Becoming Mother: Designing Online Resources That Support And Empower

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Abstract
The transition to first time motherhood is complex and holistic maternal wellbeing is important. Digital resources aimed at pregnant women and new mothers often prioritise the pushed provision of generic information rather than contextualised digital requirements and behaviours. As a result, women report being over-informed yet under-prepared for life with a newborn. This paper outlines the motivation for the co-development of a clickable prototype of the bump2bump interactive digital intervention, designed to provide targeted information and support maternal wellbeing, and brief findings from two codesign exercises.

Author Keywords
Motherhood; mothers; pregnancy; parents; women’s health; digital technology; qualitative research; eHealth; HCI; Internet.

ACM Classification Keywords

Background
Pregnancy and new motherhood are characterised by dominant social narratives as a time of fulfilment [1] and mainstream media typically depicts this transition through a saccharine lens. However, women’s experiences often tell a different story and many women report feeling ill-equipped to meet what they perceive to be unrealistic – Western and white - paradigms of ‘performing’ contemporary motherhood [2].

Holistic wellbeing during pregnancy is important and complex. Routine antenatal care typically supports women’s wellbeing by providing large amounts of generic information focused on physical health and practical skill [3]. However, women do not attribute suboptimal perinatal wellbeing to a
lack of information; rather, they blame a perceived lack of emotional and social support and limited self-efficacy in meeting the demands of motherhood [4]. The transition to parenthood is amongst the most simultaneously enriching and stressful life events that a woman might experience and requires successful navigation and balancing of multiple online and offline resources. Pregnant women and new mothers frequently seek out support and information via digital media [5] but significant effort and digital literacy are required to navigate the plethora of generic online content.

Digital resources that are fit for purpose
The majority of digital perinatal resources offer a limited solution to the question of how best to empower and support new mothers: content skirts around the periphery of what women want to know, avoiding taboo subjects such as postnatal physical recovery, reinforcing the implicit narrative of the female body as ‘dirty’. Existing resources are arguably not fit for purpose and the codesign process of the bump2bump digital resource aims to address this by placing women at the heart of its development. Through a process of participatory codesign and cooperative evaluation, we have developed a clickable prototype which integrates behavioural theory and goal-directed design to provide content prioritized by new mothers. Women involved in the codesign process stripped down and decommercialised existing resources; they described the trajectory of information and support-seeking during the transition to motherhood and the importance of nuanced and context-specific content; they described key information needed at specific points in the transition process and how this might be delivered in sensitive and engaging ways. The full prototype will be evaluated using an in the wild approach, where women will use the resource over the course of the transition to new motherhood.

Contributors
Nikki Newhouse is a Medical Research Council-funded PhD candidate within the Faculty of Engineering at University College London and a qualitative researcher with the Health Experiences Research Group at the University of Oxford. Her PhD research is situated at the intersection of public health and HCI and focuses on the role of technology in the transition to first time motherhood. Her interdisciplinary research utilizes best practice from traditionally siloed paradigms and translates it into pragmatic digital solutions that are fit for purpose and grounded in contextualized needs.

Ann Blandford is Professor of Human–Computer Interaction and Director of the UCL Institute of Digital Health. Her expertise is in human factors for health technologies, and particularly in how to design systems that fit well in their context of use. She is involved in several research projects studying health technology design and user experience.

References