Things began to take off’ (Garfield, 2007, p.73). As shown in (Fig. 4) Street’s body was similar to Pallo’s with greater definition in his arms, chest, shoulders and core than most men making him, like Pallo, similar to the ‘Greek half-god Adonis lean, muscular and strong’ (Soulliere and Blair, 2006, p.270). However, that alone was not enough to make him masculine in the eyes of the fans. Max

Crabtree, a Wrestling Promoter, states the fans' reaction was often "Get out of it you bloody poof, Street!" (Garfield, 2007, p.74) This shows that even though the male body is important to masculinity, as well as wrestling, it isn't the only factor that can be taken into consideration when looking at masculinity or the popularity of BPW.

The violence of BPW.

While the wrestlers played a huge role in the popularity of BPW, it was the violence of these matches which drew people to wrestling. Laurence De Garis, who highlighted that: while advertising may bring fans to the event once, 'good matches will bring them back. Matches, then, must be dramatic themselves, a story within a story' (Garis, 2005, p.193) forming an epic. Yet the question remains how did these matches find a way to make fans want to return so much? As stated earlier matches took place between Faces and Heels, in which a battle between good and evil took place. It was here the fans connected to the match, 'Men see the ring villains as their bosses or rivals' (Anon, 1964). Here fans took sides and want to see their suppressors beaten, and ultimately see good overcome evil. Susan Bennett argues that when watching a performance the audience sees 'the mainstream culture of their own historical moments' (Bennett, 1997, p.192) this means that it was very likely that wrestlers truly embodied these men's bosses, and working class men were drawn to wrestling as it reflected their everyday struggle.

Yet while the characters played a role, ultimately it was the violence they faced in the ring that drew people in. Nevitt who highlights the 'social script' (2013, p.38) of matches, shows the violence of these matches was popular as 'violent enactment of recognisable power relationships in such extreme ways serves to reinforce oppressive social and political norms' (2013, p.38). Expanding on this idea it can be argued that people agreed with the violence they were seeing as they enjoyed seeing the hero overcome the villain, acting as a form of escapism from normal life. Gilda Berger suggests that a wrestling ring represented a 'theatre of violence' (1990, p.69); the moves conducted in the ring often reflected the character of the wrestlers; eye rakes and low blows were conducted by the villains, such as Pallo and McManus who were famous for using underhanded moves, while the hero kept to the rules. Moves ultimately highlight the struggle of a battle, Barthes argued that 'The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions' (Barthes, 2009, p.4) here Barthes refers to the struggle in which wrestlers go through, fans expect to see the hero dominated and beaten, highlighting the troubles they face, being knocked back down

repeatedly, but then having the power and will to come back and win, against all the odds. It was here where the violence of matches was sold. The hero had to be beaten so badly it seemed a win was impossible. Yet as Barthes writes 'The logical conclusion does not interest the wrestling-fan' (2009, p.4) instead they were interested with the ideal that good can triumph over evil no matter what the odds.

This chapter has established why BPW acted as a social script for British society of this era by embodying the views society held towards, violence, masculinity and popular culture between 1960 1980. Its ability to do this would not last. BPW would face a steep decline after 1980. Chapter two will look to highlight why failure to measure up to the perceived values British society had towards violence, masculinity and popular culture would end Britain's favourite past time.

Chapter Two: 'The Fall' of British wrestling: American wrestling as Sports Entertainment in the 1980s.

The 1980s marked the end of the 'Golden Years' of BPW. Repetitive and dull matches had all but destroyed the entertainment factor of matches leading to Greg Dyke, the new director of programmes at ITV, deciding to take the 'cheerful mayhem' (Kelner, 2013, p.157) of BPW off the air in December 1988. However, while this chapter will highlight why BPW declined, due to changing factors within Britain, it will ultimately look at the impact of American wrestling, in particular the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) on the British public and their expectations of wrestling. During this period the WWF shifted its efforts from trying to sell wrestling as a legitimate form of sport to selling wrestling as a form of 'Sports Entertainment'. This shift back to wrestling's origins of 'ancient theatres' (Barthes, 2009, p.3) created a hybrid form of sport and drama and in doing so drastically changed the expectations of the British public when it came to wrestling matches. This chapter will show how the changes in working class attitudes towards violence, masculinity and popular culture lead to the decline of BPW. The relevance of this chapter is a deliberate attempt to underline the impact that America, not just WWF, had on British Wrestling and British society during the 1980s.

A Television Generation, the first decline of BPW

By the mid-eighties, BPW's decline had begun. British television was beginning to go through drastic changes due to Americanisation: 'Britain could not remain immune from the main currents of American social and cultural life' (Water, 2007, p.452). Watching television had become a main leisure pastime 'a mass activity' (Malchow, 2011, p.255) within Britain as it had become the "default" activity when there was nothing else to do' (Holt and Mason, 2000, p.105). However, an influx of American shows which 'sensationalized sex and violence' (Malchow, 2011, p.255) drastically changed attitudes towards entertainment within British society. This change in British popular culture would ultimately lead to the decline of BPW.

ITV launched in September 1955 to offer an alternative to the BBC's traditional shows and sports, while claiming to offer the working classes shows they wanted to see and 'with a regular and recurring timeslot professional wrestling became a signature of the

channel' (Litherland, 2012, p.580). BPW was seen as the embodiment of 'working class entertainment and aspirations' (MacFarlane, 2012, p.137) as shown in Chapter one. However, despite its mass appeal to the working classes, wrestling in the eyes of the upper class was nothing more than a form of low cultured entertainment unworthy of being on television: 'wrestling is the odd man out, the one that doesn't quite belong' (Kretzmer, 1982). This was a view shared by Greg Dyke, who claimed that wrestling 'was tarnished with the old-style look of ITV' (Garfield, 2007, p.145) and no longer had a place on his new look, 'new era' (Fitzwalter, 2008, p.30) ITV. This shows that the working class tastes were being forced to change with the removal of beloved shows, such as BPW, for 'lightweight and ephemeral' (Ellis, 2005, p.36) shows instead.

