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Future Parents: Associations between social media use, parenting styles, and parenthood desires

Kennedy Evins
The University of Southern Mississippi

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Future Parents: Associations between social media use, parenting styles, and parenthood
desires

by

Kennedy Evins

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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Approved by:



Bonnie Nicholson, Ph.D.,
Thesis Advisor,
School of Psychology



Sara Jordan, Ph.D.,
Director,
School of Psychology

Sabine Heinhorst, Ph.D.,
Interim Dean
Honors College

ABSTRACT

Research suggests that college students without children have opinions about parenting styles and practices, which may influence future parenting intentions and behaviors. In addition, research indicates that media exposure affects fertility desires in women. The present study explored how pre-parent college students view parenthood by examining the impact of social media use on perceptions of parenting, parenthood intentions, and anticipated parenting styles. One hundred nineteen ($N = 119$) college students completed measures that assessed social media use, perceptions of parenting, parenthood intentions, and anticipated parenting styles. Demographic variables such as parental status, race, age, and gender were also collected. Four hypotheses were evaluated. First, it was hypothesized that higher rates of social media use would be associated with more negative perceptions of parenting. Second, it was hypothesized that higher rates of social media use would be associated with lesser parenthood intentions. Thirdly, it was hypothesized that social media use would be shown to impact anticipated parenting styles. Lastly, it was hypothesized that perceptions of parenting and social media use will be associated with parenthood intentions. Multiple correlational analyses were used to examine the relationships between social media use, perceptions of parenting, parenthood intentions, and anticipated parenting styles. Data analysis did not support the first and third hypotheses. However, the second hypothesis was supported as higher rates of social media use were positively correlated with parenthood intentions, and the fourth hypothesis was partially supported. Additional analyses found significant positive and negative relationships between parenthood intentions and certain subscales of perception of parenting.

Keywords: *parenting, college students, parenthood intentions, social media*

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In modern society, fertility rates are declining in most developed countries (Adsera, 2004). Within the United States, the number of children will be outnumbered by the number of older adults by 2034 (Vespa et al., 2018). Women, in particular, are having children at older ages due to an increased social emphasis on enrollment in higher education and career advancement (Nisen et al., 2019). Young women have been shown to prioritize early skill-acquisition over child rearing by delaying parenthood or deciding not to have children (Adsera, 2004). Further, delayed parenthood has socioeconomic benefits for both men and women (Nisen et al., 2019). It is often expected for individuals to enter into parenthood after earning a college education and securing a job; therefore, delayed parenthood can alleviate stress during that period of transition for young adults (Nisen et al., 2019). However, there is little research on specific features of modern society that influence future fertility rates and/or timing of parenthood. To this point, no studies have examined how modern influences such as social media may impact parenthood intentions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine parenting intentions in relation to social media use, perceptions of parenting, and parenting style.

Parenthood Intentions

Intentions to become parents are impacted by several global factors. The rate of population growth in the United States is declining as the population ages and focuses less on child rearing (Vespa et al., 2018). Although the United States will still experience population growth in the coming decades, other countries such as Japan and Russia have declining population growth. These changes are due largely to couples desiring smaller families and increasing contraceptive use in modern societies (Bongaarts & Casterline,

2018). Because of these fertility preferences, fertility rates across the globe are near replacement level, the fertility rate necessary to stabilize a population (Bongaarts & Casterline, 2018).

