

Working Harder or Smarter?:

The Role of Coping in Academic Behavior and Grades

Charla McKinzie Bishop, Ph.D., Charles Adams, Ph.D., & Matasha Harris, Ph.D.
Bowie State University

Study Rationale

- Increased use of multiple academic study behaviors (i.e., timely assignments, regular class attendance, reading assignments, and using office hours) are linked to better grades (Gracia & Jenkins, 2003).
- Active/Problem focused coping is associated with higher grades (Cohen, Ben-Zur & Rosenfield, 2008)
- However, Millennial and Gen Z students:
 - Are more likely to use emotion-focus coping (Gustems-Carnicer, Calderon & Calderon-Garrido, 2019)
 - Have underdeveloped academic study behaviors (Huang & Capp, 2013)
 - But desire higher grades and individualized special treatment in school (Baer & Cherymokhin, 2011; Twenge, 2013)
 - Additionally, African American students are less likely to be prepared for college in terms of academic study behaviors than White students (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2005/2006)

Hypotheses

- Higher grades are associated with increased use of basic study behaviors.
- Active or problem focus coping is linked to better grades
- Active or problem focused coping is associated with increase use of basics study behaviors.
- Coping style, grades, and use of basic study behaviors are interrelated and predict student success.

PROCEDURES

- Data collected in spring of 2008
- Historically Black University in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S.
- Stratified random sampling of courses in the most populous majors
- 52% response rate

Measures

- Transcript GPA

Academic Study Behaviors Scale ($\alpha = .78$; test-retest = .73) (0 = not at all true, 1 = a little true, 2 = somewhat true, 3 = pretty true, and 4 = very true)	
Topic	Sample Item
Timely Assignments	I makes sure that I get my assignments in on time.
Attendance	I make it to classes regually and on time to make sure I don't miss out on materials learned in class.
Reading Course Materials (reverse coded)	I often wait to purchase textbooks, until I figure out if I need to read the text in order to do well in the class.
Seeking Support	I ask for help from the teacher prior to the assignment' due date.

Academic Coping: How are you most likely to handle stressful situations at school (i.e., difficulty with coursework, low grade(s), academic probation)?			
Item Response	Type of Coping	Recoded Value	N (%)
Avoid the issue by doing other things	Behavioral Disengagement	Emotion Focused	21 (7.6%)
Venting feeling to others	Venting	Emotion Focused	32 (11.9%)
Accept the issues you are having at school	Acceptance	Active	145 (53.7%)
Feel hopeless that anything will ever improve	Mental Disengagement	Emotion Focused	4 (1.5%)
Seek out other who may help (i.e. tutors, teachers)	Seeking Support	Active	24 (8.9%)
Look for other factors that may have caused your stress (i.e. job, relationship, etc.)	Blaming Others	Emotion Focused	8 (3.0%)

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION & RESULTS

- Sample Description
- 214 undergraduate students
 - 68% women
 - 86% African American
 - Only 2% married
 - Only 7% parents
 - 70% work at least part-time
 - 2.88 average GPA
 - 20.83 average age

