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New Parents' Facebook Use at the Transition to Parenthood

Mitchell K. Bartholomew, Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan, Michael Glassman, Claire M. Kamp Dush, and Jason M. Sullivan*

Mitchell K. Bartholomew: bartholomew.70@osu.edu

Human Development and Family Science, The Ohio State University, 135 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

*Office of Institutional Research and Planning, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210

Abstract

New parents' Facebook use was examined from a social capital perspective. Surveys regarding Facebook use and parenting satisfaction, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting stress were completed by 154 mothers and 150 fathers as part of a larger study of dual-earner, Mid-western U.S. couples making the transition to parenthood. Results indicated that mothers used Facebook more than fathers, and that mothers perceived an increase in use over the transition. When more of mothers' Facebook friends were family members or relatives, and when fathers reported connecting with more of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook, they reported better parental adjustment. For mothers, however, more frequent visits to Facebook accounts and more frequent content management were each associated with higher levels of parenting stress.

Keywords

Facebook; social capital; social networking; transition to parenthood

LeMasters (1957) was the first to identify the transition to parenthood as one of the family's most difficult adjustment periods. Certainly parenthood is rewarding, yielding for many parents feelings of achievement and meeting societal expectations as well as fun, affection, and companionship (Petch & Halford, 2008). Parenthood also brings many challenges, including infant care demands, a decline in disposable income, reduced frequency and quality of leisure and couple time, and poorer couple communication (Petch & Halford, 2008). Conceptual models of adjustment to parenthood for individuals and couples (Belsky, 1984; Kluwer, 2010) emphasize the importance of understanding individual differences in adjustment and call attention to factors within the individual, within the couple, and outside of the family that may increase or decrease the probability of successful transitions into parenthood.

The social capital resources of new parents have been identified as critical to successful adjustment to parenthood (Fielden & Gallagher, 2008; Milkie, 2011). In particular, Belsky's (1984) model of the determinants of parenting identified contextual sources of support, including the parents' social networks (e.g., friends, neighbors, relatives), as important influences on parental adjustment. Although useful resources are often obtained through face-to-face relationships with family, friends, and community members, online social networking sites may also help new parents build and maintain social capital. This is

especially true for parents who reside far from family and friends (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005).

Facebook (a popular social networking site) is the most trafficked website in the world (Google, 2011). It offers many communicative features and information-sharing applications that foster social capital by allowing users to exchange resources within a trusted online environment. Indeed, half of active users log into their Facebook account in any given day, giving them access to 130 friends on average (Facebook, 2011) and the various social capital resources associated with these relationships. Among active Facebook users, 18 – 24- (30.9%), 25 – 34- (22.6%), and 35 – 54-year-olds (27.0%) are the largest member groups and continue to experience substantial growth in members (Corbett, 2011). Given that the majority of active Facebook users are in prime childbearing years (18 – 34-year-olds; 53.5%), it is likely that a considerable portion of users are undergoing the transition to parenthood.

Given the bliss and strain associated with becoming a parent, Facebook may serve an important function in the formation and maintenance of new parents' social capital. The current study examined how new mothers and fathers use Facebook over the transition to parenthood from a social capital perspective. Data from the New Parents Project were used. The New Parents Project is a longitudinal study of dual-earner, married or cohabiting couples with relatively high levels of education undergoing the transition to parenthood in the Midwestern United States. The larger study was designed to examine differences in individual and couple adjustment to parenthood.

Facebook Use and Social Capital

In 2006, Facebook opened membership to nonacademic and non-U.S.-based users (Joinson, 2008), enabling diverse populations to communicate more efficiently with family, friends, and community members, whether they live down the street or across the world. Joinson found seven primary uses of Facebook among a convenience sample of Facebook users: (a) reconnection or maintenance of social ties; (b) establishing a shared identity via such activities as joining groups, organizing events, or communicating with likeminded people; (c) viewing and posting of photographs; (d) using applications, games, and quizzes; (e) using Facebook to learn more about people who were met offline; (f) moving from one person to another via friendship links; and (g) posting and viewing status updates. Thus, active Facebook users utilize Facebook for a variety of purposes, all of which provide potential for the formation and maintenance of social capital.

Social capital refers to the resources accrued through relationships among people (J. S. Coleman, 1988). Putnam (2000) furthers this conceptualization by distinguishing between two forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital exists within strong-tie networks, which Granovetter (1983) described as having high degrees of trust, intimacy, and emotional support. Members of strong-tie networks have long histories together and are readily available for support in all circumstances. Family and close friends typically provide bonding social capital, and strengthening these relationships may prove particularly important across the transition to parenthood. In fact, Belsky and Rovine (1984) found that new parents increased their contact with their family of origin from the third trimester of pregnancy to 9 months postpartum. Similarly, in a more recent study, Gameiro, Boivin, Canavarro, Moura-Ramos, and Soares (2010) found that new parents showed a "social nesting" pattern in which they perceived increased support from their nuclear family from the pre- to the postpartum period.