As modern societies experience decreased fertility rates and postponed parenthood, it is important to evaluate parenthood desires and intentions among young adults because this information predicts future fertility outcomes (Adair et al., 2014; Eklund, 2016). The decision to become a parent is a complex issue with many important components, including the perceived value of children and the appeal of parenthood (Lawson, 2004). When studying parenthood aspirations, researchers include elements such as parenting desires and intentions, likelihood estimations, attitudes toward childlessness, or even a parenting continuum (Gato et al., 2020). According to Mynarska and Rytel (2020), the differential between desires and intentions is that desires are wants that motivate intentions, and intentions are deliberate efforts to pursue a desired, yet achievable result. Parenthood intentions are affected by psychological and sociodemographic factors (Gato et al., 2020). Age, relationship status, and autonomy greatly influence the perceived costs and rewards of parenthood for childless young adults (Liefbroer, 2005). Research about gender-specific parenthood desires shows that emotional aspects were also important for women, and crucial factors for men include parenting satisfactions and traditional values of children (Mynarska & Rytel, 2020). The desire to have children for women and men has been found to be negatively impacted by higher concerns about the time, energy, and financial costs of childcare (Mynarska & Rytel, 2020). As values change to encompass the role of higher education in modern society, college students are more focused on education and career pathways rather than

parenthood (Gato et al., 2020). For women in particular, contemporary social structures in the United States provide more opportunities outside of motherhood; therefore, women without children are likely to focus on work or on leisure instead of motherhood (McQuillan et al., 2008). Taking this into consideration, it is important for research to examine parenthood intentions amongst young adults because they are members of the current birth cohort who will contribute the most to their country's fertility and birth rates. Therefore, the current study examined several predictors of parenthood including social media influences and perceptions of parenting, as well as preference for parenting styles.

Perceptions of Parenting

The perceived rewards and costs of parenthood are key factors that determine if and when an individual becomes a parent (Lawson, 2004; Liefbroer, 2005). Entry into parenthood was influenced by perceived rewards and costs of parenthood (Liefbroer, 2005). Because women are typically tasked with more child rearing responsibilities, the perceived rewards from parenthood and marriage have decreased over time, and women are now more likely to achieve greater academic achievements (Liefbroer, 2005).

Opinions on parenthood are influenced by expected rewards and costs of the timing and desired number of children (Liefbroer, 2005). Individuals who perceive higher costs of independence and career are more likely to postpone having their first child (Liefbroer, 2005). To evaluate attitudes toward parenting, Karen Lawson's Perceptions of Parenting Inventory investigates values and expectations that motivate individuals to delay, abandon, or plan for parenthood (2004). Her study found that childless individuals who intended to enter parenthood had a greater association between parenting, enrichment

rewards, and social support availability (Lawson, 2004). Therefore, the current study investigated the various perceptions college students may have about parenting and the degree to which these may be impacted by external factors, such as social media.

Social Media

Media outlets are symbolic environments that help construct reality; therefore, prolonged use inevitably shapes perceptions of the social world (Bandura, 2001). Given the lack of first-hand experience and the likelihood of social comparisons, media portrayals of roles and expectations have been shown to impact current and possible future conceptions of young women (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2014). As the use of social networking sites (SNS) increases, individuals continue to make social comparisons towards others on these sites (Coyne et al., 2016). The social comparison theory states that comparisons to other individuals are useful for self-evaluations of individual opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954). Because social media provides standards for social comparisons, social media exposure is likely to shape ideas of parenthood. For example, prolonged media exposure seems to strongly affect fertility desires in women; this exposure seems to more strongly affect a preference for smaller families and more positive attitudes towards contraceptive use (Barber & Axinn, 2004). Some research findings suggest that young women's ideas of motherhood are shaped by TV exposure (Ex et al., 2002). One study found that the media's portrayal of celebrity mother culture has set the standard for ideal motherhood, which has influenced perceptions of motherhood in Korean women (Chae, 2015). A recent study showed that parenting information on Twitter highlights topics about parenting behaviors and parenting styles (Ryan et al., 2021). Furthermore, research has shown that online information about

parenthood usually focuses on negative aspects of child rearing such as potential problems and failures (Chae, 2015). Because there is an abundance of parenting information online (Ryan et al., 2021), social media use has a potential influence on the parental attitudes of future parents. College students have high levels of social media use (Wang et al., 2011), and their opinions of parenting and parenting styles, along with other factors, may potentially influence when and if college students want to enter parenthood.