This policy can clearly be seen when in 1988 BPW was taken off air and replaced by popular American imports which were used as 'low-cost filler' (Malchow, 2011, p.255) such as *The A-Team* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Giant Haystacks, one of Britain's most famous wrestlers expands on this by stating 'Instead of wrestling they (ITV) put on these violent movies showing debauchery and murder' (Garfield, 2007, p.142). This highlights the shift away from traditional British working class values as new forms of entertainment were in demand. This view of wrestling and BPW goes some way to answering the question: why was BPW removed from British Television? But were there other reasons?

British professional wrestling 'is crap!'

When BPW was removed from television, audiences still initially flocked to live shows to see how feuds and clashes ended. However, despite its initial demand, BPW would all but vanish by the end of the 1980s, replaced by the new form of 'Sport Entertainment' that the WWF was providing. This chapter will now look at why BPW was overshadowed by its American counterpart.

To be able to fully understand why the WWF was able to take over from BPW a comparison of two 'Main Event Matches' from each of these promotions is useful. While there have been many famous British wrestlers, the two most ingrained in the popular culture of Britain were Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks. Daddy (Fig. 6) 'weighed over 25 stone' (Chow, 2004) and was the nation's hero.



Fig. 6 Big Daddy: *Wrestling Heritage*

Meanwhile his arch-rival, and the nation's villain, Giant Haystacks was 'an enormous man, standing 6 feet 11 inches and weighing almost 50 stone' (Holt, 2004) (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Giant Haystacks: *Wrestling Heritage*

Their feud, to show who the greater man was, had begun in the mid 70s and by the start of the 80s was the main concern of the BPW's audience with their final bout coming at Wembley in 1981. It is this match that this chapter will focus on and use as comparison to a similar WWF match. Despite the fact that this match took place seven years before BPW was finally taken off air, this match is vital to this chapter's study as it shows the best reflection of why BPW began to decline and why it was doomed long before its removal from ITV in 1988.

While this feud was hugely popular with the working classes of this time, the matches that were being put on lacked any form of entertainment and were seen by the majority of people as 'A couple of obscenely fat men fall all over each other in what appears to be an unseemly, middle-age brawl' (Kretzmer, 1982). This view was also shared by wrestlers from this period such as Jackie Pallo and Dave Soulman Bond. Pallo suggested that BPW was 'crap!' (Garfield, 2007, p.146) it was no longer entertaining because of its short duration, lack of moves and predictability, a point highlighted by Bond: 'Daddy won, and that was it' (Garfield, 2007, p.153). It was this lack of excitement and its predictability that left BPW in a vulnerable position:

The whole Big Daddy, Giant Haystacks thing obviously drew big numbers for British wrestling back then but it also left the impression to a lot of people who weren't wrestling fans of that's what British wrestling was that it was a couple of big fat guys, in singlets just running at each other.(Interviewee D, 2015)

This notion of two fat men running at each other can be seen in this match's only exciting sequence where a brief exchange of shoulder charges take place (TICE123, 2009, 2:10-2:20). While this may have been exciting to the fans of the time, due to the fact they 'were attracted less by the athletic endeavours of its exponents than by the glitz and glamour of the rituals' (Chow, 2004) such as Big Daddy's entrance and his obvious victory, the fact remained, this match was not exciting. This feud was built over ten years and for their final match to last just three minutes highlights why BPW was a dying form of entertainment. More time in this match was spent with the two men hugging in the middle of ring than wrestling. By comparing this 'once in a life time' Main Event to a main event in the WWF, shows why BPW was on the decline.

Much like BPW, the WWF had two men at the top of their promotion, Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant. In a similar way to Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks these two men were seen as the two top heavy weights in the company: Hogan (fig. 9) at twenty one stone and Andre the Giant (Fig.8) at thirty seven stone. The similarities of these four men continue as Hogan and Andre were in the midst of a feud that started in 1987 and captured

the hearts of many Americans. The match this dissertation will look at takes place in 1988 and is a rematch of their '*Wrestlemania III*' match that had taken place the year before. This match was a Main Event sold on these two men's desire to beat the other and unlike the match between Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks provided many different layers of entertainment.

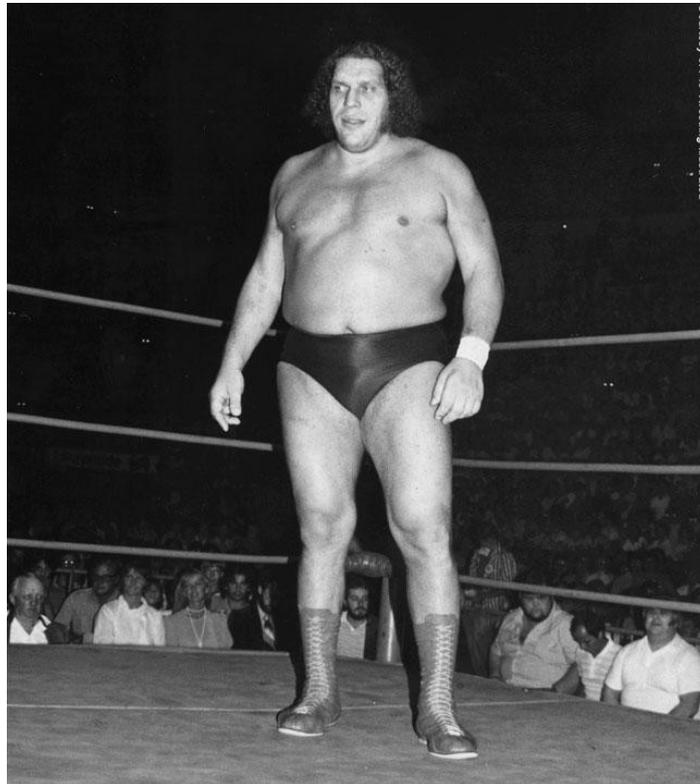


Fig. 8 Andre the Giant: *WWE.com*

Unlike the match between Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks, this match provided a lot of exciting action due to the moves conducted. An example of this is Andre 'scoop slamming' Hogan in the middle of the ring (WWE Classic Matches & Reviews, 2012, 4:38-4:45) as well as delivering multiple head-butts to Hogan (WWE Classic Matches & Reviews, 2012, 4:30-5:30). This provided more 'entertainment' for the audience, in the form of different physical moves, in one sequence than the whole Big Daddy vs. Giant Haystack's match, highlighting why BPW began to decline as the British public found a new form and definition of violence in this American wrestling.

