



The Relationship Between Video Game Play and Coping During Adolescence: Does the Type of Video Game Played Matter?

Laura J. Finan, Jessica Schulz, Lakeisha Smith, & Christine McCauley Ohannessian

University of Delaware

Abstract

This study explored the relationship between video game play and coping strategies among male and female adolescents. Although studies have shown that technology may negatively affect youth, more recent research suggests that adolescents may use technology as a coping mechanism. The present study sought to extend this research by examining whether the type of video game play was differentially related to among adolescent coping. Additionally, gender differences were assessed. A sample of 234 adolescents was drawn from a larger 4-year longitudinal study. The 14-item Technology Use Survey was used to indicate types of video games played (e.g., traditional sports, war/fighting, and fantasy games) and the 36-item COPE Inventory was used to identify adolescents coping strategies. Results suggested that playing traditional sports games and war/fighting games may be linked to less frequent use of effective coping strategies, especially for girls. In contrast, playing fantasy games appears to be associated with more frequent use of beneficial coping strategies for both girls and boys. These findings highlight the importance of considering both the type of video game played and gender when examining the relationship between video game play and coping during adolescence.

Sample

- 234 high school students (52.6% female) from the Adolescent Adjustment Project (AAP)
- Adolescent mean age = 17.96 ($SD = 1.37$)
- All participants attended high school in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Measures

Type of Video Game Played

The 14-item Technology Use Questionnaire (Ohannessian, 2009) was used to assess whether or not adolescents played various types of video games. In this study, traditional sports, war/fighting, and fantasy games were examined.

Coping Strategies

The 36-item COPE Inventory (Carver et al., 1989) was used to measure how adolescents cope with stressful situations. Response options ranged from 1= don't do this at all to 4= do this a lot. The following scales from the COPE were included in this study: Emotional social support ($\alpha = .88$), instrumental social support ($\alpha = .85$), denial ($\alpha = .85$), planning ($\alpha = .86$), mental disengagement ($\alpha = .57$), and active coping ($\alpha = .77$).

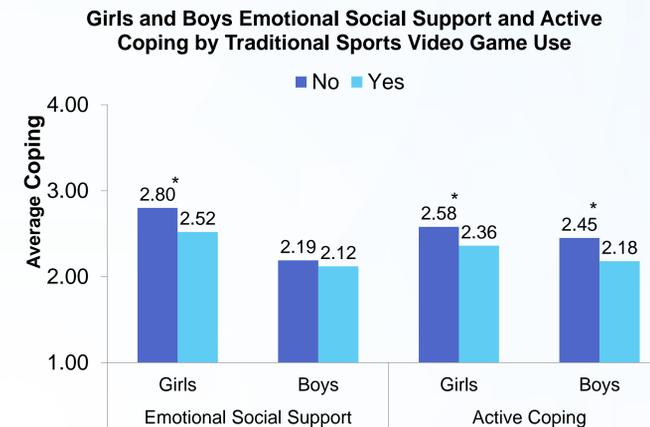
Procedure

During the Spring of 2009, adolescents were invited to participate in the study. Those who had parental consent and provided assent were included in the study. Trained research assistants administered self-report surveys in school, which took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at anytime and that their responses would be kept confidential. After finishing the survey, participants were given a movie pass.

Results

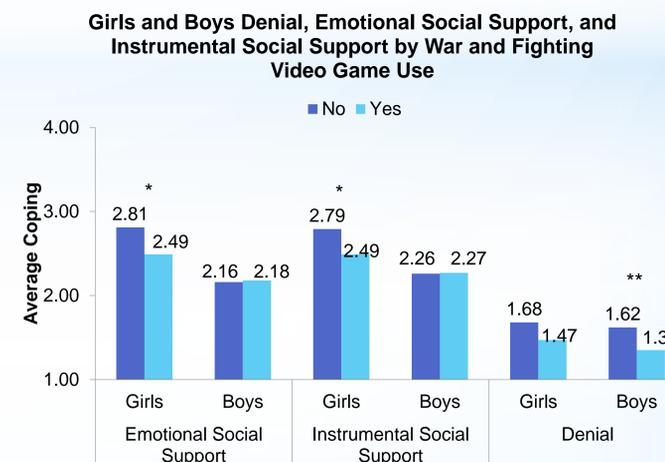
Traditional Sports Games

Among those who played traditional sports games, girls were less likely to seek emotional social support than girls who did not play these games ($F(1, 232) = 5.28, p < .05$). In addition, both girls ($F(1, 232) = 4.19, p < .05$) and boys ($F(1, 164) = 5.43, p < .05$) who played traditional sports games were less likely to use active coping strategies than those who did not play sports games.



War/Fighting Games

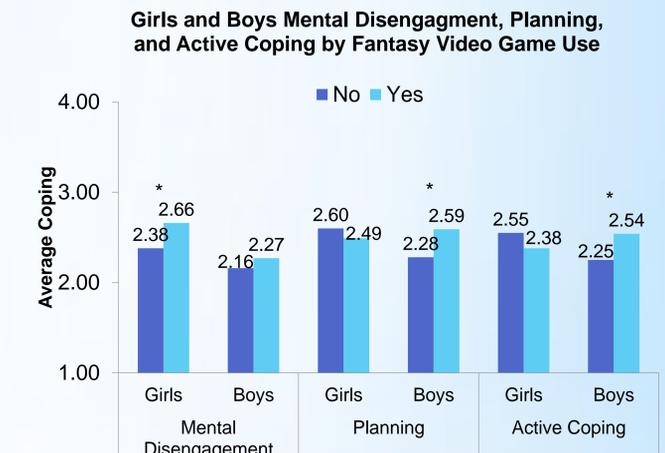
Among those who played war/fighting games, girls were less likely to seek both emotional ($F(1, 232) = 5.12, p < .05$) and instrumental social support ($F(1, 232) = 4.47, p < .05$), and boys were less likely to use denial ($F(1, 180) = 8.44, p < .01$), than those who did not play these games.



Results cont.

Fantasy Games

Finally, for those who played fantasy games, girls were more likely to mentally disengage ($F(1, 226) = 4.54, p < .05$) and boys were more likely to use planning ($F(1, 157) = 5.86, p < .05$) and active coping strategies ($F(1, 157) = 6.43, p < .05$) compared to those who did not play fantasy games.



Conclusions

The results from this study suggest that playing traditional sports games and war/fighting games may be linked to less frequent use of effective coping strategies, especially for girls. In contrast, playing fantasy games appears to be associated with more frequent use of beneficial coping strategies for both girls and boys. These findings highlight the importance of considering both the type of video game played and gender when examining the relationship between video game play and coping during adolescence.