Parenting Styles

One last variable of interest is parenting styles, which may overlap with intentions to parent. Diana Baumrind's theory of parenting introduced three types of parenting styles that are prominent in parenting research. Parenting styles are conceptualized as parental attitudes and beliefs that are established to create the emotional climate of parent-child relationships (Wolfradt et al., 2003). Authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, and permissive parenting focus on the interplay of control and responsiveness in parent-child relationships (Baumrind, 1966). The authoritarian parenting style implements a high level of control and a low level of responsiveness towards the child's behavior (Aldhafri, 2016). By implementing reward and punishment strategies, authoritarian parents establish and control clear behavior expectations that restrict the child's autonomy and discourage negotiation (Baumrind, 1966; Aldhafri, 2016). The authoritative parenting style implements balanced levels of control and responsiveness (Aldhafri, 2016). Authoritative parenting frames the child's learning as insightful, age-appropriate, suitable for the child's stage of development, and pleasurable (Baumrind, 1966). By recognizing the child's individuality, authoritative parents set future expectations and encourage the child's autonomy with parent-child negotiation

(Baumrind, 1966; Barnhart et al., 2013). The permissive parenting style implements a low level of control and a high level of responsiveness (Aldhafri, 2016). Permissive parents function as resources for their children, and they use reasons and manipulation rather than power to influence the child's responsibility and behavior (Baumrind, 1966). By making few rules, permissive parents encourage the child's autonomy by promoting self-regulation, discovery, and expression (Baumrind, 1966; Aldhafri, 2016).

Research about parenting styles primarily focuses on parents and perceived parenting styles reported by young children and adolescents. Parenting research has found that mothers and fathers are likely to endorse different parenting styles, supporting the idea of gendered parenting styles in Western populations (Barnhart et al., 2013). Because of these differences, researchers recommend that parenting styles for fathers and mothers should be measured separately (Aldhafri, 2011). There is limited parenting style research that focuses on college students and their future parenting styles. In one study in the United States, female college students selected the authoritative parenting style as their future parenting style, and male college students selected the permissive parenting style (Barnhart et al., 2013). Those findings indicate that pre-parent college students have opinions about the use of potential parenting styles despite their lack of experience. For this study, anticipated parenting styles will be defined as the specific parenting style that an individual believes he or she will practice in the future. By further examining the anticipated parenting styles of college students, researchers can better understand potential parental attitudes and beliefs. Parenting style researchers acknowledge that aren't-child relationships are guided by the parents (Wolfradt et al., 2003); therefore, parental attitudes and beliefs affect the children's attitudes and behaviors. Research about

anticipated parenting styles can potentially reveal trends that may indicate the quality of parenting that future generations will receive.

The Current Study

Declining fertility rates in modern societies warrant in-depth study on parenthood aspirations among young adults. However, minimal research has examined anticipated parenting styles and the role that social media use plays in shaping conceptions of parenting. The current study explored how pre-parent college students view parenthood by examining the impact of social media use on perceptions of parenting, parenthood aspirations, and anticipated parenting styles. Because research has shown that most parenting posts on Twitter focus on negative aspects of parenting (Ryan et al., 2021), it was anticipated that the negative content will influence parenting perceptions. The authoritative parenting style has been described as the most balanced parenting style (Aunola et al., 2000); therefore, it is likely that the balanced nature of authoritative parenting will be appealing to the participants of this current study. Other research has also supported that there will be gender differences for female and male anticipated parenting styles (Sushko et al., 2019). These expectations were reflected in the study hypotheses:

Q1: Does social media use influence perceptions of parenting?

H1: Higher rates of social media use will be associated with more negative perceptions of parenting.

Q2: Does social media use influence parenthood intentions?

H2: Higher rates of social media use will be associated with lesser parenthood intentions.

Q3: Does social media use influence anticipated parenting style?

H3: Social media use will be shown to influence anticipated parenting style.

Q4: Will perceptions of parenting and social media use predict parenthood intentions?

H4: Each of the dimensions associated with perceptions of parenting and social media use will be associated with parenthood intentions.

