Project Title: Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and Fatherhood in Online Contexts

Mentor: Sarita Schoenebeck, PhD

Project Description

The term “do-it-yourself” or “DIY” has come to refer to a broad range of activities, ranging from crafting to digital production to cooking. However, DIY has historically been associated with home maintenance and improvement—traditionally masculine activities located in masculine domestic spaces (e.g., sheds and garages). In a prior study, my research group found that fathers used DIY language (e.g., “crafting”, “hacking”) to refer to everyday homemaking and childcare activities they were engaging in such as making dinner. We think that fathers’ use of DIY language is a form of discourse that helps to legitimize masculine identities while engaging in what have been traditionally female domains in the home. Building on this work, we hypothesize that the use of DIY label could promote increased involvement and satisfaction in parenting among fathers.

This project will test this hypothesis via an experimental study that examines the effects of DIY language and visuals on measures of fathers’ involvement and satisfaction around parenting. To do this, we will ask fathers to engage in a series of activities with their children and then study how they feel about the activities. The experiment will be done by assigning a control group to an online site with activities for fathers to do with their children and assigning an experimental group to a similar online site but that also has DIY language and visuals. The activities presented in the blog will be borrowed from existing parenting activity resources. We will conduct a multi-week experiment in which fathers are asked to participate in the activities. As part of the study, fathers will be asked to complete a short weekly check-in survey via email or text message that asks them to report whether they did the activity, whether they enjoyed it, whether they would do it again, and how they felt about their interaction with their child during the activity. We will evaluate participation via clicks to the email/text message links, survey responses, and the pre and post-test surveys.

Decades of social science research and government and non-profit initiatives have advocated for greater father involvement in children’s lives. If we find that DIY helps promote greater father involvement, the results could help promote new kinds of outreach and policy approaches to benefit children and families.

Student Role

The student will work as a research assistant on this project to help recruit participants, assign participants to one of the conditions, send out notifications to participants about activities on the site, and analyze participation. The sites will be designed prior to the students’ arrival; the 12-week period will be spent conducting the experiment, analyzing the results, and beginning to write an article for submission to a conference or journal. The student does not need to have
experience conducting an experiment, but should have a broad interest in either DIY, gender, or social media use, and should have excellent time management skills and attention to detail.

**Contribution to Student Academic and Professional Development**

The student will gain knowledge in theories about maker culture, DIY movements, fatherhood, log file analysis, gender, and social equality. The student will also learn about conducting an experiment including participant recruitment, study design, and data analysis. All aspects of work will be conducted with an eye towards contributing to academic scholarship in the form of a publication in a top journal or conference venue.

In addition to the above primary project, the student will also have the opportunity to work on a secondary project, if interested, that involves working closely with a current UMSI PhD student in the areas of either (1) how to manage and reduce harassment in online contexts or (2) peer-to-peer buying and selling groups online (e.g., Mom for sale groups on Facebook).

**Mentoring Plan**

I will meet with the student weekly and probably more often while the study is being conducted. The first step, preferably before the student arrives, will be to begin with going through the UM Institutional Review Board process for conducting ethical research. I will work very closely with the student to ensure success of the study design. For this project, the student will also be able to interact closely with one or two UMSI PhD students involved in the project. This project will allow the student to be a key player in planning and carrying out a research study.