Coping and Video Game Play during Emerging Adulthood
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Abstract
Most research conducted on youth media use has focused on the negative effects that media may have on adjustment. However, recent research suggests that media use may benefit some youth. For example, adolescent boys who play video games frequently have been found to be less anxious than those who play video games less frequently (Ohannessian, 2009). This finding suggests that video game play may be used as a coping mechanism for boys. Nonetheless, few studies have examined the relationship between coping and media use (and none have examined video game play). Therefore, the goal of this study was to examine the relationship between coping and media use during a challenging period – the transition to adulthood. The sample included 538 youth between the ages of 17 and 20. Participants completed a self-report survey in 2009 to assess their coping and video game play. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results indicated that coping strategies systematically related to video game play. Moreover, the relations differed depending on whether video games were played alone or with others. These results highlight the need to consider the context when examining media use in youth.

Sample
- Data were collected from 538 17-20 year olds (62% female; 65% Caucasian) in the Spring of 2008
- Mean age = 17.96 (SD=.71)
- All participants had attended a public high school in Delaware, Pennsylvania, or Maryland and were in the 12th grade or had graduated the prior year

Measures
Video Game Play
The youth were asked how much time they spent playing video games (PlayStation, Nintendo, Game Boy, Xbox, etc.) on an average/typical day. The response scale ranged from 1 = none to 6 = 4 or more hours a day.

Coping
The COPE Inventory (Carver et al., 1989) was used to assess adolescents’ coping strategies. A representative COPE item is “I usually do other activities to take my mind off things.” The response scale ranges from 1 = don’t do this at all to 4 = do this a lot. Previous research has supported the validity of this measure (Carter et al., 1989). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .83 for denial, .86 for emotional social support, .83 for venting emotions, and .55 for mental disengagement.

Procedures
During the spring of 2009, youth who provided assent, and who had parental consent, completed a self-report survey. The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete. After turning the survey in, participants were thanked for their time and given an American express gift card.

Analyses
Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine whether coping strategies are related to the frequency of playing video games. Given that the relationship between coping and video game play may depend on whether play is solitary or with others, a multiple group analysis was conducted comparing youth who played video games alone to those who played with others. The chi-square difference test statistic was significant for the structural weights ($\Delta \chi^2(4) = 11.63, p <.05$). Therefore, the parameter estimates that follow were derived from the unconstrained model.

Results
The SEM model fit the data well ($\chi^2(41)=71.72, p<.00$; CFI=.98; RMSEA=.04). A significant path was observed between venting emotions and video game play for both youth who played alone and those who did not play alone ($\beta = -.19$, $p<.01$ for both). This finding suggested that youth who relied on venting their emotions when coping frequently played video games less frequently. In addition, denial and humor were significantly related to video game play for youth who did not play alone ($\beta = .21$, $p<.001$; $\beta = .11$, $p<.05$, respectively). These results indicated that youth who frequently coped by using denial or humor played video games more frequently; however, this finding only held for those who played in the context of others.

Conclusions
Results from this study support the tenet that youth may play video games as a method of coping. More specifically, in the present study, youth who used denial or humor coping strategies played video games relatively frequently. Of note, this only was the case when youth played video games with others. Perhaps playing with others enhances these coping mechanisms (it may be easier to deny problems and find humor in the context of others). Future research should examine the underlying mechanisms involved in the relations between coping strategies and video game play observed in the present study.

*Supported by NIAAA K01AA015059

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