CHAPTER II: METHOD

Participants

The sample used for the analysis was comprised of 119 college-aged university students. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the sample, most of the participants identified as White (67.2%) and female (95%). The participants ranged from 18-21 years old with an average age of 19-years-old ($SD = 1.045$). Most participants reported a single, never married marital status (96.6%), and a majority of the participants were college freshmen (47.1%).

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. A brief demographic questionnaire was used to assess participants' parental status (no children, expecting/pregnant, or one or more children), gender, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, household income, parents' marital status, and college status. The question about parental status was used to make sure the participant's data was qualified for analysis.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Participant gender		
Female	113	95.0
Male	5	4.2
Other	1	.8
Participant race		
White/Caucasian	80	67.2
Black/African American	25	21.0
Table 1, Continued		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>

Asian	4	3.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	.8
Other	7	5.9
Participant ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic	113	93.4
Hispanic	8	6.6
Participant college status		
Freshman	56	47.1
Sophomore	31	26.1
Junior	20	16.8
Senior	12	10.1
Parents' marital status		
Single, never married	13	10.9
Married, but divorced	8	6.7
Married, still married	72	60.5
Married, divorced and one or both parents remarried	3	2.5
Other	23	19.3
Participant marital status		
Single, never married	115	96.6
Married or domestic partnership	4	3.4
Participant household income		
\$0-\$24,999	2	1.7
\$25,000-\$49,999	37	31.1
\$50,000-\$74,999	16	13.4
\$75,000-\$99,999	19	16.0
Table 1 Cont'd		
Characteristic	<i>N</i>	%
\$100,000-\$124,999	15	12.6
\$125,000-\$149,999	13	10.9
\$150,000+	17	14.3

Facebook Intensity Scale (FBI; Ellison et al., 2007). The 8-item FBI was revised and used to assess the frequency, duration, emotional connectedness, and daily integration of social media usage. Modifications of this scale were used to measure the intensity of a variety of social media platforms. Participants were asked to either name

their most used social media platform or select from the following options: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok. By using the piped text tool on Qualtrics, the items were customized to display the selected most used social media platform of each participant. Of the 8 items, six had a rating scale of 5 options. If a participant selected Twitter, for example, the item would say, “Twitter has become part of my daily routine.” Participants responded on a 5-point scale: *1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral/Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree*. Two items were open-ended questions to assess participants’ approximated friend/follower count (SM-Follow) and their approximated daily use of their most used social media platform (SM-Time). In addition to the original 8 items, this scale was expanded to include items to assess the participant’s exposure to parenting content on their most used social media platform, and the perceived influence of that parenting content on their perception of parenting and their parenting desires. The measure (FBI-RP) was scored by calculating the mean on all of the items with rating scale options. The open-ended questions were used as reported by participants in data analysis. The measure demonstrated a high reliability score ($\alpha = .746$).

Hypothetical Vignettes for parenting styles- Mother and Father versions

(Barnhart et al., 2013). Three hypothetical vignettes were used to assess perceptions of parenting styles and anticipated parenting styles. Each vignette described an interpersonal situation between two children and a parent (mother or father). The way the parent responded to the interpersonal situation represented one of the three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Participants who identified as female, transgender, or other responded to the mother version, and participants who identified as male responded to the father version. In addition to the vignettes, three items were used

to assess perceived effectiveness, helpfulness, and care towards children. One final item assessed the extent to which the participant would implement each style with future children. All items were rated on a 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“very”) scale. The measure was scored by calculating the mean on all items. The measure demonstrated a high reliability score ($\alpha = .918$).

