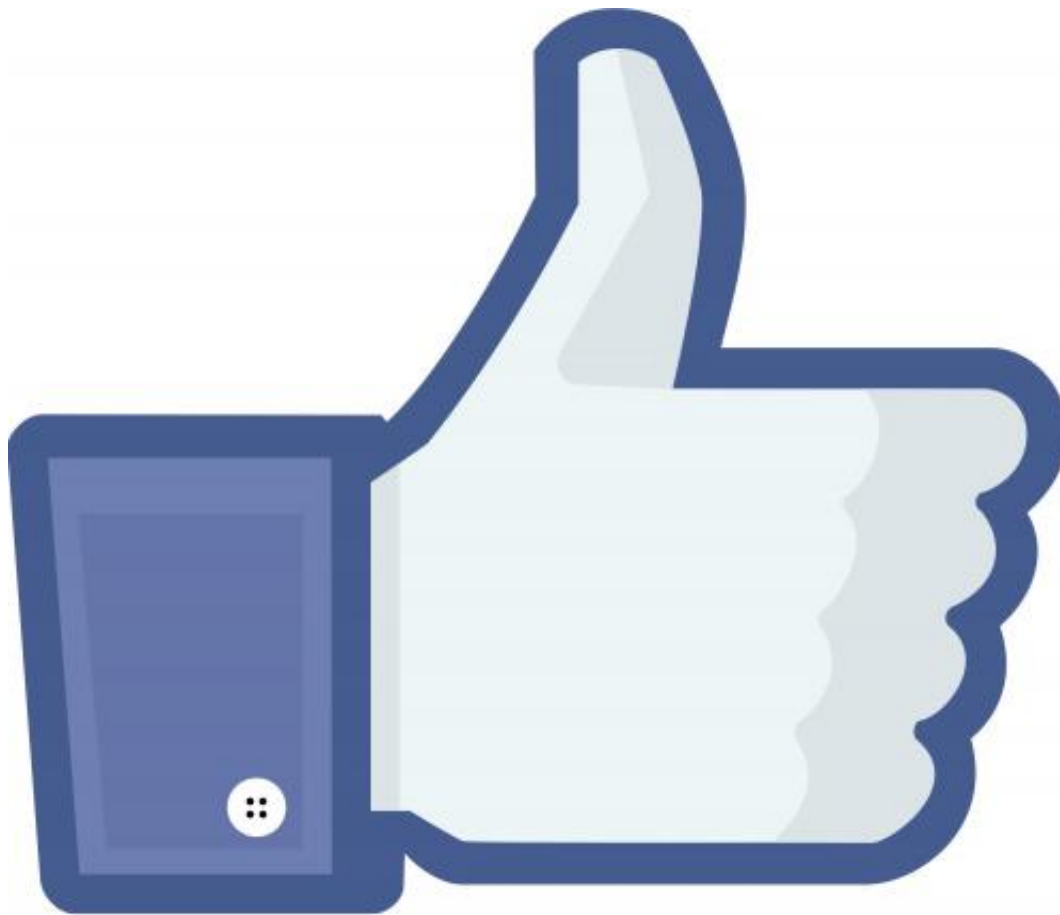


Study shows which new moms post the most on Facebook

May 24 2016, by Jeff Grabmeier



A study shows which psychological characteristics of some new mothers may affect how they use Facebook to show off their baby.

The study looked at a specific group of moms - highly educated, mostly married Midwestern women who had full-time jobs - and found that those who felt societal pressure to be perfect moms and who identified most strongly with their motherhood role posted more frequently than others to Facebook.

These same [mothers](#) who posted most frequently also reported stronger emotional reactions to comments on the photos they posted of their new baby - such as feeling bad if they didn't get enough positive comments.

While many new mothers are active on Facebook, these results suggest some seem to be more drawn to the site than others and may use it in less-than-healthy ways, said Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan, lead author of the study and professor of human sciences at The Ohio State University.

"If a mother is posting on Facebook to get affirmation that she's doing a good job and doesn't get all the 'likes' and positive comments she expects, that could be a problem. She may end up feeling worse," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

In fact, those mothers who posted more on Facebook tended to report more [depressive symptoms](#) after nine months of parenthood than other moms.

"The message of the study isn't that Facebook is necessarily harmful- but that using Facebook may not be an effective platform for women to seek and gain external validation that they're good moms," said Jill Yavorsky, co-author of the study and a doctoral student in sociology at Ohio State.

The study appears online this week in the journal *Sex Roles*.

The researchers used data from the New Parents Project, a long-term study co-led by Schoppe-Sullivan that is investigating how dual-earner

couples adjust to becoming parents for the first time. In all, 127 mothers from Ohio participated in this study.

Because this sample includes mostly highly educated women from dual-career couples, the results may not hold for all [new mothers](#), especially those who don't work outside the home, Schoppe-Sullivan said.

When the women were in their third trimester of pregnancy, the researchers measured how much they believed society expected them to be perfect parents. They were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements like "Only if I am a perfect parent will society consider me a good parent."

Nine months after the baby was born, the researchers measured how much the women in the study identified with their role as a mother. They rated how much they agreed with statements like "I know people make judgments about how good of a partner/mother I am based on how well cared for my house and family are."

The researchers also measured the frequency of their Facebook activity since their child was born, how often they uploaded photos of their children to Facebook and their emotional responses to Facebook friends' comments and likes of child photos. For example, mothers were asked to rate on a 7-point scale from 1 (disappointed) to 7 (pleased) how they felt when photos of their child got more or fewer comments than they expected.

Moms also reported how often they felt depressive symptoms at three and nine months after giving birth.

The study showed that the new moms in the study nearly universally used Facebook to share about their child - 98 percent said they had uploaded photos of their infant. The average new mom reported a slight

increase in Facebook use since her baby was born.

The typical mom reported first uploading a photo of her infant to Facebook within one week of her child's birth. And 80 percent of mothers who had ever uploaded a photo of their child reported that they had featured their child in their profile picture.

Those mothers who did make their child's image their own profile photos tended to show stronger identification with their mother role than women who didn't.

"What these mothers are saying is that my child is central to my identity, at least right now. That's really telling," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

One of the key findings was how mothers who thought society expected them to be perfect and who identified strongly with their motherhood role reacted to Facebook posts, Yavorsky said.

"These mothers paid close attention to the comments they got when they posted pictures of their baby. They felt validated when they got a lot of likes and comments, but they were also more likely to feel bad and disappointed when the reaction wasn't what they had hoped," Yavorsky said.

These results aren't surprising, she said. "The easiest way for women in our society to get validation is still through being a mother because other roles that [women](#) take on are still not as valued."

Added Schoppe-Sullivan: "These are not stay-at-home [moms](#) in our study. They have jobs outside the home that can also provide validation, which makes our results even more interesting. They have other successes to point to for validation."

Women in the study reported more depressive symptoms at nine months when they identified more with their role as mother and thought society expected them to be perfect, and thus posted more to Facebook.

Schoppe-Sullivan said that result should be interpreted cautiously. She noted that the increase in depressive symptoms doesn't necessarily indicate depression.

But all mothers should be aware of why they are using Facebook.

"It's great to share stories and pictures of your baby, but relying on Facebook to feel good about your parenting may be risky," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

More information: Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan et al. Doing Gender Online: New Mothers' Psychological Characteristics, Facebook Use, and Depressive Symptoms, *Sex Roles* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-016-0640-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0640-z)

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: Study shows which new moms post the most on Facebook (2016, May 24) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-05-moms-facebook.html>

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