

CAMmer in the Spotlight

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Getting to know... Michael Rich

What are you currently working on? The Center on Media and Child Health focuses on children, adolescents and media in three ways: Investigation, Translation, and Innovation.

Investigation is pursuing two major projects right now, Measuring Youth Media Exposure (MYME), our smartphone-based method that combines Ecological Momentary Assessment, time-use diaries, and video observation to measure the way youth use and multitask with media today and the content and contexts of their use. Piloted in the US, it is now being rolled out in Alberta, Canada and, soon, Finland, in prospective longitudinal studies following physical, mental and social health outcomes annually. In Mexico and the US, we are using a variation of MYME to study play in early childhood, as it moves seamlessly between the physical and digital spaces, and following the children's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development into school age.

Our centerpiece of Translation is Ask the Mediatrician, the online advice column for parents, educators and clinicians on raising healthy children in the Digital Age (AskTheMediatrician.org). We are currently in preproduction for the first season of an Ask the Mediatrician television series.

Innovation is where we develop media tools and applications that benefit child health and development. We have morphed Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA), our research method where sick kids make visual illness narratives on video, into Children's at Home, a series of secure social media sites where young people with the same medical condition share their visual illness narratives, replacing isolation with a community of peers, crowdsourcing solutions to challenges, and mentoring younger children facing their fears.



What has been your most memorable project so far, and why? I have to confess that my most memorable project is usually the one I am working on -- why look back when there is so much to look forward to?

Currently, my team and I are collaborating with Michael Levine and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center to recreate *Free to Be...You and Me* with Marlo Thomas. She and a host of popular stars created TV, music and books to address sexism in the 1970s and a social movement arose from it. *Raised on Free to Be...You and Me*, an entire generation can sing the songs. We are working with the entertainment industry and schools across the US to counter bigotry on the basis of race, religion, sexuality, disability – any characteristic that people seize on to ostracize, bully, or make someone “other”. In these toxic times, we must bring our knowledge and skills with media to make things better, especially for those who don’t have a voice.

Which achievement are you most proud of, and why? Creating the Center on Media and Child Health and establishing a legitimate place in academic medicine and public health for the rigorous study of how the media we use and how we use them can affect physical, mental, and social health. We owe it to our children and our shared future to understand this ubiquitous environmental health influence and mindfully direct our media use toward that which makes us all better.

Dina Borzekowski would like to know how your day-to-day experiences in the clinic impact your study of children and media? Not so long ago, clinical implications of media use were limited to obesity and aggressive behavior, but now we are seeing media-related sleep disturbances, nutritional issues from obesity to anorexia, school performance problems, and behavioral issues such as cyberbullying, sexting, anxiety and depression. Perhaps the most unique issues we are seeing in the clinic and investigating with research are distracted parenting, where parents neglect their children during meals or at the playground because they are focused on their devices, and Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU, or $\pi\mu$) that distracts and disables children and adolescents from their relationships and responsibilities. We are seeing what used to be inaccurately called Internet addiction disorder (because it’s not just the internet and it’s not actually an addiction) in four presentations: compulsive gaming, social media, pornography, and information-seeking, often in the form of video viewing. The outcomes can be severe: sleep deprivation, family disruption, school drop-out, even suicide attempts.

What is an important question from parents and practitioners that we as academics cannot provide a good answer to yet? How do we teach children and adolescents to use their interactive devices effectively to learn, communicate, and entertain themselves, while self-regulating that use so that it does not become all-consuming?

What would be your work motto? Be Kind, Work Hard, Think Big.

Which of your publications is your favorite, and why? Wow, that's kind of like asking which is my favorite child... If I have to choose, I think it would be the MYME methodology paper because it came out of 10 years' development in response to needs identified by the National Children's Study Media Workgroup and I think it could transform how we study the way media are used today and the influence that use has over time.

Rich, M., Bickham, D. S., & Shrier, L. A. (2015). Measuring Youth Media Exposure A Multimodal Method for Investigating the Influence of Media on Digital Natives. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(14), 1736-1754.

If you had unlimited resources, what kind of project would you want to do and why? I would want to apply MYME in a prospective longitudinal study of child health and development outcomes with a demographically diverse, global population. The positive and negative effects of the media we use and how we use them appear to be real, but incremental and cumulative over time. We need to understand, in a constantly changing media environment, the potential long-term outcomes so we can make informed choices for ourselves and our children.

If you had to give one piece of advice to young CAM scholars, what would it be? Be observant, - we are studying the interface between two moving targets, the developing human and an evolving media environment -- and welcome surprises -- we must be open and responsive to unexpected outcomes.

Who would you like to put in the spotlight next, and why? Jochen Peter, because of his groundbreaking work on how the internet has influenced the development of human sexuality.



"When a journalist, interviewing me as we walked beside a river in Boston, asked me for the cure for PIMU, I said "Nature!" and grabbed a handful of mud from the riverbank. I was disappointed that they did not use the photo because it was "inappropriate for a Harvard professor."