With respect to online social networking, Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) found the intensity of Facebook use among a sample of college students was positively associated with

a measure of bonding social capital. This finding provides evidence that Facebook can function as a strong-tie network where users derive trust, intimacy, and emotional support (Granovetter, 1983). Thus, it is possible that Facebook serves a similar function for new parents, providing them with a platform for maintaining strong ties like those with family and close friends that are vital at the transition to parenthood.

Conversely, bridging social capital exists within weak-tie networks and is based primarily on new perspectives and useful information (Ellison et al., 2007). Members of weak-tie networks are much less likely to offer support in all circumstances, but are far more likely to provide useful information concerning a particular topic (Fingerman, 2009). Although theory and research on the transition to parenthood have focused on the importance of social support (Belsky, 1984; Gameiro et al., 2010), the strong-tie networks most often cited are geographically bounded and limited to family and close friends (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005). Research, however, indicates established weak-tie networks may be an additional resource for coping with the new demands of parenthood (Madge & O'Connor, 2006). Belsky and Rovine (1984) found that bridging social capital does in fact increase across the transition to parenthood. Specifically, new parents increased their contact with other parents of young children from the third trimester of pregnancy to 9 months postpartum. In addition, Deave, Johnson, and Ingram (2008) reported that new parents valued peer support, especially that of other parents who had simultaneously or recently undergone the transition to parenthood.

Advancements in Internet technology allow new parents to easily establish weak-tie connections that may provide the kinds of social capital resources not typically found in strong-tie networks. Specifically, the Internet allows new parents to build and maintain bridging social capital via interaction within weak-tie networks. For example, Drentea and Moren-Cross (2005) found mothers who were active participants on a parenting message board used Internet tools to develop instrumental support systems that contributed to the formation and maintenance of bridging social capital. Similarly, Madge and O'Connor (2006) found that new mothers primarily used an online parenting community for the acquisition of knowledge and support. With respect to online social networking, Facebook has been described as primarily a weak-tie network (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009), offering limited but far-reaching support, mostly in the form of information. In fact, the intensity of Facebook use among college students predicted bridging social capital after controlling for demographics, psychological well-being, and general Internet use (Ellison et al., 2007). New parents may seek social support in the form of parenting advice, child-care recommendations, or commiseration about the difficulties of having an infant from Facebook friends.

It is important to maintain a balance between strong-tie and weak-tie networks in navigating the complex social world (Lin, Smith, & Granovetter, 2002). With the growth and popularity of Facebook and the frequent if not instant access users have to their online networks via personal computers and smart phones, Facebook may be a mechanism by which today's new parents increase their contact with members of both strong- and weak-tie networks and hence increase their bonding and bridging social capital, thereby increasing the probability of successful adjustment to parenthood.

The Current Study

Although data indicate that a large number of Facebook users may be undergoing the transition to parenthood, the current study appears to be the first of its kind to investigate new parents' Facebook use during this stressful life event. Specifically, the current study examined how new mothers and fathers use Facebook at the transition to parenthood using a

social capital perspective. Four questions were addressed: (a) How do new parents use Facebook? (b) How does new parents' Facebook use change over the transition to parenthood? (c) Do new mothers and fathers differ in their Facebook use at the transition to parenthood? and (d) How is new parents' Facebook use associated with their adjustment to parenthood?

Because research concerning parenthood and Facebook remains scant, the first question was exploratory and descriptive in nature. Given that the transition to parenthood is a major life event full of many challenges, during which parents may seek social support both from family and from community members (Belsky & Rovine, 1984), today's new parents may use Facebook to build and maintain social capital. Joinson's (2008) work provided insight regarding the various uses of Facebook; the results he obtained with a diverse community sample, however, may prove qualitatively different from Facebook use among those undergoing the transition to parenthood.

With regards to the second question, it was hypothesized that new parents' Facebook use would increase over the transition to parenthood. This hypothesis challenges previous research that suggests that new parents have considerably less time for leisure activities (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). The formation and maintenance of social capital, however, remains of utmost importance during the transition to parenthood (Fielden & Gallagher, 2008; Milkie, 2011) and Facebook's user-friendly platform and expansive reach afford new parents nearly effortless acquisition of various forms of social capital (whether it be bonding or bridging in nature). That is, with little effort, new parents undergoing this momentous shift in their lives may accrue valuable resources online via both strong and weak ties that would be otherwise difficult to build or maintain given constraints on the lives of new parents.

With respect to the third question, Joinson's (2008) findings regarding differences between male and female Facebook users provide potential insight as to how new mothers and fathers might differ in their Facebook uses. Joinson compared how personally important several uses of Facebook were between men and women. Women scored uses related to reconnection and maintenance of social ties and the viewing and posting of photographs as more personally important than men; women also visited Facebook more frequently than men. These findings suggest that new mothers may use Facebook more than new fathers to maintain social connections as well as share photographs across the transition to parenthood. This is consistent with research that suggests that women are more likely than men to take responsibility for maintaining social ties (Rosenthal, 1985).