However, this wasn't the only form of entertainment that came in this match. As stated earlier in this chapter, the WWF was going through a drastic change, moving away from mundane wrestling matches and instead intent on creating a true spectacle, 'as both sport and drama' (Souther, 2007, p.217). Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks' feud was simply

built on the battle between two colossal men trying to prove that they were the best “big man” and when the match ended with Big Daddy knocking Giant Haystacks out of the ring it proved he was the better (TICE123, 2009, 3:45-4:00). While this may have provided some level of entertainment, the WWF created many more. While WWF matches maintained the ‘violent and sensual meeting of human flesh in the ring’ (Sammond, 2005, p.7) that the British public enjoyed they also represented a much ‘greater plot’ (Pratten, 2003, p.33). The WWF were creating a ‘highly physical, male-orientated soap opera’ (Pratten, 2003, p.41) which was maintained by ‘soap-operatic storylines and back-stage intrigue’ (Sammond, 2005, p.7). It was here where the WWF drew fans in, as matches were no longer ‘one offs’ they began, through their soap opera storylines, to symbolise something other than just what the fans saw in the ring.

In the ‘masculine melodrama’ (Souther, 2007, p.270) that the WWF created, the battle between heroes and villains meant more than just the idea of good overcoming evil; it had much deeper symbolism than that. Villains in the WWF were made obvious as during this period, they embodied the enemies of America ‘changing from Russian to Iranian, to Arab; each new “foreign menace” pulled straight from the day’s headlines’ (Souther, 2007, p.270). In this case above, Andre, of French descent, represents the foreign menace. Hogan however, represents America: strong, powerful; able to overcome all the odds and victorious no matter what. So when Hogan loses this match to Andre the Giant a subplot is added to create more excitement for the fans, when it is revealed there was an imposter as referee (WWE Classic Matches & Reviews, 2012, 11:00-13:20) strengthening the idea that Hogan (America) can only be defeated if the rules are broken or he’s outnumbered. However, to reinforce the image of America as powerful, Hogan is able to still get some form of retribution: in this case lifting the fake referee above his head and throwing him out the ring (WWE Classic Matches & Reviews, 2012, 13:00-13:15).

This ‘soap opera’ twist had become a focal point of mainstream British entertainment. This now meant that the audience of BPW demanded more entertainment than they were receiving. By becoming a soap opera the WWF changed wrestling from a form of ‘sport’ to ‘sports entertainment’, which addressed all of the requirements, the public of this period now demanded: action, violence and drama. This style would become so popular it would all but destroy BPW during this period. However, it wasn’t just the entertainment value which drew fans towards the new form of wrestling in the WWF, but also the new form of wrestler being shown.

The new wrestler: tanned, toned and big.

With the emergence of WWF not only was the product of BPW impacted upon, but so too were the wrestlers. Since its origins wrestlers have always offered fans ‘a model of masculinity’ (Mazer, 1998, p.100) and, as suggested by Jackie Pallo, fans no longer wanted to go and see the ‘big fat horrible men. You don’t go to see big fat horrible men. You go to see dolly fellas’ (Garfield, 2007, p.146). This highlights the shifting view of masculinity during this period. While Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks were once seen as a models of masculinity and were still masculine, in the fact they ‘have the audience’s attention without doing anything based on their look, sheer size, they look like they can kill you’ (Interviewee D, 2015) they were no longer an embodiment of masculinity for the British public.

Hogan, on the other hand, embodied the new hegemonic man that had emerged in the 80s, the bodybuilder: ‘hardbodied, toned, and tanned’ (Mazer, 1998, p.98) (Fig. 9) unlike Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks who were both fat, which connected ‘the masculine body with weakness’ (Hearn, 1995, p.106). This is important as society, which had long associated certain values with masculinity (due to Victorian ideals of masculinity) had shifted in this new generation towards the idea that ‘muscles made men’. This highlighted the shortcomings of BPW, contributing further to a decline in its popularity. The Americanisation of television had left BPW out dated as audiences moved towards the new style of entertainment and the new understanding of masculinity.



Fig. 9 Hulk Hogan: hulkhogan.com

The 'bodybuilder look' had been made popular by celebrities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Mr T, in television and films, who had 'superbly developed bodybuilders' bodies (Mazer, 1998, pp.97-98). Because of this, 'The interest in bodybuilding, workout techniques, aerobics, and fitness in general exploded in the 1980s.' (Andreasson, 2014, p.99) This can be seen within in the WWF which was built around the ideal 'bigger is better' rather than the 'well-developed specimen of manhood' (Snape, 2013, p.1427). This shift in attitude can be seen in Hogan who, in his match against Andre, lifts the Ref above his head (WWE Classic Matches & Reviews, 2012, 13:04-13:12) highlighting his strength. Hogan's popularity would lead to his body becoming the 'WWE archetype' (Interviewee E, 2015).

This changing perception of masculinity highlights the drastic change society went through in this period as Hogan was almost identical to Adrian Street (Fig. 4) tanned, toned and with bleach blonde hair. Twenty years earlier Street was seen as a 'poof' due to his appearance, whereas by the 1980s working class ideas towards masculinity had become much more relaxed in regards to men's appearance, so long as they had muscles. BPW was built on traditional views of masculinity and celebrated the values of men over body, yet this would be a catalyst in the decline of BPW as wrestlers in WWF were, 'above average in height, weight, and musculature, and displays and descriptions of strength were often Herculean in nature' (Blair and Soulliere, 2006, p.278) due to 'intensive workouts, surgical augmentation, and/or steroids' (Sammond, 2005, p.7). This desire to see muscular and powerful men shows a change in the public's perception of body type and masculinity from that shown in Chapter one.

