

Sports and Entertainment – and More...

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In my previous article, I had proposed that “*Wrestling is different – the sport is unique, the form of entertainment is unique, and from my point of view as a psychiatrist, the relationships between the athletes themselves, and particularly the relationships between the athletes and the fans, is entirely unique, complex, and psychologically extremely sophisticated... Every time a Wrestler steps into a ring, every time a promo is cut, intense emotions and psychological complexes are being activated in the fan... most of which are actually unconscious...*” The athletic skill, prowess – and courage – necessary to be a Professional Wrestler is unquestionable; but you do not need me to discuss those issues; the pure entertainment value of the personalities, the storylines, the comedy and the drama portrayed is also obvious; and can be better addressed by a person directly involved in writing and theater. I would like to focus more specifically upon the “*and More*” – the unique psychological impact of Professional Wrestling upon the audience.

Some fans may follow Professional Wrestling primarily to enjoy the athleticism, primarily for basic entertainment value (or for some combination of the two); and some fans may follow Professional Wrestling with a focus on the violent aspect, as a fairly straightforward outlet for anger, or (less healthily) sadistic impulses. However, in my opinion, one of the most intense emotional aspects of Professional Wrestling is the implicit portrayal of invulnerability and omnipotence (to be undefeatable and all-powerful) in a manner different from other sports or entertainment productions,

All professional competitive sports will have heroes; athletes who perform what appear to be super-human feats, athletes whose skills and talents inspire awe. Most forms of entertainments involve heroes and villains. Some are depicted reasonably realistically as human (*Rocky, Captain Kirk, Ellen Ripley in Alien, Michael Corleone*), some are men (or women) but clearly “larger than life” and capable of unrealistically amazing feats (*Batman, James Bond; The Joker, Freddy Krueger, Lara Croft*) and some are purely fantasy figures. These range from super-heroes with supernatural powers beyond human limits (*Superman, etc.*), to alien/robotic life forms (*Terminator, Darth Vader, Predator*), to magical characters such as *Harry Potter* and *Hermione*.

Typically in childhood we learn about heroes (and villains) and it is perfectly normal and psychologically healthy for a child to identify with heroes, imaging himself or herself sharing in the power and/or righteousness represented by the deeds of the hero. Those fantasies provide a sense that control over life and events is possible, and that we might even reach a position of invulnerability (complete and fearless safety and security) and omnipotence (supremely

powerful). With maturity, the conscious expectation of complete control over life and the hope for invulnerability and omnipotence fades. We become all too aware of our limitations. However, even as adults, most people engage in some forms of escapist fantasy, through sports or entertainment, which at least for those brief periods of time, remind us of our secret childhood wishes; wishes that may be understood as unrealistic, but that never totally disappear. Those who unfortunately may have suffered trauma or abuse during their youth often try to cling more strongly to feelings of fantasized invulnerability and omnipotence, but still, reasonably well-adjusted adults differentiate easily between fantasy and reality.

It is my position that Professional Wrestling reaches the audience at a deeper and more intense level, and can activate the secret wishes for invulnerability and omnipotence more powerfully and effectively than essentially any other form of sports or entertainment.

Whether Babyface or Heel, in the ring, the Professional Wrestler does not pretend to have magical or supernatural powers (even if used as a “gimmick”, supernatural abilities are not expected to be “believed”). Yet both the Face and the Heel *are* expected to perform at a level that is beyond the comprehension of an “ordinary person.” Adding to the intensity of the experience, the interactions focus directly upon physical battle and “combat”, not “just” athletic achievement as in most other sports. But unlike the heroes and villains of theater (movies, TV, etc.) and unlike the heroes and villains of other combat-focused sports (boxing, MMA), neither the Face nor the Heel are expected to be truly vanquished. Whoever wins or loses on any particular night, however “beat down” or beat-up a contestant may be, however much seemingly unbearable pain the winner or loser may suffer, (other than in “squash” matches) both the Face and the Heel are expected to survive, to persevere, and to fearlessly continue to do battle another day. Specific feuds may last for weeks, months or longer; but even after a feud is ended, each party is expected to go on to his or her next challenge. Villains of TV or movies might appear in more than one episode, but there is an expectation of a conclusion: in most scenarios, the hero triumphs and the villain is eventually disposed of in some manner; or in “darker” productions, the villain triumphs and the hero meets a tragic but noble end. In Professional Wrestling, there is no expectation of a conclusion in which either hero or villain meets their ultimate fate.

While superficially the inconclusiveness of Professional Wrestling scenarios (and the changing of allegiances and the switching of roles of a Wrestler between Heel and Face) may be seen as problematic or frustrating, from a *psychological* point of view, the inconclusiveness of Professional Wrestling scenarios are all the more powerful and engrossing, in that both hero and villain are implicitly invulnerable and omnipotent.

To be an optimally effective Face or Heel, a Professional Wrestler must connect with the audience on the level of triggering conscious and unconscious fantasies of omnipotence and invulnerability (as addressed in the seminars given CAC in April, 2010). In fact, it is the unconscious realm of fantasy that is the most spellbinding. In the best matches, regardless of whom a fan is “rooting” for, the fan secretly or unconsciously cannot imagine *either* combatant being totally defeated. Through that interaction between the fan and the Professional Wrestler, our deepest hidden/repressed fantasies are depicted and energized: fantasies both positive and negative; of power, righteousness, vengeance and invincibility.

Understanding the power of Wrestling from this vantage point, ring characters such as Triple-H, Randy Orton, Sting, Awesome Kong, Beth Phoenix – and their peers and the many who paved the way for them – are much more than athletes and entertainers; they are closer to living depictions of the Greek gods and goddesses (or Jungian archetypes); who may be seen live, on TV or in PPV's; and are neither limited to seasonal competition nor restricted to a particular television or movie production. They compete, they entertain, and they psychologically entrance week after week, day after day.

Professional Wrestling is not “just” sports/athletic contest to determine who is ultimately “better”, nor “simply” escapist entertainment, (nor a definitive “morality play”). Professional Wrestling presents an epic battle between almost mythical personas, partly human and partly immortal; a battle that is intense and primal, violent and vicious, at times funny and at times tragic – yet ultimately *irresolvable and perpetual*, stubbornly refusing to provide a simple “answer” as is common in other forms of sports and entertainment – reaching to the depths of our psyches, and our innermost secret fears and desires.