Finally, we anticipated that greater Facebook use would be associated with better adjustment to parenthood for new mothers and fathers. Our rationale for this hypothesis was that if greater Facebook use facilitated the acquisition and maintenance of social capital for new parents, then parents who reported greater use of Facebook should show better adjustment to parenthood. In particular, we measured three important facets of adjustment to parenthood: satisfaction with the parental role (Pistrang, 1984), parenting self-efficacy (P. K. Coleman & Karraker, 1997), and parenting stress (Kazdin & Whitley, 2003). We hypothesized that new parents who reported greater use of Facebook would report greater satisfaction with the parental role, higher parenting self-efficacy, and lower levels of parenting stress.

Method

Participants

Data were derived from the fourth and final phase of a short-term longitudinal study of new fathers' and mothers' adjustment to parenthood (the New Parents Project). Couples were

recruited in the third trimester of pregnancy primarily from childbirth education classes, from print advertisements, and by word of mouth. The total sample included 182 couples undergoing the transition to parenthood. To participate, expectant parents were required to be (a) expecting their first child, (b) the biological parents of the child they were expecting, (c) married or cohabiting, (d) both contributing to the household income, (e) at least 18 years of age, and (f) able to read and speak English. All study procedures and materials were approved by our university's Behavioral and Social Science Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from parents prior to participation, and families received cash and gifts (e.g., baby gifts, museum membership) as incentives for continued participation at each phase of the study.

At 9 months postpartum, 154 mothers and 150 fathers completed surveys as part of the project. Demographic information on these participants was obtained at the first phase of the study, during the third trimester of pregnancy. Eighty-eight percent of the mothers and 89% of the fathers were married. The median family income reported by both mothers and fathers was \$80,000 per year. The median level of education for mothers and fathers was a bachelor's degree, with 77% of mothers and 67% of fathers having obtained at least a college degree. The majority of participants were White (86% of mothers and 89% of fathers), with the remaining participants coming from other racial backgrounds (6% of mothers and 4% of fathers self-identified as Black, 2% of mothers and 3% of fathers self-identified as Asian, 2% of mothers and 5% of fathers self-identified as "other race," and 5% of mothers were categorized as "mixed race"). In addition, 4% of mothers and 2% of fathers identified themselves as Hispanic. Mothers were between the ages of 18 and 42 years ($M = 28.18$ years; $SD = 4.05$). Fathers were between the ages of 18 and 48 years ($M = 30.17$ years; $SD = 4.49$). In the third trimester of pregnancy, the vast majority of expectant mothers worked at least 31 hours per week (90%), with only 10% working fewer hours. Similarly, only 6% of expectant fathers worked fewer than 31 hours per week. At 9 months postpartum, 63% of mothers worked at least 31 hours per week, with the remainder working 21 – 30 hours per week (15%), 11 – 20 hours per week (7%), or 0 – 10 hours per week (5%). An additional 10% of mothers were not in the work force. Of the fathers, 89% worked at least 31 hours per week, with the remainder working 21 – 30 hours per week (3%), 11 – 20 hours per week (1%), or 0 – 10 hours per week (3%). Only 3% of fathers were not in the work force.

Attrition analyses were conducted to compare the mothers and fathers who did not complete surveys at 9 months postpartum to those who did complete surveys. These analyses revealed that these sets of parents did not differ in age, family income, education, or work hours. In addition, mothers who completed surveys did not differ in race or ethnicity or marital status from mothers who did not complete surveys. Fathers who completed surveys, however, were more likely to be married and White ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively; Fisher's exact tests) than fathers who did not complete surveys.

Procedure

As part of the larger study, at 9 months postpartum (the final phase of the study), mothers and fathers completed a questionnaire measuring Facebook and Myspace use across the transition to parenthood. Parents also completed questionnaires about their adjustment to parenthood. These questionnaires were mailed to the couples' home in separate envelopes and participants were asked to complete them independently of their partners. Completed questionnaires were collected when families participated in a face-to-face assessment 2 weeks later.

Measures

Facebook use—Because no established measure of new parents' online social networking existed at the time this study was designed, a new set of questions was developed for the current study. The questionnaire was developed based on accepted definitions of the structure and uses of social network sites (SNS) outlined by Boyd and Ellison (2007). Guided by their idea that “what makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks” (p. 211), the questions tapped the size of the network, frequency of Facebook use, communication with Facebook friends, and content management. Several questions focused specifically on the uploading of pictures of the child, given that this was one of the primary uses of Facebook identified by Joinson (2008), and was anticipated to be an especially prominent Facebook use for new parents. Consistent with our research objectives, the questionnaire also tapped perceived changes in Facebook use over the transition to parenthood.

To determine whether participating parents had a Facebook account, they were asked, “Do you have a Facebook and/or Myspace account?” with the following response options: *Facebook, Myspace, both, or neither*. To determine the number of Facebook friends, participants were asked to provide a numerical answer to the following question: “How many Facebook friends do you currently have? If you are not sure please estimate.” The additional questions regarding Facebook use analyzed in this study are described in Table 1.