BPW had embodied the values of the working classes since it began, yet the shift in working class values towards the ideas of masculinity, violence and popular culture would ultimately run BPW into the ground during the 1980s. Ironically, while Americanisation acted as a catalyst in the drastic fall of the popularity of BPW, it did not end BPW. Chapter three will look to explain how, adapting to mirror these perceived values in British society since the 2000s: towards violence, masculinity and popular culture, has allowed BPW to move into a time of strong resurgence.

Chapter Three: The Full Circle: The Resurgence of British Wrestling.

As shown in the previous two chapters, since 1960, BPW and British society as a whole had felt the full brunt of cultural change and, because of this, has been forever altered. Due to changes in working class attitudes towards violence, masculinity and popular culture, BPW had all but disappeared after it came off terrestrial television in the late 1980s. However, small scale shows still put on performances ‘in front of fifty, sixty, seventy people in working men’s clubs’ (Interviewee D, 2015) or, on an even smaller scale, in local leisure centres and village halls. Minor success was found in companies who parted with traditional BPW values becoming a ‘watered down American version’ (Interviewee A, 2015) as most wrestlers of this time looked to the WWF as the Holy Grail of wrestling: ‘we look at America, we idolise it’ (Interviewee D, 2015). BPW was compromised further when WWF changed its name to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in May 2002. This emphasis on entertainment furthered the need for regular shows which allowed for soap opera-style plots and stories to be told. These changes, to audience expectation and their continuing influence on British culture, lead to the continuing downturn in the popularity of BPW.

However, WWE’s unrivalled position as the pinnacle of wrestling has since been challenged. Many fans now view the WWE as ‘quite stale’ (Interviewee C, 2015) and because of this, over the last five years, fans have begun to flock to British promotions, such as Insane Championship Wrestling (ICW) which has become the embodiment of the new BPW. Yet the question remains: why have fans gone back to BPW? This chapter will look to answer this question by drawing on interviews with British wrestlers and expanding on the point made by Dunn who suggests that ‘Fans of the old British style of wrestling have fallen away, replaced by young people used to the American television programmes’ (2013, pp.14-15). This chapter will show how, by becoming a unique hybrid form of entertainment which has taken and mixed a multitude of different cultures, BPW has experienced a resurgence and has once again become a niche pastime for the working classes.

Tradition with a twist: British professional wrestling now.

Since its decline in the 1980s, BPW’s product has been altered by not only the WWE but other imported styles of wrestling such as Lucha Libre from Mexico. However, by adopting these cultural differences and taking certain aspects from them a form of

hybridity has emerged within BPW. Hybridity in its simplest form can be defined as the mixing of two cultures, in this case American and British wrestling, to create a new culture. While the theory of hybridity is hugely controversial, this chapter will use the term 'metaphorically' (Mizutani, 2013, p.30) to highlight how British wrestling has now become a hybrid of both American wrestling and British wrestling.

The reason behind BPW/ ICW becoming a hybrid of both American and British wrestling is due to the acceptance of the view that 'Wrestling is not a sport it is a spectacle' (Barthes, 2009, p.3). By acknowledging the fact that wrestling is seen more as a spectacle by the fans, ICW and BPW has adopted the elements of American wrestling that created the most popular spectacle in wrestling. However, ICW's creator, Mark Dallas, openly states that ICW is 'not trying to mimic WWE' (Johnston, 2015), but instead offer a unique show fans of BPW can enjoy. By creating a hybrid show which contains the desired storylines, violence and character development the fans want to see, fans become 'emotionally invested in the characters' (Johnston, 2015) and because of this have flocked to ICW shows as it offers the fans the best of WWE and BPW.

While the influence of "'Family friendly" entertainment' (Smith, 2014, p.11) has become central to most forms of wrestling, ICW has shifted away from this by putting on 'over eighteens' shows' (interviewee E, 2015) only, creating a 'unique product' (Interviewee B, 2015) to the new generation of fans Dunn refers to. However, while ICW shows may appear unique to some, they represent a hybrid of both the American style of entertainment, made popular by the WWE, and the traditional shows that ran during the Golden Era of BPW. By adopting the popular 'soap opera-style storylines' (Johnston, 2015) such as those in WWE and adding an element of British-ness to them, by making these storylines 'very gritty, very hard hitting' (Interviewee A, 2015), ICW have created characters and storylines that reflect British society today, such as the emergence of lad culture which this chapter will address later. The hybridity of BPW comes from the 'respect for the British style' (Interviewee B, 2015) British wrestlers have and the emergence of the 'over the top razzmatazz, almost not real' (Interviewee A, 2015) feel that the WWE has created. It is because of that ICW has created a hybrid form of entertainment by mixing elements of both the American and British styles of wrestling.

The hybridity of BPW is further evidenced in how masculinity and violence are portrayed within ICW shows. Violence became a focal selling point in BPW in the 2000s, when WWE made violence a recurring theme in its storylines with the introduction of hardcore matches, which had no rules and often took place inside steel cages where

weapon use was not only encouraged by fans, but expected. This led to British companies, in the early 2000s participating in 'a game of one-upmanship' (Interviewee B, 2015) with matches becoming even more violent due to society's desire to see 'everything at once' (Interviewee C, 2015) and not have to wait and see a violent 'big move at the end' (Interviewee C, 2015) of a twenty minute match. Despite it being stripped 'back down again' (Interviewee C, 2015) and resembling the 'methodical, slower paced, but technically more accomplished' (Litherland, 2012, p.590) wrestling that took place in 'variety shows, like the circus' (Interviewee E, 2015), ICW maintains a 'loud in-your-face' (Smith, 2014, p.9) violent style of wrestling, where extreme matches, with no rules, encourage the use of weapons. These take place regularly, offering fans a 'good alternative' (Interviewee A, 2015) to other wrestling shows as they give the fans the violent element they want to see. This highlights the hybrid product that ICW is by tailoring its style to the expectations of the British public towards violence.