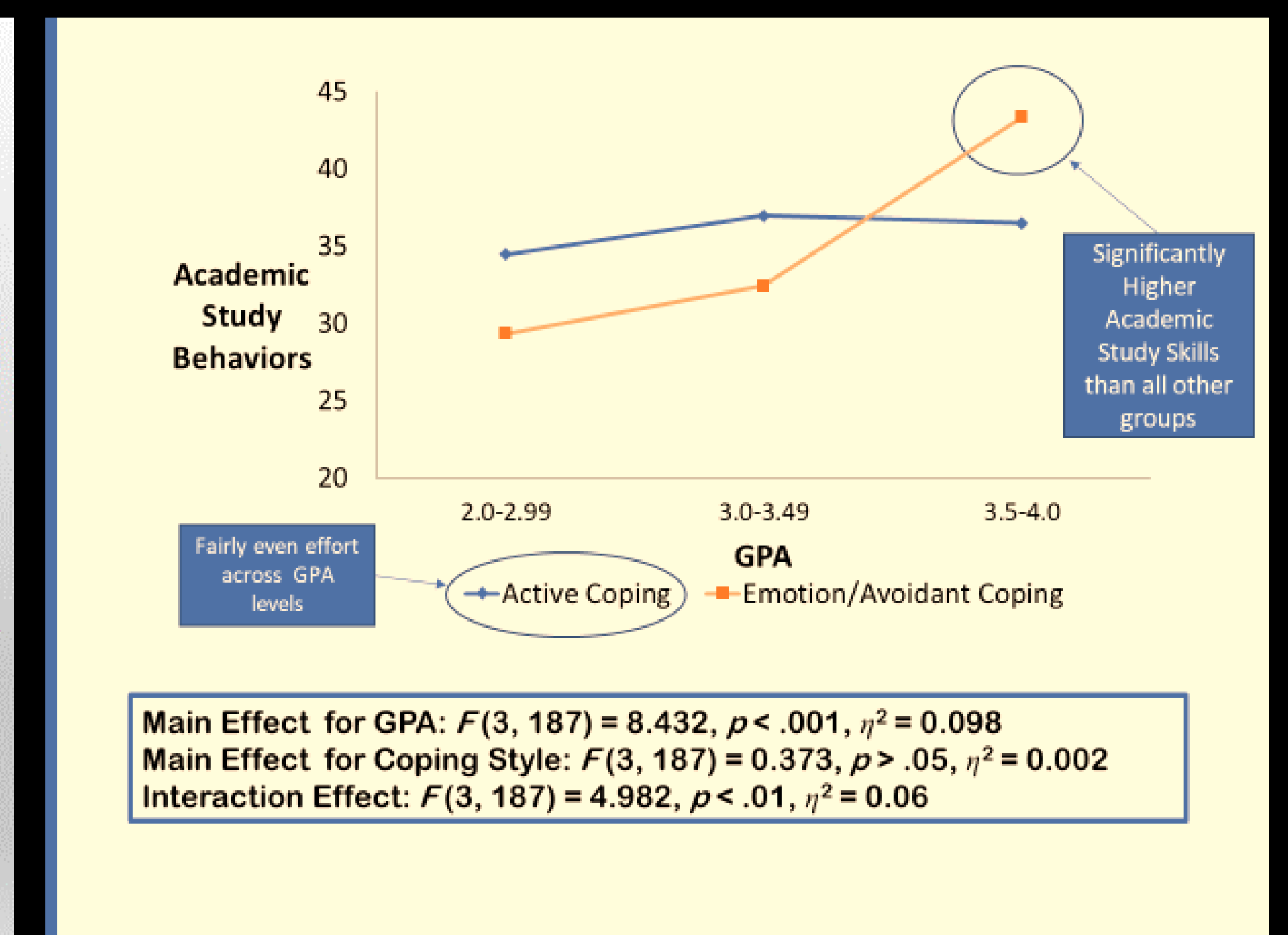
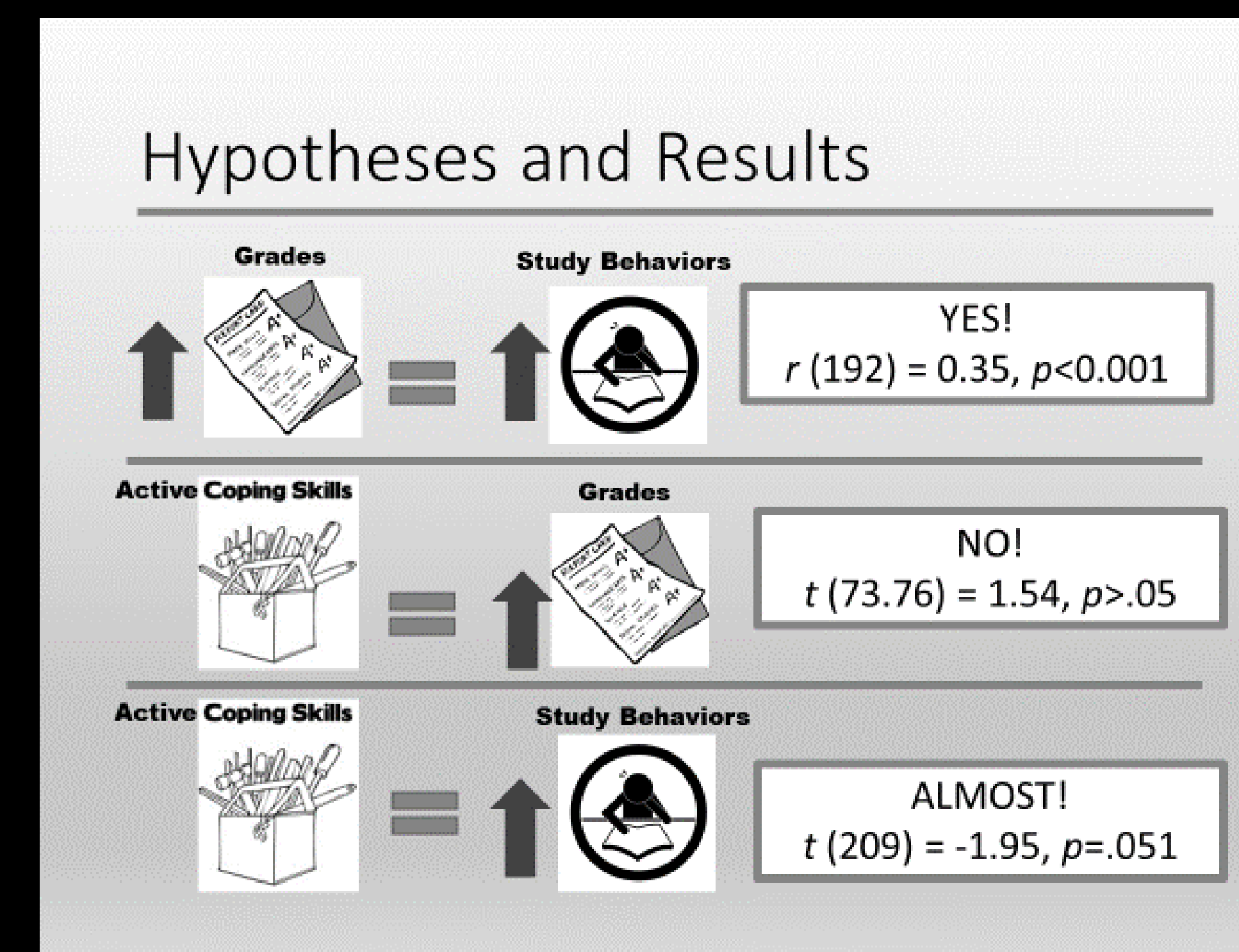


Table 1:
Predictors of Academic Study Behaviors

	R ²	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β	t	p
Step 1:	0.03 ^a	0.03 ^a					
Academic Coping			3.18	1.35	0.18	2.35	0.20 ^a
Step 2:	0.14 ^c	0.13 ^c					
Academic Coping			2.86	1.28	0.16	2.24	0.03 ^b
GPA			5.05	1.11	0.33	4.57	0.00 ^c

Note: ^a $p < .05$, ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

- Increased use of study behaviors are related to both high grades and academic coping style.
- Active/problem focused coping = consistent use of study behavior even levels across GPA [higher levels of study behaviors even at the lowest GPA level]
- Emotion focused coping = inconsistent use of study behaviors across GPA levels [less efficient use of study behaviors at the highest GPA level]

IMPLICATIONS

- More emphasis on efficient use of study skills in freshman initiative courses.
- Discussion of coping skills and resiliency should also be discussed in college preparatory programs or freshman initiative courses.
- Development of academic study behaviors and coping are particularly important for college students of color as a college success is more likely to have greater emotional value to them and their family.