All of the questions we created also inquired about new parents' Myspace use. Given that Myspace use was very infrequent, however, and Facebook use was much more widely reported in this sample, we report only results for Facebook. In particular, 0% of mothers and 3.3% of fathers reported having only a Myspace account. Eighteen percent of fathers and 32% of mothers reported having both Facebook and Myspace accounts, but of parents with Myspace accounts, over half of mothers (53%) and fathers (66%) reported visiting these accounts only a few times per year.

Adjustment to parenthood—Three indicators of new mothers' and fathers' adjustment to parenthood at 9 months postpartum were included: parenting satisfaction, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting stress. Satisfaction with the parenting role was assessed using the Motherhood/Fatherhood Satisfaction/Meaning Scale (Pistrang, 1984), which consisted of 24 items such as “My baby makes me feel useful” (1 = *never* and 5 = *very often*; $\alpha = .78$ and $.92$ for mothers and fathers, respectively). Parenting self-efficacy was measured with the 10-item Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale (Teti & Gelfand, 1991), with items such as “When your baby is upset, fussy or crying, how good are you at soothing him or her?” (1 = *not good at all* and 4 = *very good*; $\alpha = .81$ for mothers and $.80$ for fathers). The five items measuring parenting stress (i.e., “Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be”; 1 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .66$ for mothers and $.59$ for fathers) were drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Abidin, 1995; Filippone & Knab, 2005).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

More mothers than fathers reported having Facebook accounts, $\chi^2(1) = 4.22, p < .05$. In 89 couples, both partners reported having Facebook accounts. Sample comparison analyses were conducted to compare mothers and fathers with Facebook accounts to those without Facebook accounts on demographic characteristics (race or ethnicity, education, work hours, marital status, age, and family income). Descriptive statistics for these subsamples are reported in Table 2. In only one case was a significant difference found: New mothers who

reported having Face-book accounts were significantly younger than new mothers who reported not having Facebook accounts, $t(150) = -2.61, p < .05$. Frequencies for all other questions regarding Facebook use are presented in Table 1. Only parents who had a Facebook account at the time of data collection were included in subsequent analyses; these subsamples included 127 mothers (82%) and 100 fathers (75%).

With respect to adjustment to parenthood at 9 months postpartum, mothers overall reported greater parenting satisfaction, $t(87) = 2.23, p < .05$, and parenting self-efficacy, $t(87) = -3.78, p < .01$, than fathers, but there was no significant difference for parenting stress. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2 separately for mothers and fathers with and without Facebook accounts. Parents with Facebook accounts did not differ from their counterparts without Facebook accounts on any measure of parental adjustment.

New Parents' Facebook Use

New mothers—The median number of Facebook friends for mothers was 152.5 (range = 5 to 826), with 97% of mothers reporting that of their Facebook friends half, less than half, or none were family. Furthermore, 88% of mothers reported communicating with half or less than half of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook. That is, frequencies indicated that the majority of mothers used Facebook as the central means for connecting with their online friends.

With regards to the frequency of general Facebook use, the majority of mothers (58%) visited their account at least once a day. Concerning content management, the majority of mothers managed the contents of their account on a weekly (31%) or monthly (46%) basis. In addition to the frequency of general Facebook use, the current study examined specific Facebook use concerning sharing photos of the child. Ninety-eight percent of mothers indicated they had uploaded photos of their child to Facebook, and the largest percentage of mothers (64%) reported uploading photos of their child on a monthly basis. Lastly, 93% of mothers who uploaded photos of their child to Facebook reported it was “very likely” to “likely” that the photos would be acknowledged (i.e., commented on or “liked”) by their Facebook friends.

New fathers—The median number of Facebook friends for fathers was 120 (range = 4 to 1,000), with 93% of fathers reporting that of their Facebook friends half, less than half, or none were family. Furthermore, 89% of the fathers reported communicating with half, less than half, or none of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook. That is, similar to mothers, the majority of fathers used Facebook as the central means for connecting with their online friends.

With regards to the frequency of general Facebook use, 44% of fathers visited their account at least once a day, 28% of fathers visited their account on a weekly basis, and the remainder of fathers visited their account a few times a month or less. Concerning content management, 71% of fathers managed the contents of their account a few times per month or less often. With respect to specific Facebook use concerning sharing photos of the child, 83% of fathers indicated they had uploaded photos of their child to Facebook; the largest percentage of fathers (52%) reported uploading photos of their child on a monthly basis. Lastly, 71% of fathers who uploaded photos of their child to Facebook reported it was “very likely” to “likely” that the photos would be acknowledged (i.e., commented on or “liked”) by their Facebook friends.

Change in Facebook Use Over the Transition to Parenthood

When asked if their Facebook use had changed since the birth of their child, 27% of mothers and 19% of fathers indicated that their Facebook use decreased, 29% of mothers and 51% of fathers indicated that their Facebook use stayed the same, and 44% of mothers and 31% of fathers reported greater use of Facebook since the birth of their child. Binomial tests revealed that more mothers perceived an increase than a decrease in Facebook use ($p < .05$), but fathers were just as likely to perceive a decrease as an increase in Facebook use ($p = .11$).

