

Parents and Their Child, a Co-op Game or Not: Outcomes of (In)appropriate Parental Mediation

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At the age of three, children already indicate to be interested in playing video games (Holloway, Green, & Livingstone, 2013). Although, these young children rather play on their own or against the computer (e.g., Ofcom, 2013, p. 96), this gaming behavior takes place in a social and interpersonal context in which parents are involved. The interaction between children and parents will determine how children select (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988) and handle media (e.g., Gentile & Walsh, 2002). The present study aims to investigate how this interaction takes place and how it influences negative outcomes of gaming such as problematic use and oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules. We hypothesize that when parents mediate in an appropriate manner, children will show interest in interacting and playing with other children instead of showing signs of problematic gaming behavior. A novel aspect of the present study is that it targets a sample of very young children, unlike most of the previous research, which traditionally focuses on parental mediation of adolescents' gaming behavior. This study is required because of the media-drenched context in which young children grow up (e.g., Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003).

Parental mediation research originates from the seventies debate about how watching television should be parented (e.g., McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). Nikken and Jansz (2003) found evidence that the theoretical concepts of parental media guidance for television were also appropriate for video gaming. Parental strategies to cope with digital games discussed in the literature are restrictive mediation, active mediation and co-use. Restrictive mediation concerns exercising control on the amount of time children spend on media and on the contents they are allowed to use. Active mediation is instructive or normative and amounts to sharing critical comments including the explanation of complex content (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka & Engelbertson, 1999; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999). Co-use implies watching or playing together as a deliberate strategy to share children's media use (Van der Voort, Nikken & Van Lil, 1992; Nikken & Jansz, 2006). In the present study we discuss the broader context in which parental mediation occurs. Building on previous research of Darling and Steinberg (1993), we approach parenting styles as a context, which involves parenting practices like parental mediation. In this study we use the perspective of

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as a theoretical framework, which is a broadband psychological theory on motivation and personality. In SDT, a differentiation is made between a controlling parenting style and an autonomy-supportive or responsive parenting style (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Controlling parenting involves a domineering and pressuring style, where children are forced to behave, think or feel in particular ways (e.g., through guilt induction, shaming or love-withdrawal). In contrast, an autonomy-supportive style refers to the extent to which parents explain themselves when they communicate prohibitions and rather accept than counter the child's negative feelings elicited by these prohibitions (e.g., by offering choice, showing interest, and providing a meaningful rationale for a request; Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2007). Responsive parenting is a style in which parents create a warm and secure base when a child experiences discomfort or stress (e.g., by comforting, smiling to the child, showing love; Davidov & Grusec, 2006). Parents create thus a positive or a rather negative context where children grow up in. Outcomes such as problematic use of video games and oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules are possibly reinforced by the parental mediation strategy and the context in which parental mediation occurs. Oppositional defiance is the total blunt of parental authority (e.g., Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Duriez, 2014), in our case against parental authority that involves gaming rules. Problematic use includes the loss of control over gaming, which results in significant personal, professional or social harm (Van Rooij, Schoenmakers, van den Eijnden, Vermulst, & van de Mheen, 2012). Besides, interest in social play is also considered as an important factor by parents. Parents are concerned about their children when they play video games too often and lose their interest in social interaction with other children. We aim to explore how parental mediation, in its broader family context, affects the perceived outcomes such as problematic use of video games, oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules and the interest of social play with young children.

Method

A large-scale questionnaire was presented to approximately 258,000 parents of children between 3 and 9 years. 22 items measured the 3 different parenting styles (psychological control – 8 items, Soenens Vansteenkiste, Duriez, & Goossens, 2006a; autonomy-support – 7 items, Soenens et al., 2007; and responsiveness - 7 items,

Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2006b; α s ranging between .67 and .73) by asking parents ($N > 9,000$, 83.2 % mothers) to indicate how applicable each item is to them. Next, two thirds of the parents were asked to report upon their frequency of using restrictive and active mediation strategies (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). The other one third of the parents were also asked to report upon their frequency of using parental mediation strategies, as well as upon the style in which they do so (controlling or autonomy-supportive). On the basis of previous work (Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Vansteenkiste et al., 2014), a new questionnaire was developed and pilot tested among a small sample of parents ($N = 20$). A slightly adjusted scale was then administered in our large and diverse sample of parents. The style items of the adapted parental mediation scale correlated in expected directions with general indices of autonomy-supportive and controlling parenting styles. Preliminary analyses indicate that both scales were internally consistent (with α s ranging between .65 and .84). Co-use was measured by asking parents to indicate the frequency of playing together with their child. Furthermore, parents reported upon their child's quantity of gaming (in terms of child's frequency and duration alone and together with the parent) and their problematic use through the 14-item Video Game Addiction Test ($\alpha = .89$; van Rooij et al., 2012), perceived oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules (4 items, $\alpha = .86$, based on Vansteenkiste et al., 2014) as well as their interest in social play (3 items, $\alpha = .91$). In addition, as for possibly antecedent parent characteristics, we assessed parents' attitudes towards gaming through a six-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .86$, e.g., "games are a waste of time").

Results

Preliminary correlation analysis allowed us to gain insight into possible links between context (e.g., parenting styles), parenting practices (e.g., parental mediation) and outcomes such as problematic use, oppositional defiance and interest in social play. Both mediation strategies correlated most with responsiveness. Moreover, active and restrictive mediation were negatively related to outcomes such as problematic use and oppositional defiance. Surprisingly, even if parents mediate restrictive, perceived oppositional defiance was rather low. Nevertheless, being controlling in a gaming context (e.g., punish the child when it plays an inappropriate game) relates to higher levels of problematic use and oppositional defiance. Finally, parents with negative

attitudes towards gaming, have the tendency to play less together with their child. However, the frequency of how often parents play together with their child was not related to problematic use, oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules and even not to interest in social play.

In the next step, we will perform more in-depth analyses using the structural equation modeling framework (SEM). This will allow us to fit our proposed model in which parenting styles are involved as a social context and parental mediation affects possible outcomes such as problematic use, oppositional defiance against parental gaming rules and interest in social play. We will use SEM to investigate the influence of factors such as gender, age or the socio-economic status (SES). These results will be presented and discussed at the time of the conference.

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