Perception of Parenting Inventory (POPI; Lawson, 2004). The 28-item POPI was used to assess perceptions of parenting based on expectations rather than experience. This scale highlights six distinct factors of parenting perceptions: Enrichment, Isolation, Commitment, Instrumental Costs, Continuity, and Social Support. For example, “Caring for the child would bring me happiness” falls under the Enrichment subscale. All responses were rated on a 1 (“strongly agree”) to 7 (“strongly disagree”) scale. The global POPI was scored summing the 28 items forming the scale after reverse scoring the items on the scale that *strongly agree* indicated a negative perception of parenting. Higher scores for global POPI indicate a more positive perception of parenting. The six subscores were computed by calculating the mean of the designated items for each subscale. This calculation allows for direct comparisons between the subscales. Higher scores for subscales indicate a stronger association with parenting. The measure demonstrated a high reliability score ($\alpha = .755$).

Birth Desires item (USA National Survey of Family Growth, 2002). A single item was used to assess parenthood intentions. The participants read the instruction, “Sometimes what people want and what they intend are different because they are not able to do what they want. Looking to the future. . .,” and responded on a 5-point scale: 1 = *Definitely No*, 2 = *Slightly No*, 3 = *Undecided*, 4 = *Slightly Yes*, 5 = *Definitely Yes*.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the online research system used by the School of Psychology (i.e., Sona; <https://usm.sona-systems.com/>). The study was fully online. After reading information about what the study involved (i.e., description, the use of quality assurance checks, and the extra credit incentive), participants were routed to Qualtrics and accessed an online consent form that included more information about the study. They were informed about the possible risks and benefits of the study and reminded of their freedom to withdraw participation without penalty. The online consent form also explained that receiving 0.5 credits was contingent upon reaching the end of the survey and passing both quality assurance checks. Students who wished to participate provided electronic consent before being directed to all of the survey measures. Identifying information was collected to award SONA credit. To ensure confidentiality, data will be maintained on a secure cloud server for up to seven years before being destroyed. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Southern Mississippi. Two Quality Assurance items were used to ensure that participants maintained attention to study items throughout the study (e.g., respond “*Strongly Agree*” to this item).

Data Analysis

This study focused on pre-parent college students, who are college-aged (18-21) students without children. The electronic data were collected between the months of November and December of 2021 from 202 undergraduate volunteers. Eighty-three cases total were removed for the following reasons: 45 repeated responses from various participants; 7 cases responded incorrectly to at least one of the two quality assurance

checks; 7 cases were missing substantial survey data; 21 cases did not meet age requirement (18-21 years old); and 3 cases reported having at least one child or were expecting/pregnant. A remainder of 119 cases were used for analysis. Bivariate correlations and linear regression analyses were used to examine research questions and hypotheses.

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, Pearson correlations, and reliability matrix for each measure: social media use was measured by the FBI-R and SM-Time (Ellison et al., 2007), perceptions of parenting was measured by POPI (Ellison et al., 2007), parenthood intentions was measured by the BD (USA National Survey of Family Growth, 2002), and anticipated parenting styles were measured by HV-A-arian, HV-Perm, and HV-A-tive (Barnhart et al., 2013). When asked about parenthood intentions, 72 participants reported a definite intention to have children (60.5%), and 17 (14.3) participants reported indecisiveness. The remaining participants reported slightly yes (15.1%), slightly no (6.7%), and definitely no (3.4%). The first hypothesis predicted that higher rates of social media use would be associated with more negative perceptions of parenting. Results indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between POPI and SM-Time, $r(119) = -.237, p < .05$. The second hypothesis predicted that higher rates of social media use would be associated with lesser parenthood intentions. The present sample of college students reported a high average for parenthood intentions ($M = 4.23$). This hypothesis was not supported as results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between parenthood intentions and social media use, $r(119) = .179, p < .05$. The third hypothesis examined whether social media use would be shown to influence anticipated parenting styles. Results indicated that there was no significant correlation between social media use and anticipated parenting styles; therefore, this hypothesis was not supported by the data. The final hypothesis examined whether perceptions of parenting and social media use could predict parenthood intentions. Results of correlational analyses demonstrated that there was a significant

positive association between parenthood intentions and POPI-SS $r(119)=.221, p<.05$, POPI-C $r(119)=.387, p<.01$, and POPI-E $r(119)=.556, p<.01$. Significant negative associations between parenthood intentions and POPI-IC $r(119)= -.341, p<.01$ and POPI-Iso $r(119)= -.374, p<.01$ were also indicated. No significant correlations were found between social media use and parenthood intentions; therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported by the data.

