TPSM Research Fellowship
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Project Summary:

Parental mediation of children’s television viewing is a relatively new area of research that has advanced in the social and behavioral sciences. Parental mediation has been examined in regards to violent television (Nathanson, 1999), advertising (Fujioka & Austin, 2003), TV news (Buijzen, Walma van der Molen, & Sondij, 2007), and even videogame playing (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). However, one area that has not been examined is of parental mediation of sports content on television. The research on parental mediation has grown considerably, but it lacks the inclusion of interaction variables (mother or father mediation) and specific television content (sports) that might influence outcomes related to children and how they view sports media. Furthermore, the mediation of sports content may impact children’s levels of sportsmanship and their views and reactions to winning, losing, and competitive situations. The National Association of Sports Officials (n.d.) has reported that they receive over 100 reports of incidents of physical contact between players, officials, coaches and fans a year. This does not include the incidents that go unreported. Concerns over “sports rage” and violent incidents between parents and sometimes players have made national news coverage creating quite a stir over the state of youth sports in America (Heinzmann, 2002). Phillips (2007) suggests that these types of incidents are a telling sign of the decline of sportsmanship in youth sports leagues.

Parental behaviors are likely to have an impact upon their children’s’ negative and positive sportsmanship behaviors (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, Hegreness, 2009). This effect may even come via vicarious interactions such as parents watching sports on television with their children. Thus, parents may unknowingly communicate or reinforce certain television messages through coviewing. Social cognitive theory explains how children (and adults) can learn behaviors and proper ways of acting by observing others or directly enacting that behavior. Bandura (1977, 2009) described Social Cognitive theory as the interaction between personal an environmental determinants that interact with symbolic, vicarious, and self-regulatory processes to influence behavior. The modeling aspect inherently suggests that individuals can vicariously observe others and learn appropriate behaviors or ways of thinking based upon the outcomes of those thoughts or actions. Children may learn about proper or improper ways to participate in sporting events through watching sports with their parents. Therefore, it is critical that we understand how parents mediate this type of content to their children. According to Nathanson (1999) mediation can be viewed in three distinct domains; active mediation, restrictive mediation, or coviewing. Active mediation involves talking to children about the content on television (either positively or negatively), restrictive mediation involves setting limits and prohibiting the amount of television viewing, and coviewing is simply watching television with children (Nathanson, 1999). Each type of mediation has different effects upon children’s responses to television content. Mediation of televised content often sends messages to children about the importance of that content. Thus, parent’s different types of mediation strategies may likely impact children’s levels of sportsmanship.
Proposed Research Methods:
Very few studies have examined the role that parental mediation might have upon children’s positive and negative sportsmanship attitudes. Therefore, the following study will conduct interviews with parents and children. This will allow better construction of concepts and understanding from the subjects. Children may not be able to follow a survey or understand the question that is being asked of them. Interviews are a way to clarify their understanding and gain knowledge from their answers. We propose a qualitative study that will illuminate the ways in which young children ages 5 to 9 understand and develop sporting orientations (sportsmanship), and the ways in which their parents mediate (active, restrictive, or coviewing) this process. Specifically, we will carry out depth interviews, each lasting about one hour, with 20 parent-child dyads. Data will be collected over the course of two months from 20 parent-child dyads in the Austin, TX area. Austin is an ideal location in which to carry out this project. It is economically and ethnically/racially diverse while being home to a sizable number of young families. As well, it is a sports-oriented city, particularly with respect to high school and college level baseball and football. It offers a number of different sports leagues for young children, including soccer, softball/t-ball, football, etc. Informants will be recruited by an outside market research company and we will strive to include a diversity of ages, genders, ethnicities/races and socioeconomic factors. The primary requirement for participation is that the child participates in some kind of league sports activity. Since qualitative research seeks richness and depth over generalizability, we will not aim for a representative sample but instead will carry out a purposive sample. Qualitative approaches allow for a deeper understanding of the contextual factors surrounding parental mediation and sportsmanship, providing detail and richness that survey-based approaches often miss. By observing children and their parents and by probing their answers and actions for additional detail, we hope to get clearer insight into the relationship between parents, children and learned sportsmanship.

Additional Funding Opportunities:
Future research will be aimed at developing a childhood sportsmanship measurement scale. Furthermore, to implement this scale within public schools in order to understand children’s levels of sportsmanship at different age levels. Finally, a program to curb negative sportsmanship will be developed from that data. Future funding will be sought out from the National Science Foundation (NSF) under the Discovery Research K-12 program.

Timeline
2. Recruit informants, first week of June 2011
3. Carry out depth interviews, June and July, 2011
4. Transcribing interview, June to August 15, 2011 (interviews will be transcribed on a rolling basis as each interview is completed)
5. Data analysis, September 2011 – November 2011
6. Article ready for submission, March 2012
References