With regard to changes in specific Facebook uses, the majority (63%) of mothers reported uploading fewer photos prior to their child's birth. Similarly, 73% of fathers reported uploading photos less or much less often prior to their child's birth. Binomial tests confirmed that more mothers and fathers reported uploading fewer photos prior to their child's birth when compared to after their child's birth (both p s $< .01$). In other words, new parents reported uploading more photos (presumably of their child) to Facebook after the transition to parenthood.

New Mothers' Versus Fathers' Facebook Use

New mothers and fathers did not differ in the average number of Facebook friends they reported, $t(217) = 0.57$, $p = .57$. Moreover, they also did not differ in the extent to which their Facebook friends were family or relatives, Somers' $d = .00$, $p = .97$, or in the extent of their communication with Facebook friends outside of Facebook, Somers' $d = -.07$, $p = .29$. There were, however, significant differences between mothers and fathers when the frequency of Facebook activity was considered. New mothers reported visiting their Facebook accounts more frequently than new fathers, Somers' $d = .26$, $p < .01$, and managing the content of their Facebook accounts more frequently than fathers, Somers' $d = .18$, $p < .05$.

With respect to the specific use of sharing photos of the child, more mothers than fathers reported having ever uploaded photos of their child to Facebook, Somers' $d = .15$, $p < .01$. But, of those who had uploaded photos, there was no significant difference between mothers and fathers in how often they uploaded photos of their child to Facebook, Somers' $d = .10$, $p = .17$; both mothers and fathers most frequently reported uploading photos of their child monthly. New mothers, however, were more apt than new fathers to report that their Facebook friends were likely to comment on the photos they uploaded of their child, Somers' $d = .24$, $p < .01$.

When considering potential differences between mothers' and fathers' perceptions of change in Facebook use across the transition to parenthood, there was no difference in their views of change in Facebook use over this transition, Somers' $d = -.05$, $p = .47$; both mothers and fathers tended to view Facebook use as having stayed the same or increased. Similarly, there was also no difference between mothers and fathers in perceived change in photo uploads since their child's birth, Somers' $d = -.07$, $p = .41$.

New Parents' Facebook Use and Adjustment to Parenthood

Correlations were used to examine associations between new mothers' and fathers' current Facebook use and three indicators of their adjustment to parenthood: parenting satisfaction, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting stress (see Table 3). When mothers reported that a greater proportion of their Facebook friends were family members or relatives, they reported greater satisfaction with the parenting role. Similarly, mothers who reported that their friends were more likely to comment on photos they had posted of their child also reported greater parenting satisfaction. When mothers were more frequent visitors to their Facebook

accounts and managed their accounts more frequently, however, they reported higher levels of parenting stress.

With respect to fathers, those who reported connecting with a greater number of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook reported lower levels of parenting stress. Like mothers, fathers who perceived it more likely that their Facebook friends would comment on photos they had posted of their child were more satisfied in the parenting role. Facebook use was not associated with parenting self-efficacy for either new mothers or fathers.

Discussion

Since its conception in 2004, Facebook has become an extremely popular method for building and maintaining social ties among 500 million active users (Facebook, 2011). Thus, many individuals undergoing the transition to parenthood have Facebook accounts, but prior to this investigation the ways in which new parents use Facebook during this major life change remained unknown. This study has revealed that Facebook use may play a central role in the lives of many new parents and that Facebook use is modestly associated with some aspects of new parents' adjustment to parenthood.

Even as new parents are strapped for time and overwhelmed with new responsibilities (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Petch & Halford, 2008), it is clear that on the whole they are continuing to use Facebook, and some—particularly mothers—appear to even increase their use over the transition to parenthood. We found that the majority of new mothers and fathers visited their Facebook account at least once a day and managed the content of their account roughly once per month. Mothers also perceived an increase in general Facebook use across the transition. When compared to a sample of new college students (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009), 84% of whom reported that Facebook was part of their everyday activity, the new parents in our sample were not using Facebook as intensely. The college students, however, also appeared to use Facebook to ease the transition to college, as our parents may have done to ease the transition to parenthood.

One potential explanation for these trends is that Facebook serves an important function in the acquisition of social capital and social support resources, which are beneficial at the transition to parenthood according to theory (Belsky, 1984) and research (Fielden & Gallagher, 2008; Madge & O'Connor, 2006; Milkie, 2011). As such, increased Facebook use for new parents could reflect a “social nesting” pattern (Gameiro et al., 2010) in which parents draw family and friends closer to them. Facebook and other forms of online social networking offer the ability to develop social capital while staying in the home, or—aided by the advent of smart phones—even while multitasking (e.g., parents could be taking and uploading photographs of their infant to Facebook while eating dinner). Indeed, uploading photographs appeared to be a frequent Facebook use for new parents. Both mothers and fathers perceived that they were uploading more photographs to Facebook after their child's birth than they had prior. Given that adult humans are attracted to infant faces (Fullard & Reiling, 1976), it is possible that posting photographs of one's infant is a particularly compelling way of engaging Facebook friends in the interactions that build social capital.