Additional analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between perceptions of parenting, social media use, and anticipated parenting styles. Results of correlational analyses also demonstrated that there was a significant positive association between POPI scores and HV-A-rian for female participants $r(119)=.200, p<.05$. A significant negative association between FBI-RP and HV-A-rian was also found $r(119)= -.181, p< .05$. There were no significant correlations between the remaining variables.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine variables which may be associated with parenthood intention. FBI-R, FBI- RP, and subscales of the POPI were included as predictors with intention to parent (rated on a scale from 1-5, with 5 indicating greater intention to parent) entered as the outcome variable. Results indicated that POPI and FBI-RP were associated with intentions to parent, $F(7, 113) = 10.23, p < .001, R^2 = .39$. Both POPI-Iso ($t = -2.15, p = .034$) and POPI-E($t = 4.26, p <.001$) were significant predictors in the model.

ANOVA was used to examine racial differences on study variables. Race was recoded such that Caucasian = 0 and African American/ Other minority race = 1. The POPI-SS, POPI-C, and POPI-Iso were all found to be significantly different between groups. There were significant differences between groups POPI-SS, $F(1,119) = 4.11,$

$p < .05$, with Caucasian students reporting higher scores on this subscale ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.1$) than African American students ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.17$). Significant differences were also found between groups on POPI-C, $F(1, 119) = 3.81$, $p < .05$, and POPI-Iso, $F(1, 119) = 3.86$, $p < .05$. Caucasian students reported higher scores on POPI-C ($M = 5.07$, $SD = .76$) than African American students ($M = 4.78$, $SD = .76$). Caucasian students also reported higher scores on POPI-Iso ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.40$) than African American students, ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.21$). There were no significant between group differences for POPI-IC, POPI-E, and POPI-Cmt.

TABLE 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. BD	4.23	3.65	-	.12	.03	-.12	.12	.58**	-.36**	.20*	.38**	.55**	-.09	-.38**	.16	-.05	-.01
2. FBI-R	3.65	0.72		-	.11	.14	.11	.10	.04	.16	.14	.27**	.10	.12	-.05	.12	-.055
3. SM-Follow	664.21	1,020.02			-	-.04	-.14	.16	-.21*	-.01	-.02	.04	-.15	-.18*	.24**	-.01	-.13
4. SM-Time	3.15	3.42				-	.06	-.24*	.08	-.18*	-.26**	-.15	.15	.12	-.08	-.03	-.05
5. FBI-RP	3.11	1.09					-	.07	-.03	.08	.01	.11	-.12	.07	-.19*	.03	-.012
6. POPI	123.47	18.00						-	-.64**	.47**	.59**	.80**	-.22*	-.75**	.21*	-.01	.05
7. POPI-IC	5.26	1.01							-	-.06	-.09	-.22*	.27**	.56**	-.31**	-.11	.30**
8. POPI-SS	5.72	1.11								-	.47**	.43**	.21*	-.12	.06	-.09	.28**
9. POPI-C	4.98	0.77									-	.58**	.09	-.22*	.05	.05	.18*
10. POPI-E	5.85	1.02										-	.13	-.42**	.07	-.04	.20*

Table 2 Continued

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
11. POPI-Cmt	5.42	0.95											-	.14	.02	.05	.17
12. POPI-Iso	4.08	1.37												-	-.24**	.02	.01
13. HV-A-rian	3.50	1.56													-	.02	-.03
14. HV-Perm	2.75	1.21														-	-.30**
15. HV-A-ive	6.06	1.13															-

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. BD= Birth Desires item. FBI-R= Facebook Intensity Scale. SM-Follow= Total Followers on Social Media.