ICW's success comes from the fact that it has embraced all the changes that BPW has gone through over the last fifty years, such as: new perceptions of the body and masculinity; the changes in popular culture; changing attitudes towards violence and the emergence of 'sports entertainment'. Unlike other companies that have been 'quashed within the near-monopoly of the WWE' (MacFarlane, 2012, p.140) or forced to change and become something they're not, ICW has instead taken the most popular elements of both American wrestling and British wrestling and created the ultimate hybrid form of wrestling and in doing so provides a mirror for the changing attitudes within society in regard to violence, masculinity and popular culture. While the product of wrestling has felt the force of hybridity so too has the masculinity of wrestlers as this chapter will now show.

Introducing Grado! The importance of characters in BPW.

As shown in the previous two chapters the fundamental premise of a wrestling match is for wrestlers to assert their manliness over other wrestlers and because of this masculinity is entwined with wrestling. However, much like BPW, masculinity within wrestling in the twenty first century has also embraced hybridity. Hegemonic masculinity represents the pinnacle of masculinity 'to which other forms (of masculinity) are subordinate' (Beynon, 2001, p.162) and because of this has become synonymous with wrestling. However, as shown in the previous chapter, hegemonic masculinity is always subject to change and with the body builder look replacing the traditional wrestler look, it highlights the emergence of masculinism, 'the culture of 'being a man', traditionally based on physical

power, aggression and competition' (Beynon, 2001, p.162), which took over the role of hegemonic masculinity. Yet, while this is still the case in the WWE, British wrestlers display another kind of masculinity, hybridized masculinity, which is the 'outcome of cultural cross-over and borrowings from other versions of masculinity' (Beynon, 2001, p.162), as this chapter will now show.

While it used to be that the 'body of the wrestler' (Barthes, 2009, p.5) acted as a vessel for masculinity, the WWE changed this with the creation of characters. Wrestlers of the WWE were 'configured as an iconic identity' (Spark, 1996, p.93) each with their own unique persona which allowed for the development of soap opera plots by pitting opposite characters against each other. These characters either became so popular the audience talked 'less about the fighting itself than about the wrestlers and their exaggerated characters' (Jones and Ponton, 2004, p.223) or 'disappeared as quickly as they had arrived' (Litherland, 2012, p.590). Because of this development, characters became central to wrestling, needing to 'attain a strong emotional reaction from the audience' (Smith, 2008, p.157) in order to be successful. It is the creation of unique characters and their relationship with masculinity, within BPW that has allowed for its resurgence, highlighted by the popularity of such wrestlers as Grado (Fig.10). Grado is the persona of Graeme Stevely, ICW's biggest star. Grado represents further the hybrid nature of ICW and the hybridized masculinity that is now embodied in BPW. While Grado's body type may appear to aid in the understanding of how masculinity has changed, this chapter will first examine how his character affects the audience's view of how masculine he is.



Fig. 10 Grado: ICW photo archives

Grado's relationship with masculinity and the fans comes from the fact that he embodies the 'new lad'. With his carefree attitude Grado represents a time when men were 'able to behave badly and not worry about censure' (Beynon, 2001, p.111). The lad movement emerged in the 1990s in the wake of feminism and the crisis of masculinity with men looking to rebel and regain their position as men. While at first the lad movement was seen to some as nothing more than a generation of 'mindless-bully boys' (Pearson, 1983, p.3), the lad movement in Britain has become part of British masculinity, as its 'renewed focus on working class style of masculinity' (Forth, 2008, p.227) has led to a form of hybrid masculinity being created which is apparent in ICW. Grado is an example of the cultural change taking place within ICW. With strong links to the development of characters and storylines, which were both used by the WWE, ICW has absorbed certain American values and mixed them with an aura of 'Britishness'. Grado shows how British wrestling has moved away from the traditional WWE archetype by creating a character rich in British lad culture who glamorises the lad movement and brings a certain element of 'sophisticated humour' (Interviewee A, 2015) that highlights the return of British values

to BPW and how, by going back to what is British, ICW has engineered a large resurgence in popularity.

Grado's character can further be used to highlight the change in views towards hegemonic masculinity, due to him being 'such a loveable character that it wouldn't actually work if he was a big muscly guy' (Interviewee A, 2015). Due to his success as a 'comedy guy' (Interviewee E, 2015), Grado has shown that while the WWE may still 'glamorize the dominant form of masculinity by emphasizing physical size, strength and aggression' (Soulliere, 2006, p.3) BPW has returned to its traditional ways of valuing the actions of wrestlers and not just judging wrestlers by their body type. This can be seen also in Grado's comedic value as he openly mocks WWE in his entrance into the ring. While the entrance is meant to symbolise who the wrestler is and what they stand for, Grado uses his laddish behaviour to enter to Madonna's '*Like a Prayer*', developing his care free attitude which encourages the crowd's reaction when they erupt as the song reaches its chorus and Grado emerges into the arena dancing (1:30-1:55, Insane Championship Wrestling, 2014). This 'dry sense of humour' (Interviewee A, 2015) present in Grado's entrance is a clear example of how American and British wrestling have merged together to create a hybrid form of entertainment. However, while this hybridity can be seen in wrestlers' characters it is also apparent in their bodies, as now shown.

Muscles not needed: the new wrestler.

While the product of BPW has been altered due to the emergence of the WWE, no element of BPW has felt the brunt as badly as the body of wrestlers. As shown before, 'British wrestlers paled in comparison to the WWF's brand of bodybuilders' (Litherland, 2012, p.591) and because of this were no longer seen as the pinnacle of men. However, due to the emergence of character development and a change in the views towards masculinity, BPW has created a new form of masculine body type which, while not appearing to look like the 'traditional chiselled look' (Interviewee C, 2015) and bodybuilder image the WWE created, has allowed BPW to ask the question: 'what is the traditional look?' (Interviewee C, 2015)

While the WWE may be focused on the ideal of bodies representing 'steroid freaks' (Interviewee B, 2015), British wrestling has returned to its origins of wrestlers being 'lots of different shapes and sizes' (Interviewee A, 2015) despite the desire for muscle 'at the higher level' (Interviewee A, 2015). However, there is still a huge expectation on wrestlers 'to look like an athlete' (Interviewee C, 2015). While Grado (Fig. 10) may appear to be

overweight and out of shape, this is part of his character and he is more than able to perform at a high level: ‘Grado might play the character he’s tired and stuff but like he could go’ (Interviewee C, 2015). This put emphasis on the idea that if you’re willing to work and are physically fit and ‘able to go’ anyone can make it. This highlights the hybridity of masculinity taking place within BPW as the body is now becoming second to character when related to masculinity.

