THE EFFECT OF THE STAR SPORTSMANSHIP EDUCATION MODULE ON PARENTS’ SELF-PERCEIVED SPORTSMANSHIP BEHAVIORS IN YOUTH SPORT

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Research Problem
The purpose of this study was to examine how the STAR Sportsmanship education module affected parent behavior attached to their experience of their child’s sporting endeavors.

Sportsmanship is a behavioral concept worth exploration because of the seemingly disconnect between the understanding of it and its practice in youth sport. Most people identify sportsmanship with the mindset of “I know it when I see it” (Vandenabeele, 2004, p 1). With the disruptive, sometimes dangerous behavior and shameful violence that has become so commonplace (Vandenabeele) in sport, the question that remains—do people really know what sportsmanship is and why sportsmanship is important?

This article would likely be useful to recreational programs that are looking to implement a parent education module into their leagues. Part of the parent education program would be to implement a sportsmanship module into the program. This article would also be useful for motor developmentalists who research and study moral and motor development in youth sports. The most important individual who would benefit from this article would be the parents. If a quality sportsmanship program could be implemented in youth sports; strategies could be developed for implementing sportsmanship, which include, defining and emphasizing sportsmanship, stressing participation rather than results, teaching values as part of the program, and educating and involving parents.

Issue
Unruly parent behavior and violent confrontations at youth sporting events have become increasingly frequent. Consequently, these behaviors have damaged parent’s relationships with coaches, officials, spectators, other parents and even their own children. Parental violence and parental sports rage paint a portrait of the youth sport environment as one lacking in moral and ethical conduct.

Children are an extension of their parents; thus, they tend to see their child’s faults and successes as their own. Unfortunately, in some situations, parents get so involved in the, it's about me attitude that they lose sight of what is really important to the child – to have fun.

In the August 2001 edition of Sports Illustrated for Kids, 3,000 youth were surveyed about their perspective on parental violence in sports. The survey showed that 74% of the respondents said they witnessed out-of-control adults at their games and the two most common behaviors observed were those of parents yelling at children and parents yelling at officials or coaches. Continual exposure to such conduct reinforces to the youth athlete that aggression is the best way to resolve conflict.
If parents are the critical factor in shaping both the meaning of sport and the role that sport plays in their child’s life, then educators and youth sport administrators must create a system that addresses both the youth leagues’ expected values and subsequent behaviors surrounding the production and consumption of sport. Essentially, educators and youth sport administrators must facilitate sportsmanship education for youth athletes and their parents. Sportsmanship education would articulate what sportsmanship is and why sportsmanship is needed in youth sport.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how the STAR Sportsmanship education module affected parent behavior attached to their experience of their child’s sporting endeavors. The STAR module educates parents on sportsmanship concepts in the context of youth sport. This module seeks to facilitate the immediate application of information presented by its users. This particular teaching tool provides multi-media that illustrate key principles, contiguity, modality, redundancy, coherence, and personalization to get the point across to parents without condemnation. Without question, as time and energy costs continue to be depleted, for parents this educational tool could serve as the most efficient and effective way to articulate those values and behaviors that better define the meaning and purpose of sport for both parents and children.

Summary

Participants were asked to complete the Parent Experiences in Youth Sport (PEYS) online survey and the Learning Through Sports STAR Sportsmanship parent module. The PEYS was an assessment and evaluation instrument designed for this study to measure parent self-perceived sportsmanship behaviors in the youth sport setting before and following the STAR Sportsmanship parent module. The PEYS, developed by the Center for Sport Policy and Research (2008), is based on past literature and similar instruments that measured sportsmanship behaviors in other groups (i.e. athletes, coaches, and officials).

In addition to providing content validity for the PEYS, it was determined that known-group evidence would assist in strengthening the validity of the PEYS. With the known-groups validation design, data were collected for each participant’s gender to find whether the measure showed the expected difference. A One-way ANOVA was conducted on the pretest data. The One-way ANOVA was significant for the respondent’s gender on the pretest score $F(1, 90) = 8.275, p = .05$.

To obtain test-retest reliability data, 35 additional parents completed the PEYS. Test-retest reliability of the PEYS was $t(34) = 0.937, p = 0.356$. The test-retest correlation was high (0.81).

To further strengthen the PEYS measure, reliability was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to insure internal consistency of the overall PEYS instrument. An alpha coefficient of 0.70 was used as the minimum level of acceptance. The uni-dimensional test result obtained for internal consistency was a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.70.