SM-Time= Average Time Spent on Social Media Daily. POPI= Global Perceptions of Parenting Inventory. FBI-RP= Facebook

Intensity Scale Parenting items. POPI-IC= Perceptions of Parenting Inventory Instrumental Costs Subscale. POPI-SS= Perceptions of

Parenting Inventory Social Support Subscale. POPI-C= Perceptions of Parenting Continuity Subscale. POPI-E= Perceptions of

Parenting Enrichment Subscale. POPI-Cmt= Perceptions of Parenting Commitment Subscale. POPI-Iso= Perceptions of Parenting

Isolation Subscale. HV-A-rian= Authoritarian Parenting Style Hypothetical Vignette. HV-Perm= Permissive Parenting Style

Hypothetical Vignette. HV-A-ive= Authoritative Parenting Style Hypothetical Vignette.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of social media use on perceptions of parenting, parenthood intentions, and anticipated parenting styles. The first research question sought to examine if social media use was associated with perceptions of parenting. The results confirmed that average time spent on the participants' most used social media platform was associated with more negative perceptions of parenting. These results align with previous research that found that online information highlights more negative aspects of child rearing (potential problems and failures) than positive aspects (Chae, 2015). This suggests that increased time spent on social media increases the likelihood of participants being exposed to online parenting content that emphasizes negative aspects of parenting. The results also align with the assertion that social media content can operate as representations of parenthood. In the media, the celebrity mother portrays a woman who has a successful career and motherhood (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Successful motherhood has been redefined as intensive mothering, which involves high levels of costs, labor, and knowledge (Hays, 1996). Because the cost of parenthood is an influential factor for perceptions of parenting and entry into parenthood (Lawson, 2004; Liefbroer, 2004), this online representation of motherhood is likely to cause greater perceptions of the cost of parenthood. Parenting information is increasingly being sought out on online platforms (Rothbaum et al., 2008), which leads to individuals feeling pressured to meet the expectations set by the media (Festinger, 1954). As individuals compare themselves to the intensive mothering standard, parenthood can seem more costly and can negatively impact their perception of parenting.

The second research question sought to examine if social media use was associated with parenthood intentions. Contrary to predictions, the results showed that parenthood intentions were positively associated with social media use intensity. These results may be due, in part, to the use of algorithms on social media platforms. Algorithms use data from users to generate content that they are likely to enjoy such as similar posts, advertisements, and search engine results (Gruwell, 2018). The job of an algorithm is to show an individual what he or she wants to see, which promotes social persuasion and manipulation through algorithm bias (Petrescu & Krishen, 2020). According to previous research, this use of algorithms has led to confirmation bias, which is the preference of information that supports pre-existing beliefs (Mao & Akyol, 2020). Confirmation bias and algorithms also contribute to the polarization of opinions on social media due to the exposure to one-sided content (Petrescu & Krishen, 2020). In the present sample, college students reported high parenthood intentions; therefore, it is likely that their algorithms showed content that reinforced their parenthood intentions.

The third research question sought to examine if social media use was associated with anticipated parenting styles. The results showed no significant correlation between social media use and anticipated parenting styles. According to Barnhart (2012), parenting styles differ across cultures due to socialization goals set by the parents. In Western cultures, parents emphasize autonomy and independence, which is corroborated by college students' preference for the authoritative parenting style (Barnhart, 2012). This suggests that culture and socialization influence perceptions of parenting style. Although social media creates opportunities for new influences, opinions, and social

comparisons (Cramer et al., 2016), the results from this study do not support that social media use influences the parenting style decision of participants.