One reason for this is a shortage of heavyweights. BPW is ‘set around the junior heavyweights and the smaller guys who do the flashier stuff’ (Interviewee D, 2015) and because of this gives credence to the idea that size and muscle are of less importance in regard to masculinity. An example of this is El Ligero (Fig. 11) who, despite being tanned and toned, doesn’t match the WWE look as, at five foot nine and eleven stone, he lacks the size to be seen as a WWE star. However, El Ligero highlights the hybridity taking place in BPW as he not only draws inspiration from Lucha Libre in the way he presents himself but also is a reflection of the new hybrid masculinity within BPW, as despite his small stature he remains ‘a good athlete’ (Interviewee A, 2015) and in the fans’ eyes this makes him masculine despite his small nature.



Fig. 11 El Ligero: [britishwrestlingpictures.com](http://www.britishwrestlingpictures.com)

BPW's hybridized masculinity has taken the version of WWE's hegemonic masculinity: that strength and size matter, and mixed it with the traditional British values that currently connect to masculinity, such as laddism. While this new form of hybridized masculinity has developed it is due to the emergence of masculinism that has attached masculinity to the body. However, as can be seen in the characters of Grado, El Ligerio and Dave Mastiff (Fig. 12), the chiselled look of the WWE is no longer needed to make a man masculine, as focus is now on how an individual performs and if they are the 'physically fittest' (Interviewee C, 2015) they can be.



Fig. 12 Dave Mastiff: britishwrestlingpictures.com

The hybridity of British and American wrestling can be seen throughout ICW. From the product of ICW to wrestlers' characters and their bodies the mixture of both American and British values is displayed in all aspects of ICW. Due to its position as being neither wholly a sport, nor simply a spectacle, BPW is forever evolving and because of this offers not only insight into changing attitudes towards violence, masculinity and popular culture,

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but offers one of the most unique and untouched forms of hybridity available today. It is this ability to change that has lead to the resurgence of British wrestling.

Conclusion

Understanding the changes covered by this dissertation in examining the 'Golden Era' 'The Fall' and 'The Resurgence' of BPW, it has become clear that Barthes view that 'Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle' (2009, p.3) can be seen to describe BPW's relationship with the viewing public. The changes mirrored in BPW have come from the changes in society's views during this period of violence, masculinity and popular culture. These three themes have been instrumental in shaping BPW since the 1960s.

Due to its position as a spectacle, the changes that have taken place within BPW are due to social and cultural changes within the public's perceptions towards violence, masculinity and popular culture and, because of this, a unique history has emerged from this study. This can be seen, firstly, in the change in the view towards masculinity throughout BPW's history. By expanding on the argument made by Connell that 'masculinities come into existence at particular times and places' (2005, p.185), this dissertation has shown not only that this is true but why this is: by identifying that wrestlers embody and represent hegemonic masculinity, this dissertation has not only shown that hegemonic masculinity has changed since BPW's 'Golden Era' but has been affected by cultural and social change within Britain's working classes. This is shown in the 1980s when the emergence of the 'bodybuilder look' became central to masculinity from the Americanisation of British entertainment. This was in part due to the idea of 'masculinism' and the message that WWE gave about manhood. By putting emphasis on muscles, 'aggression and violence' (Soulliere, 2006, p.1) the WWE created a new form of hegemonic masculinity, one the British working classes accepted, which led to 'The Fall' of BPW during this period.

However, while working class hegemonic masculinity changed, this dissertation has shown how, due to its evolution, BPW has now created a new form of hybrid masculinity. As stated by Beynon, hybridized masculinity emerged due to 'cultural cross-overs and borrowing from other versions of masculinities' (Beynon, 2008, p.162). This dissertation has shown that working class perceptions of masculinity have now created a unique form, taking elements from both American and British masculinity. This can be seen in the emergence of characters, such as Grado who embody certain traits while maintaining the characteristics of an athlete, highlighting the fact that British working class attitudes are now neither based solely on the body or characteristics, but instead have

become a mixture of both. While supporting Connell's theory this dissertation has provided not only support for her idea, but has also a unique insight into how British working class attitudes towards masculinity have changed over the last fifty-five years.

While this dissertation has aimed to emphasise the importance of the body in the study of masculinity by expanding on the work conducted by Mosse and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, it has also looked to provide further reasons behind the change in working class-attitudes towards masculinity by highlighting the importance of the themes of violence and popular culture. Much like the body, the role of violence and popular culture have also impacted and shaped BPW, and the role of masculinity within BPW. This dissertation has shown that despite being violent in nature, wrestling has become more violent to mirror the working classes' perceptions of violence. This was once again due to the message the WWE showed in its 'hyper-violent' (Atkinson, 2002, p.47) shows, which not only attached violence to masculinity but also to the popular culture of the time. This can be seen in the new hybrid masculinity that is in BPW at the moment, as wrestlers are expected to be violent and aggressive whenever possible due to working class ideas relating to violence. However, while violence is an important factor within this study, the importance of popular culture within BPW, namely the introduction of soap opera storylines and characters, is central to this conclusion as BPW 'has a special place in the popular culture' (Hill, 2014, p.175) of British history. The working class desire for 'Good to overcome Evil' in a 'Hero versus Villain scenario' has built their interest in characters and plot so that their leisure time is linked to more than just the bout itself.

The importance and relevance of this dissertation comes from the fact that BPW is shaped by the working class audience and because of this must reflect their views towards violence, masculinity and popular culture. What this dissertation has provided is not only an in-depth study into the history of BPW and its relationship with the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture but an insight into its relationship with the British working classes. This study has offered a unique 'history from below' with the use of oral history collected from my interviews with predominantly working class wrestlers. This has given a voice to a working class group which otherwise may have been lost or forgotten to history. These voices have shown the importance of BPW within the leisure time of its audience.

