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The relative importance of paternal and maternal parenting as predictors of adolescents' home Internet use and usage

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ABSTRACT

This study examined parental education, parental information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, and parenting style as predictors of adolescents' home Internet use and usage by employing relative importance analysis. Irrespective of adolescents' gender, the three most important predictors of learning-related Internet usage were maternal education, paternal monitoring style, and maternal monitoring style. Male adolescents were highly influenced by maternal education and paternal parenting styles, whereas female adolescents were highly influenced by maternal parenting styles and paternal education. The three most important predictors of leisure-related Internet usage were maternal permission style, paternal permission style, and paternal monitoring style. Maternal permission style and paternal permission style were the most important predictors for male adolescents. Maternal permission style, paternal ICT literacy, paternal monitoring style, and maternal worry style were the most important predictors for female adolescents.

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1. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become part of everyday life for many people. Social media and Web 2.0 applications have radically altered the way people live. In particular, these new technologies have redefined human communication and relationships. This phenomenon is unprecedented in human history. Adolescents particularly frequently use Internet technology. However, the Internet brings advantages as well as disadvantages to youth (Tripp & Herr-Stephenson, 2009). Scholars have investigated the relationship between technology and society by using various approaches. The proponents of technological determinism argue that technology exerts a linear, predictable, and unidirectional influence on individuals, cultures, and societies (Winner, 1977). By contrast, the social construction of technology approach stresses the contribution of individual agency and effort in actively shaping shared meanings regarding technology (Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987). The social shaping of technology (SST) approach recognizes that technology and people influence each other in a reciprocal and dynamic way (Williams & Edge, 1996).

On the basis of SST, Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley (1992) delineated four processes of technology domestication—appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion—in which media and technology, which are social, cultural, political, and economic products, are culturally integrated into the routine practices of households. This approach to

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technology adoption focuses on the fact that the use and meaning of technological artifacts are socially constructed through constant negotiation among members of households over time; thus, this approach tends to situate the relationship between social and technological factors more appropriately in authentic contexts.

Within the family environment, parents are generally the media gatekeepers of their children's Internet use and usage. Parental mediation is a parenting practice in which parents supervise their children's media use (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Nathanson & Botta, 2003). Although parents are crucial agents in monitoring their children's home Internet use and usage, the existing literature on parental involvement tends to overlook this topic. Instead, previous studies have focused on parental involvement in relation to children's education and school life (DCSF, 2008; Harris & Goodall, 2007).

Fathers and mothers play primary socialization roles in relation to their children's Internet use and usage at home. Although some studies have shown a moderate to high degree of congruence in parenting behaviors (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Verhoeven, Junger, van Aken, Dekovic, & van Aken, 2007), other studies have found that parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors differ in certain facets of parenting (Adamsons & Buehler, 2007; Rhoades & O'Leary, 2007). Furthermore, few studies have analyzed the similarities and differences between fathering and mothering with regard to children's Internet use and usage. The purpose of the present study was to explore the relative influence of maternal and paternal parenting on adolescents' Internet use and usage at home. Specifically, the research question is, "What is the relative importance of paternal and maternal parenting in predicting adolescents' home Internet use and usage in terms of parental education, parental ICT literacy, and parenting style?"

2. Parental roles in adolescents' ICT use and usage in the domestic environment

From the perspective of family systems theory, children constantly shape and are shaped by other subsystems, including parents, siblings, and the surrounding environmental context, in a holistic manner (White & Klein, 2008). Parents, as paramount socialization agents, exert a major influence on children's physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being. The roles fathers and mothers play in their children's development have undergone changes over the past two decades. Previous studies have shown that mothers tend to play the role of caregiver, providing their children with warmth and nurturance, whereas fathers generally play a more instrumental role in disciplining, financing, and protecting their offspring (Mackey, 1996; Stern, 1995).

However, in recent decades, family structures and life cycles, and consequently fathers' and mothers' child-rearing behaviors, have been transformed substantially in response to social, cultural, and economic circumstances. For example, Phares, Fields, and Kamboukos (2009) found that mothers spend significantly more time with their adolescent children than fathers do. These researchers also found that mothers are principally responsible for their adolescent children's discipline, daily care, and recreational activities.

Regarding parental involvement in the supervision of children's ICT use at home, research suggests that mothers are more involved than fathers in monitoring their children's Internet activities. Lim and Soon (2010) found that because of the influence of cultural conceptions and social expectations regarding motherhood and maternal responsibility, Chinese and Korean mothers are more engaged than fathers in the mediation and regulation of their children's home ICT use. Similar studies from other cultural contexts, such as Australia (Singh, 2001), the United States (Dholakia, 2006), and Israel (Ribak, 2001), have also shown that mothers play the dominant role in their children's domestic ICT use and deployment to fulfill household obligations. This gender role pattern (Le Poire, 2006) suggests that mothers are more influential than fathers in monitoring the technology use and usage of children at home. Accordingly, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Mothers are more involved than fathers in supervising their children's ICT use at home.

3. The influence of parenting on adolescents' ICT use and usage at home

Parenting is the socialization process whereby parents shape their children's behavior in order to improve their ability to function in society while respecting their individuality (Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008). The parenting process involves various practices and strategies. Three major parenting variables that influence adolescents' Internet use and usage at home are parental education, parental ICT literacy, and parenting style. Parental education is conceptually related to cultural capital, which enables individuals to thrive in society (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital is transmitted through families at home. Sullivan (2001) found that the cultural capital possessed by parents was strongly related to their social class and education, and it had a significant impact on children's cultural capital as well as their academic performance. Sun et al. (2005) showed a positive association between parents' educational level and their adolescent children's home Internet usage. In families with highly educated parents, adolescents more readily used ICT at home for learning and leisure purposes than did their counterparts with less educated parents (DeBell & Chapman, 2006). Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Parents' educational level is positively associated with their children's level of Internet use and usage at home.

Findings concerning the influence of parents' ICT literacy on their children's Internet use and usage have been mixed. Nikken and Jansz (2013) reported that parents who possessed more computer or Internet skills were more likely to use technical mediation to ensure the online safety of their children. Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson (2011a) identified

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