At first glance, it appeared that the new parents in this study were primarily using Facebook to build and maintain bridging social capital through weak-tie connections. This is consistent with characterizations of Facebook as a weak-tie network (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009) and also with research linking Facebook use to bridging social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). Specifically, the majority of new mothers and fathers in the current study indicated that their Facebook friends were not family members, and they reported not connecting with most of these friends off-line. Therefore, Facebook appeared primarily to be a weak-tie network for

these parents. It is likely, however, that the friendship networks of these parents contained a small subset of family or close friends and that those were also the same people that some parents interacted with outside of Facebook.

In fact, when mothers reported that a greater proportion of their Facebook friends were family members or relatives, they reported greater satisfaction with the parenting role. Thus, Facebook may also be a source of bonding social capital for new parents, consistent with the notion that social support from family and community members is important for successful adjustment to parenthood (Belsky & Rovine, 1984; Gameiro et al., 2010). With respect to fathers, those who reported connecting with a greater number of their Facebook friends outside of Facebook (possibly indicating a more close-knit network) reported lower levels of parenting stress. Mothers and fathers who reported that their friends were likely to comment on photos they had posted of their child also reported greater satisfaction in the parenting role. Taken together, these findings suggest that it may be reciprocity in interactions with friends on and outside of Facebook that is behind the extent to which Facebook serves to maintain or increase bonding social capital for new parents (Vitak, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2011). Future research should delve more deeply into the nature of the ties that new parents have with their Facebook friends in order to understand the extent to which Facebook may be a source of bridging and bonding social capital.

Although many aspects of Facebook use were similar for mothers and fathers, some differences did emerge. In the larger sample, more mothers than fathers reported having Facebook accounts, and within the subsamples of Facebook users, mothers reported more frequent visits to their Facebook accounts and more frequent management of Facebook content. Moreover, more mothers than fathers reported having ever uploaded a photograph of their child to Facebook, and mothers also perceived it more likely than fathers did that their friends would comment on photos of their child. That women use Facebook more than men is not entirely surprising (Joinson, 2008); this is, however, the first study to report that this gender difference is also apparent in a sample of new parents. These findings, combined with the fact that mothers—but not fathers—perceived a general increase in Facebook use across the transition to parenthood, suggest that new mothers may be taking on the role of forging and maintaining social ties (Rosenthal, 1985). Because of the constraints associated with the transition to parenthood, which may involve time off work, especially for mothers, and more time spent in the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the ability to maintain old social links or establish new ones may become diminished. As such, Facebook may be a particularly important means for mothers in particular to build and maintain social capital for themselves, their children, and their families.

In contrast to our expectations, however, Facebook use was not uniformly associated with better adjustment to parenthood. In fact, no aspect of Facebook use was significantly associated with parenting self-efficacy for mothers or fathers, and for mothers, more frequent visits to Facebook accounts and more frequent content management were each actually associated with higher levels of parenting stress. These findings may appear to contradict those of Madge and O'Connor (2006), who reported that mothers using an online parenting community derived many perceived benefits from their online interactions with other mothers. But, it is certainly possible that the new mothers in our study who were experiencing the highest levels of parenting stress were more likely to use Facebook intensely in an effort to seek social support or information. Longitudinal research is needed to detect whether use of online social networking sites or communities has a beneficial or detrimental effect on parental adjustment or whether individuals who have more to share about their parenting experiences—both good and bad—are simply more likely to take advantage of these venues.

Although this was the first study to examine Facebook use among new mothers and fathers in the context of the transition to parenthood, it is also important to acknowledge some limitations of this initial step in understanding how new parents are utilizing online social media. The social capital perspective we adopted provided a useful framework for understanding Facebook use among new parents, but building social capital is likely not the only motivation (and not necessarily even the primary motivation) for new parents' Facebook use. Identity theory (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000), for instance, may also be useful. When individuals become parents, they seek to verify their parental identities (Cast, 2004), or control meanings in the social environment so that they match meanings contained in their identities. It is possible that some of the Facebook activity measured in the current study (e.g., perceived increases in use across the transition to parenthood, uploading of photographs) could reflect new parents' identity verification efforts. Thus, future research should consider alternative theoretical perspectives on new parents' Facebook use to enrich our understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, future investigations of new parents' online social networking employing a social capital perspective would benefit from including direct assessments of social support, bonding and bridging social capital, which were not available in the present study.

The current sample was modest in size and relatively homogenous. That is, participants were predominantly White, highly educated, and of approximately the same age. In addition, fathers who contributed data on Facebook use differed from those who did not respond to surveys in race and marital status, with non-White and cohabiting fathers less likely to have participated at 9 months postpartum. Individuals with sociodemographic profiles similar to those of our participants, however, are more likely to use Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2007); thus, our sample provided a greater chance to examine variability in Facebook use within a sample of parents that may have been more likely to have Facebook accounts than new parents in the general population. Regardless, future research efforts should analyze larger, more diverse samples in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds in order to understand more fully to what extent and in what ways new parents use not only Facebook but also other forms of online social media and electronic communication, for example, texting, Skype, and e-mail.