The final research question sought to examine if perceptions of parenting and social media use could predict parenthood intentions. Similarly to Lawson (2004), these results showed a significant positive correlation between parenthood intentions and positive aspects of parenting (social support, continuity, and enrichment). This suggests that participants have a higher expectation of experiencing social support, continuity, and enrichment as a parent. Social support includes social support from family, friends, and community (Lawson, 2004); it is considered as a positive aspect of parenting because it can help ease parenting demands (Jackson, 1998). Continuity includes the long-term benefits of parenting such as family traditions and being a future grandparent, and enrichment includes the sense of reward from parenting (Lawson, 2004). Positive aspects of parenting positively influence parenthood intentions because they are desirable consequences of parenthood (Lawson, 2004). Findings also showed a significant negative correlation between parenthood intentions and negative aspects of parenting (instrumental costs and isolation). Instrumental costs include financial, physical, and emotional expenses from parenthood, and isolation accounts for the interference that childcare will have on other aspects of life (Lawson, 2004). Negative aspects of parenting negatively influence parenthood intentions because they are not desirable consequences of parenthood (Lawson, 2004; Liefbroer, 2004). Social media use was not found to be a predictor of parenthood intentions. Previous research has shown that other influences such as career and education-based priorities are greater indicators of if and when an individual becomes a parent (Liefbroer, 2004).

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study to consider. First, there may be a need for a more precise measure of parenting intention. It is possible that the use of a 5-point scale (*1 = Definitely No, 2 = Slightly No, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Slightly Yes, 5 = Definitely Yes*) decreased the precision of the Birth Desires item because of the many options given to the participants. Second, utilizing self-report data for social media engagement may lack validity. For example, the participants were not given a direct method of measuring their time spent on social media; therefore, it is likely that participants inaccurately reported the amount of time. Third, the open-ended questions may increase answer variability because of the self-report method. Finally, the lack of diversity in this study's sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Previous research has shown gender-related differences in preferred parenting styles (Barnhart et al., 2013), and with less than five percent of the participants being male, this current study would be unable to make indications towards men's preferences for anticipated parenting styles. Furthermore, with the majority of the participants being Caucasian females, the findings of this study should not be used to generalize for minority groups such as African American women. Parenting research has mainly focused on the middle-class White American population, which has many myths surrounding African American parenting styles (Rious et al., 2019). Baumrind's 1967 study excluded Black families because of their different parenting style patterns (Power, 2013), and the pattern of predominantly Caucasian samples in parenting research has led to inappropriate generalizations for African American and other ethnic families. The current study found significant correlations between parenthood intentions and social support; however,

previous research has shown differences between Caucasian and African American families. African American families are more likely to implement a stricter parenting style due to historical and systematic discrimination and racism (Julian et al., 1994). Another study showed that the social networks of African American families are more likely to consist of extended family and fictive kin (Kim & McKenry, 1998). Because the current study found a significant relationship between parenthood intentions and social support, it is important to consider how the different social network structure may impact perceived social support. More diverse ethnic and gender participant pools are necessary for appropriate generalizations of research findings.

Future Directions

The present findings suggest that social media use is likely to be relevant in understanding the perceptions and attitudes towards parenting for future parents. In addition to addressing the above limitations through utilizing a more direct way of tracking social media usage and the application of methodologies that extend beyond self-report data, future research should focus on perceptions of parenting and parenthood intentions amongst diverse cultural groups. Longitudinal studies of how social media use impacts parenting perceptions and intentions may also be beneficial for future research to provide a more in-depth evaluation of the influence of social media. The current study was unable to directly examine the types of social media content seen by the participants, so future research could further benefit from a content analysis of parenting content to explain what aspects of parenting and child-rearing are being seen by college students online.

Conclusion

In summary, the current study found that time spent on social media was negatively related to positive perceptions of parenting and that social media use intensity was positively related to parenthood intentions. These findings add to the literature on modern parenting by suggesting that social media use may play a role in impacting perceptions of parenting and parenthood intentions for pre-parent young adults. It is hoped that this will lead to more studies aimed at providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in parenting perceptions, parenthood intentions, and anticipated parenting styles.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 21-189
PROJECT TITLE: Future Parents: Associations between social media use, parenting styles, and parenthood desires
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Psychology
RESEARCHERS: PI: Kennedy Evins
Investigators: Evins, Kennedy~Nicholson, Bonnie~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 28-Oct-2021 to 27-Oct-2022

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson