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Fathers' Role in Co-Use of Video Games in Russia

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of co-use of video games by children and their parents. The object of our investigation are father's strategies of mediation of children video gaming within culture-historical approach and activity theory (L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev, P.Ya. Galperin). Despite some authors regard fathers as main protagonists of media use among family members, their role in co-use of video games still requires more through exploration. We assumed that family structure and relative position of father in it affect the strategies of mediation of children's video gaming activities. 30 father-child dyads were chosen for in-depth interviewing. To evaluate father's position within family structure we developed and used a graphic method "Family Model". Collected data allowed to map out three groups of fathers and corresponding strategies of mediation of video gaming.

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1. Introduction

Recent policy recommendations of Interim Commission of Information Society Development of Federal Council of Russia encourage parents to co-use media technology with their young children [1]. However, little is known about what factors predict parents' co-use of the multiple types of media technology with their children.

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Some research indicate that parents are more likely to co-use traditional media such as books and television, whereas they are least likely to co-use video games [2]. Studies also suggest that media co-use may be a function of parental availability and parents' time spent with media, as well as parents' demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and level of education, as well as the demographics of children themselves [3].

It is widely recognized that family is an important resource for learning media literacy [4, 5], but family structure is explored without distinguishing the roles of father and mother and their strategies of co-usage of media. The time allotted to media use by children and parents is regarded as the main criteria of psychological evaluation. Type of interaction and its impact on development are usually left out of researcher's scope.

The majority of psychological research on the effects of "gaming" has been on its negative impact: the potential harm related to violence, addiction, and depression [6]. Parents consider video gaming as most time consuming children's leisure activity. The nature of these games has changed dramatically in the last decade, becoming increasingly complex, diverse, realistic, and social in nature. Over 70% of gamers play their games with a friend, a relative, either cooperatively or competitively [ibid.]. Co-using of media by parents and children may be motivated and structured in different ways. Nikken and Jansz in their research of video gaming revealed early that both parents and children distinguished three types of parental strategies of mediation: (1) 'restrictive mediation', (2) 'active mediation', and (3) 'co-playing' [7].

Researchers recognize several types of families according to following social and psychological criteria: closeness-openness of the family circle, distribution of power-responsibility, degrees of emotional proximity among family members [8]. Two "traditional Russian" models of family remain unbalanced particularly because of a gap between fathers' power and mothers' responsibility. This lack of balance emerged as a result of a string of military conflicts (WWII is the most impactful in this regard) when fathers were away from households for a long time. The first model features a dominant father, where man is a power holder, who distance himself from psychological life of family, while a mother holds the responsibility for all the familial affairs. Fathers do not attend to upbringing of children, because they consider it as a "women's responsibility". If father delegates power to mother he takes upon a submissive role of a "child" (model with submissive father), but he is included inside family circle, gets involved in familial affairs, and spends more time with children. Under the influence of ideas of feminism and gender equality couples attempt to form more Western oriented parity families; parents "bargain" around questions of power and responsibilities. In order to compare culturally determined models of family the method "Family models" had been designed [9].

We investigate overall video-gaming from the positions (prospective, within framework) of activity theory (A.N. Leontiev, P. Galperin). Three stages form any activity, including video-gaming– orientation (planning), execution, control over execution. The main hypothesis of our investigation was that the type of relations among fathers and children outside of computer-mediated activities determines goal-orientation and content of co-use of video-games; father's disposition in the family affects what strategy of joint video gaming will be chosen.

2. Method

Sample of our research consisted of 30 dyads – teenagers in the age of 10-12 years old (17 boys and 13 girls) and their fathers (from 32 to 40 years old). All of the families have had been living in Moscow for at least 10 years and have both parents living together. According to the information about their income all participants belong to middle class. Most of the fathers (23 out of 30) have university degrees, while the rest obtained only secondary education.

We used the following methods: 1) in-depth interviews with children and their fathers separately on how much time they spend together using computers, how often and who makes decision when to start and to stop playing video games, how fathers react on children video gaming, etc. 2) our original graphic method "Family models".

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