In addition, the current study measured change in Facebook use over the transition to parenthood retrospectively. Future research should measure Facebook use prospectively, including before and after the birth of a couple's first child, to better understand the impact of the transition to parenthood on Facebook use. Furthermore, the current study cannot determine whether changes in Facebook use are due to parenthood or other factors. Future research could benefit from a comparison sample of same-age, similar-demographic participants who did not undergo the transition to parenthood examined over the same time period. It is still notable, however, that new parents in the current study did not perceive a decrease in Facebook use, which could have been expected, given that literature on the transition to parenthood has provided evidence of a lack of leisure time for new parents (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008).

Finally, because these data on new parents' Facebook use were collected within the context of a larger study of family relationships at the transition to parenthood, they provided an overall picture of Facebook use but lacked some elements of specificity. For example, the measure we created did not differentiate between the frequency or types of content management before and after birth. It is likely that differences in the frequency of content management exist before and after the child's birth as well as differences in the types of content managed (i.e., status updates vs. uploading photos). In addition, the measure used in the current study did not distinguish the sources of increased activity. That is, new parents reported the degree to which their Facebook use changed since the birth of their child, but

did not clarify all sources that contributed to this change. Moreover, although our questions were directed at individuals' use of Facebook, it is possible that some of the questions (e.g., about uploading photos) were interpreted at a "couple" or "family" level. In other words, a respondent could have been thinking about their partner's Facebook use in addition to their own when responding to some of the questions. Future research on Facebook use and parenting should use more detailed measures to probe further into these nuances and types of specific uses.

The findings of this study have implications for practitioners who work with expectant and new parents. Facebook appears to have become part of the fabric of family life for many new parents and may serve as a means through which new parents build and maintain social capital. It is important to recognize that new parents—particularly mothers—perceive an increase in the frequency and intensity of Facebook use across the transition to parenthood. Thus, conceptions of new parents' social support networks need to be expanded to include the online environment in addition to family, friends, and community members that new parents see face to face.

Although we did not directly examine many other specific uses of Facebook that new parents are likely taking advantage of (e.g., Facebook group membership), the very notion that new parents are using Facebook opens up the possibility of facilitating parents' access to evidence-based resources for new parents through linking. Most information on social networking sites is obtained through links (often referred to as hyperlinks). Social network sites offer two ways for using links to expand weak-tie networks. The first way is by receiving information through the network of one's Facebook friends. Most individuals keep a list of their friends available to their other friends and sometimes even to visitors (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These friend lists contain individuals, but many times they also contain pages of important organizations and communities that the original friend belongs to. By exploring these lists an individual can quickly and easily link into a new hub community that has the potential to offer new information or even social support. A second way that Facebook promotes links is by actually posting a link on one's wall with a comment about why it is interesting or important. What makes these wall links so effective is that one receives these links in one's ongoing newsfeed. Thus, practitioners may consider taking advantage of the ease of sharing hyperlinked information on Facebook. It may also be useful to consider ways in which to engage fathers in social networking or online communities in addition to mothers, as we found evidence that suggests that new mothers may be taking on the role of forging and maintaining social ties (Rosenthal, 1985), potentially affording them greater access to social capital resources.

Our findings of associations between Facebook use and parental adjustment are also relevant for practitioners. New parents may be using Facebook not only to build social capital through weak-tie connections but also to enhance communication with more traditional social support networks (i.e., family and close friends), and these uses may be most beneficial for parental adjustment. Although speculative, this could be an especially important function of Facebook for parents who live far from family and friends. Thus, practitioners should take Facebook use into account when working with new parents, and, for some parents, practitioners may be able to leverage Facebook use to improve parental functioning at the transition to parenthood. But, even as there is the potential for new parents to benefit from Facebook use, there also appears to be potential for Facebook use to add to new parents' stress instead of (or in addition to) alleviating it. As Facebook use continues to grow, further research on the pros and cons of Facebook use among new parents, and the conditions under which this type of technology can ease the transition to parenthood for new mothers and fathers, should be pursued.