Throughout its history, BPW has evolved and adapted in order to mirror working class views. From its origins in All-in wrestling, to its transformation into a hybrid form of sports entertainment, the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture have been instrumental in BPW's changing history. This dissertation has aimed to open a door into

the study of BPW by highlighting its unique relationship with: masculinity, the body, popular culture, trans-Atlantic relationships, violence, working class values and the hybridity of society. By applying the history of BPW to the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture, this dissertation has created a unique history of its own, while expanding on other works. However, if the study of BPW is to be continued it must be remembered that BPW, like all wrestling, 'is not a sport, it is a spectacle' (Barthes, 2009, p.3).

WEEKEND BROADCASTING	
SATURDAY TELEVISION	
<p>B.B.C. 1 (Ch. 1)</p> <p>1.25 p.m., Notice Board: Public Service Announcements.</p> <p>1.30, Summer Grandstand: including Racing from Ascot Heath: Virginia Water Stakes, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes, Princess Margaret Stakes, Sandringham Stakes; Swimming from Perth: The Scottish A.S.A. Championships; Sailing from Stokes Bay, Portsmouth; Speedway from Newport, Mon.: Great Britain v. U.S.S.R.; Sports results and news service.</p> <p>5, The Telegoons: Captain Seagoon, R.N.</p> <p>5.15, Juke Box Jury.</p> <p>5.40, Dr. Who: A Battle of Wits.</p> <p>6.5, The News and Weather.</p> <p>6.15, Dick Van Dyke Show: Honeymoons are for the lucky.</p> <p>6.40, See America First or How to Survive as a British Tourist in the U.S.A.: A Revue.</p> <p>7.25, First Night of the Proms.</p> <p>8.15, The Western: Cattle Queen of Montana.</p> <p>9.40, The Flying Swan: The Gold Rosette.</p> <p>10.25, News.</p> <p>10.35, Andy Williams Show.</p> <p>11.25, Weather.</p> <p>B.B.C. 2 (Ch. 33)</p> <p>6.55 p.m., News, 7, Sport of the Day.</p> <p>7.50, Montreux Festival 1965: The Silver Rose Award: The Wayne and Shuster Show.</p> <p>8.35, The Mind of the Enemy, part 5: The Fatal Slip.</p> <p>9, Cinema 625: Death of a Cyclist (a Spanish film with English sub-titles).</p> <p>10.25, News Summary.</p> <p>10.27, Late Night Line-up.</p> <p>B.B.C. WALES as B.B.C. 1 except:</p> <p>1.30-5 p.m., Summer Grandstand, including: Racing from Ascot Heath; Lawn Tennis: The Men's Finals of the Welsh Open Championships; Sailing: Speedway; Sports Results and News Service.</p> <p>9.40, Saturday Night: News and Sport in Wales.</p> <p>9.55-10.25, Studio B: Light entertainment.</p>	<p>ASSOCIATED TELEVISION (Ch. 9)</p> <p>1.30 p.m., News.</p> <p>1.35, Summer Sport.</p> <p>1.38, International Swimming from Cardiff.</p> <p>1.50, Tenpin Bowling from Wembley.</p> <p>2.22, Racing from York (run-down on day's racing and race at 2.30).</p> <p>2.34, International Swimming.</p> <p>2.53, Racing from York (race at 3).</p> <p>3.6, Tenpin Bowling.</p> <p>3.25, Racing from York (race at 3.30).</p> <p>3.35, Racing Results Roundup.</p> <p>3.40, International Swimming.</p> <p>4.3, Professional Wrestling.</p> <p>5.5, Sports Roundup.</p> <p>5.15, The Forest Rangers.</p> <p>5.45, News.</p> <p>5.50, Lucky Stars.</p> <p>6.30, Opportunity Knocks!</p> <p>7.20, The Saint.</p> <p>8.15, On the Run, starring Neil McCallum.</p> <p>9.20, The Best of Morecambe and Wise.</p> <p>10, News.</p> <p>10.10, Public Eye.</p> <p>11.5, Milligan's Wake with Spike Milligan.</p> <p>11.35, The Four Just Men. Weather.</p> <p>12, Epilogue.</p> <p>A.B.C. MIDLAND and NORTHERN (Ch. 3, 9 and 10)</p> <p>1.30 p.m., London.</p> <p>5.15, Sir Francis Drake.</p> <p>5.45, London.</p> <p>7.20, Hong Kong.</p> <p>8.15, The Best of Morecambe and Wise.</p> <p>8.50, Hawaiian Eye.</p> <p>9.40, News.</p> <p>9.50, Undermind.</p> <p>10.45, Mainly Millicent.</p> <p>11.20, ABC Weekend. Tomorrow's Weather. Epilogue.</p> <p>ANGLIA (CH. 11)</p> <p>1.30 p.m., London 5.15, The Flintstones. 5.43, Weather. 5.48, London. 7.20, The Princess and the Pirate. 9, Peyton Place. 9.30, That Show. 10, News. 10.10, Man of the World. 11.5, Milligan's Wake. 11.35, Car 54, Where Are You? Weather. 12.5 a.m., At the End of the Day.</p>

Fig 5. Weekend Broadcasting: *The Time Digital Archive 1785-2010*

Appendices II: Interview Transcripts

Full typed up transcripts of Interviews: A, B, C, D, E from wrestlers and trainers at ‘Grapple Wrestling School’ Leeds, are in my possession.

Questions asked:

- 1) What got you into wrestling? And what are your earliest memories of wrestling?
- 2) At the moment BPW is going through a strong resurgence, with companies such as ICW leading the charge. Why do you think BPW is going through a resurgence at the moment?
- 3) The body plays a huge role on wrestling and when you think of BPW, you think of Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks. However, in American wrestling the body is based on muscles and tan. Do you feel like there is pressure on wrestlers to maintain a certain look?
- 4) How much does the crowd and popular culture impact matches?
- 5) Violence has become a big part of some cultures of wrestling, and some promotions do just sell on extreme wrestling. In regard to moves and matches, do you feel they have got more violent over time?
- 6) Do you think there is a spot for BPW television today?
- 7) What makes BPW so unique?

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Figure 11. *Jonny Storm vs. El Liger*(2015) [Photograph] at:

<http://albums.britishwrestlingpictures.com/thumbnails.php?album=1734> (Accessed 7th March 2016)

Figure 12. *Robert Rochester Rose vs. Dave Mastiff* (2015)[Photograph] at:

<http://albums.britishwrestlingpictures.com/thumbnails.php?album=2306> (Accessed 7th March 2016)

Hulk Hogan Fan Page

Figure 9. *Hulk Hogan* (2016) [Photograph] at: <http://hulkhogan.com/featured/pop-cultures-most-memorable-wrestlers.html> (Accessed on 17th February 2016)

Victorian Popular Culture Archive

Figure 1. *Apollo presents "John Lemm"* (1910) [Handbill] at:

http://www.victorianpopularculture.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/Documents/SearchDetails/NFA_178T1.150# (Accessed on 15th December 2015)

Wrestling Heritage Photo Archive

Figure 2. *With the compliments of Jackie Mr. TV Pallo* (2012) [Poster] at:

<http://www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk/apps/photos/photo?photoid=167729586> (Accessed on 15th December 2015)

Figure 3. *Mick McManus* (2012) [Photograph] at:

<http://www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk/apps/photos/photo?photoid=168634527> (Accessed on 15th December 2015)

Figure 4. *Adrian Street* (2012) [Photograph] at:

<http://www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk/apps/photos/photo?photoid=82705116> (Accessed on 15th December 2015)

Figure 6. *Big Daddy* (2012) [Photograph] at:

<http://www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk/apps/photos/photo?photoid=153825561> (Accessed on 15th February 2016)

Figure 7. *World Middleweight Wrestling Champion Nature-Boy Adrian Street 1975* (1975) [Photograph] at: <http://www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk/apps/photos/photo?photoid=199962730> (Accessed on 15th February 2016)

World Wrestling Entertainment Photo Archive

Figure 8. *Andre The Giant* (2014) [Photograph] at: <http://www.wwe.com/classics/50-most-epic-andre-the-giant-photos#fid-26795430> (Accessed on 17th February 2016)

Insane Championship Wrestling Photo Archive

Figure 10. *Dave's Not Here Man! Match 1 – Grado v Cabana* (2013) [Photograph] at: <http://insanewrestling.co.uk/photos.php> (Accessed on 7th March 2016)

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Interviewee A. (2015) Interviewed by Matthew Stocks at Grapple Wrestling School, Leeds, 3rd December.

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Interviewee C. (2015) Interviewed by Matthew Stocks at Grapple Wrestling School, Leeds, 3rd December.

Interviewee D. (2015) Interviewed by Matthew Stocks at Grapple Wrestling School, Leeds, 3rd December.

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Figure 5. (1965) 'Weekend Broadcasting' The Times, Saturday 17th July, p.3. Document Number: CS51341553 (Accessed on 15th December 2015)

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Self-reflection

The main project of my third year of study was a 10,000 word dissertation, a project that has taken me the best part of nine months to complete. The dissertation represented a chance for me to study a topic of my choosing and also allowed me to create a unique history of my own. My dissertation was entitled '*Gladiators in Spandex: violence, masculinity and popular culture in British Professional Wrestling 1960-2015*' and focused on the impact that violence, masculinity and popular culture have had on BPW. This assignment called for the use of a variety of sources, both primary and secondary in order to support and highlight the changes that took place in BPW during this period. The sources were used along with secondary reading to further support and expand on ideas this dissertation looked to show.

However, due to BPW's complex nature, as neither wholly a sport nor entertainment, many sources were not available or non-existent and therefore time management was key to the success of this study. Because of this, progress was slow until I decided to look for resources that may not have been looked at by other historians, for example the *wrestling heritage* website where images of BPW can be found. This website also led me to find valuable contacts who pointed me in the right direction and helped me locate other sources to use. However, my research skills grew further when I sought out wrestlers to interview. By conducting these interviews I gained a unique insight into the world of BPW and confidence in my ability to go out and look for new sources as well as increasing my confidence in meeting new people and communicating with others.

Despite my best attempts to manage this task, with a strict schedule to ensure that work was completed on time, the process of collecting sources and completing this dissertation was still slow due to the limited history on BPW. While the themes of violence, masculinity and popular culture were key issues throughout this dissertation, it wasn't until discovering the work of Roland Barthes that this dissertation began to move forward more quickly as this source provided a clear pathway to follow. Despite this, a broad scope of different pathways emerged which could have been followed, primarily the study of wrestling as a performance and the economics behind BPW. While this dissertation briefly looks to address some of these pathways, others had to be ignored due

to the limited word count. This was also done to ensure that not only would the word count be adhered to, but to allow for a specific study that would be completed in time.

Upon completing this dissertation I was very happy with the outcome as I felt that all the key themes and ideas I had aimed to show were covered and linked to the time frames studied. Not only did this dissertation do that, but it provided a unique insight into a history that for the most part has yet to be discovered by historians. Because of this I felt a large amount of pride in my work as it not only reflected an end to all the hard work I had done over the course of this assignment, but this dissertation reflects a unique piece of historical work that I have created, unlike any other.

While I am happy in the sense that my dissertation allowed me to achieve all my original goals, there are a few aspects I would do differently if I were to do this task again. While my time management skills, for the most part, were successful, as I completed my dissertation early, I would have liked to started my collection of sources earlier as I feel that further interviews would have allowed for greater insight into the world BPW and might have further supported the ideas this dissertation aimed to show. I would also look to complete a vast amount of research into the study of BPW, before I started the dissertation, to allow me to select from a wider area of influences. The many different paths this dissertation could have taken show the importance of initial research and the ability to focus on given areas.

While this dissertation marks the end of my time at university, it also highlights the skills I have gained: commutating with people, time management, a strong work ethic and developing research skills. I have not only become more confident in my own abilities but have grown confident in all my academic skills, which will, hopefully, help in my future career.