An independent t test was used to determine whether there was a difference in parent behavior scores between the parent’s pretest score and posttest score. Parent behavior scores from the posttest ($M = 4.04, SD = 0.313$) were significantly higher than their behavior scores from the pretest ($M = 3.94; SD = 0.267$), $t(94) = 3.84, p = .000$ (two-tailed), $d = 0.344$.

Analysis

This study utilized parents who provided feedback on the Parent Experiences in Youth Sport (PEYS) survey regarding their behavior and experience as they were engaged in their child’s sport. The 18-item survey was developed specifically for this study because of the lack of assessment tools that could accurately measure parent sportsmanship behavior. The development of the PEYS provides future researchers a tool to measure parent behavior in the context of youth sport. Because the test can be administered online, researchers can acquire parental behavior feedback in a timely manner from anywhere in the world.
Participants were 95 parents and legal guardians from various socioeconomic backgrounds who had at least one child participating in some sport activity at the time the study was conducted. Each participant completed the PEYS survey and provided demographic information related to the participant’s gender, relationship to the youth athlete, age, education, income, number of children in youth sport, age, and gender. The present data demonstrated that the PEYS was a valid, reliable, and internally consistent test to measure parental sportsmanship behaviors.

Known-group validity was significant for the variable gender. The significance suggests that the scores differed for men and women. In this case, the men scored higher than the women in pretest data. Sports have been traditionally geared towards men. The realm of athletics has held on to the mindset that women are not as intelligent or strong to handle the tough and very competitive nature of athletics. This is mostly due to the reassertion and legitimization of male power and privilege in sport as well as the socialization process that has defined distinct roles for men and women in society. Men are more engrossed with sport than women are engaged with sport, thus men know more of the expected behaviors, values, and rules of a particular sport. Men or fathers, in the context of involvement with their child’s sport participation, tend to spend more time engaged in physical play (sport participation) with their children than women or mothers spend time in physical play with their children. According to Wuerth, Lee, and Alfermann (2003), fathers tend to score higher than mothers in relation to directive behavior on surveys centered on parental behavior. This means father’s give sport specific advice to their children (i.e. pointing out what their child did bad or telling the youngster how to improve) and push them to train harder and give their best.

Analysis of the t test found a significant difference in the parent’s sportsmanship behavior score from pretest to posttest. This significance confirmed that the module is an effective learning tool for parents to learn sportsmanship concepts.

**Discussion**

For future research, the following recommendations can be made based on the results of this study. First, expand the demographics to include parent’s ethnicity and nationality. Second, examine parent’s sportsmanship behaviors at different levels of their child’s youth sport participation. It would be interesting to note how parents adjust their behavior as their child grows and moves from one age group to the next age group when participating in sport. Third, utilize the STAR Sportsmanship education module in research to collect continuous time data of parents for specific sport behaviors. An individual’s behavior can change dependent upon the revelation one receives regarding a particular subject matter. The results of this research would provide information as to whether or not the parent’s behavior changed as well as whether or not the behavior is sustained.

This study did not focus on participants socioeconomic backgrounds; however, studies that examine the socioeconomic backgrounds of parents could provide youth sport administrators with insight on possible factors that motivate parental behavior. Another idea would be to examine parents who are professional athletes and how they engage in their child’s sport. Athletes are competitive and research could possibly benefit from observing what type of sportsmanship messages these parents send to their own children. Researchers could also observe parent sportsmanship behaviors based on the region of the United States in which they reside (i.e. North, South, Southeast, West, East, etc.). On a global level, researchers could examine parental sport behaviors in different countries. Countries around the world have their own cultural norms and it would be interesting to note the similarities and differences in parent behavior as their children participate in sport.

This study can be used as additional knowledge for future researchers in hoping to implement effective sportsmanship education and training for parents in youth sport. One important area to study would be the continued impact of the STAR Sportsmanship education module on parents around the country. Strategies for
implementing sportsmanship should include defining and emphasizing sportsmanship, stressing participation rather than results, teaching values as part of the program, and educating and involving parents.

Sportsmanship education programs can influence the behaviors of their parents by including the STAR Sportsmanship education module to their curriculum. Parents significantly influence their child’s perception of sportsmanship and have seemingly lost sight of what youth sports were originally intended to do. Gone are the days when children would gather and play a game just for pleasure. Now fun has been replaced with a win-at-all-cost, skill development, and championship attitude perpetuated by the parent. This mindset, in effect, creates a climate for unsportsmanlike behavior that is recognized by sport administrators as a problem.

There is a lack of studies where parents self-report their own behaviors and attitudes. Sportsmanship can be taught, learned and even required, but without careful examination of the athletic environment and why parents behave the way they do, the desired behaviors will not be perpetuated or valued by those for whom the sport activity was created for in the first place – the child.