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Table 1

Frequencies for Facebook Use Survey Questions

	None	Less Than Half	Half	More Than Half	All
How many of your Facebook friends are family/relatives?					
Mothers	2.4%	82.5%	11.9%	3.2%	0.0%
Fathers	5.0%	78.0%	10.0%	6.0%	1.0%
How many of your Facebook friends do you communicate with outside of Facebook (e.g. phone, e-mail, in person)?					
Mothers	0.0%	63.2%	24.8%	10.4%	1.6%
Fathers	3.0%	66.0%	20.0%	6.0%	5.0%
Have you uploaded photos of your child to Facebook and/or Myspace?					
Mothers	78.6%	0.0%	19.0%	2.4%	
Fathers	75.8%	0.0%	7.1%	17.2%	
How frequently do you visit your Facebook account?					
Mothers	15.7%	26.8%	15.7%	7.9%	3.9%
Fathers	9.0%	14.0%	21.0%	12.0%	7.0%
How frequently do you manage the content (i.e., what you upload/what you post) of <i>your</i> Facebook account?					
Mothers	3.9%	4.7%	3.1%	12.6%	20.5%
Fathers	2.0%	6.0%	6.0%	7.0%	24.0%
How often do you upload photos of your child to Facebook?					
Mothers	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	5.8%	34.7%
Fathers	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	4.9%	28.4%
Has your Facebook usage changed since the birth of your child?					
Mothers	9.7%	17.7%	29.0%	30.6%	12.9%

	Much Less	Less	Same	More	Much More
Fathers	6.2%	12.4%	50.5%	24.7%	6.2%
Prior to the birth of your child, how many photos did you upload to your Facebook account?					
Mothers	32.4%	30.4%	27.5%	5.9%	3.9%
Fathers	31.2%	41.6%	22.1%	2.6%	2.6%

	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Too Likely	Unlikely
How likely are your Facebook friends to comment on/acknowledge the photos you upload of your child?					
Mothers	63.9%	28.7%	6.6%	0.8%	0.0%
Fathers	45.8%	27.7%	21.7%	3.6%	1.2%

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Mothers and Fathers With and Without Facebook Accounts

Variables	Mothers With Facebook (n = 127)		Mothers Without Facebook (n = 27)		Fathers With Facebook (n = 100)		Fathers Without Facebook (n = 50)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Race/Ethnicity								
White	109	85.8	23	85.2	86	86.0	45	93.8
Black	7	5.5	2	7.4	5	5.0	1	2.1
Asian	2	1.6	1	3.7	3	3.0	1	2.1
Other race	3	2.4	0	0.0	6	6.0	1	2.1
Mixed race	6	4.7	1	3.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hispanic ethnicity	5	4.0	1	3.8	3	3.1	0	0.0
Weekly work hours (9 months)								
Not working	13	10.6	2	7.4	5	5.1	0	0.0
0—10	6	4.9	1	3.7	2	2.0	2	4.2
11—20	11	8.9	0	0.0	1	1.0	1	2.1
21—30	15	12.2	8	29.6	5	5.1	0	0.0
31—40	44	35.8	9	33.3	34	34.3	12	25.0
41—50	32	26.0	5	18.5	44	44.4	28	58.3
Over 50	2	1.6	2	7.4	8	8.1	5	10.4
Education								
Less than high school	1	0.8	0	0.0	1	1.0	0	0.0
High school degree	3	2.4	0	0.0	7	7.1	4	8.0
Vocational or tech program	3	2.4	0	0.0	3	3.0	2	4.0
Some college	17	13.4	4	14.8	15	15.2	7	14.0
Associate's degree	5	3.9	2	7.4	5	5.1	5	10.0
Bachelor's degree	57	44.9	9	33.3	43	43.4	21	42.0
Master's degree	33	26.0	10	37.0	22	22.2	9	18.0
Ph.D. or equivalent	8	6.3	2	7.4	3	3.0	2	4.0
Marital status								
Yes (married)	110	86.6	25	92.6	88	88.0	45	90.0
No	17	13.4	2	7.4	12	12.0	5	10.0

	Mothers With Facebook (<i>n</i> = 127)			Mothers Without Facebook (<i>n</i> = 27)			Fathers With Facebook (<i>n</i> = 100)			Fathers Without Facebook (<i>n</i> = 50)		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>SD</i>
Parental adjustment												
Parenting satisfaction	3.90		.57	3.89		.81	3.65		.51	3.71		.51
Parenting self-efficacy	3.48		.31	3.39		.41	3.30		.35	3.29		.36
Parenting stress	2.08		.48	2.00		.59	2.01		.46	1.99		.46
Age in years	27.80		3.77	30.04		4.90	29.91		3.95	30.70		5.40
Household income	84,745.10		42,904.84	98,045.45		37,297.36	86,735.63		35,205.53	91,072.62		43,986.61

Table 3
Pearson Correlations Between Current Facebook Use and Adjustment to Parenthood

Facebook (FB) Use	Parental Adjustment					
	Parenting Satisfaction		Parenting Self-Efficacy		Parenting Stress	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Number of FB friends	.16	.17	-.04	-.11	.16	.11
Number of FB friends that are family	.23*	.05	.14	.19	-.08	-.14
Number of FB friends communicate with outside of FB	-.07	.11	.06	.09	.07	-.26**
Frequency visit FB	.14	.10	.12	-.02	.19*	-.07
Frequency manage FB content	.17	.15	.06	-.10	.18*	.04
Frequency upload photos of child to FB	.11	.06	.05	.04	.12	-.05
Likelihood of FB friends commenting on photos of child	.19*	.22*	.08	.20	.16	-.09

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$.