
Supporting Partner Communication Over the Course of a Pregnancy Journey

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CSCW '19, November 9–13, 2019, Austin, TX, USA
ACM 978-1-4503-6819-3/19/11.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3334480.XXXXXXX>

Abstract

From conception to postpartum, pregnancy is a life journey that encompasses a variety of social and personal adaptations in addition to the physiological and psychological changes of pregnancy. The initial conversations about pregnancy among couples (biological and/or intimate partners) are often the beginning of an identity transition process; The birthing person and their partner have to adopt new roles within the context of pregnancy- as the birthing person and the support providers- and within a social context- as expected parents and/or guardians. These complex adaptations are often accompanied by various communication needs and care coordination nuances. In this paper we discuss some of the communication challenges that couples experience during a pregnancy journey and identify opportunities to address these challenges through the design of social technologies.

Author Keywords

Authors' choice; of terms; separated; by semicolons; include commas, within terms only; required.

CCS Concepts

•**Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; *Haptic devices*; User studies; Please use the 2012 Classifiers and see this link to embed them in the text: https://dl.acm.org/ccs/ccs_flat.cfm

Introduction

The pregnancy journey starts with a rush of emotions and leads to an overwhelming number of decisions. Couples who go through a pregnancy experience together face a variety of personal and social transitions that often impact both their individual identities and their relationships. The birthing people are faced with physical and psychological, identity transitions in order to adopt to their new social role as expecting parents. On the other hand, their partners are often socially expected to act as dependable sources of support for the birthing individual, while simultaneously, learn about pregnancy and adopt new identities as expecting parents or guardians. Communication challenges among intimate couples that arise during pregnancy can hinder a couple's ability to meet personal and social goals and expectations, and lead to an unsatisfactory pregnancy experience.

Proper communication enables couples to optimally support each other during pregnancy. During pregnancy, the birthing person may find it hard to communicate the need for additional support, while their partner may feel confused about the right time to intervene to provide support. Additionally, the partner of birthing person may feel ignored and excluded from the pregnancy experience, while the pregnant person may feel overburdened, uncomfortable, and unsupported. Previous studies suggest these interpersonal challenges during pregnancy could negatively impact pregnancy outcomes. Therefore, interventions that aim to improve interpersonal communication and increase partners involvement have the potential to enhance the pregnancy outcome and the overall pregnancy experience.

The importance of a partners involvement in pregnancy support is often socially emphasized and is a notion backed-up by many studies[1]. Traditionally, couples have partici-

pated in a variety of practices such as private and community classes regarding pregnancy care, childbirth education, and lactation support to collaboratively fill-in the gaps in their knowledge of pregnancy and parenthood. However, more individuals currently rely on online communities and information sharing platforms for pregnancy related information. While these platforms are often advertised as gender neutral, evidence suggest the primary users of these platforms are pregnant women. Meanwhile partners of pregnant women may form private social groups online to gather information about pregnancy, learn about pregnancy support, and parenting.

The majority of pregnancy related social technologies have focused on the peer-peer and peer-expert information sharing and tracking pregnancy progress. While necessary, these technologies often fall short on facilitating communication between the pregnant individual and their partner. Therefore, they may fail to align the couples' expectations. We believe, by designing technologies to support interpersonal communication between couples, social technologies have the opportunity to expand online pregnancy support beyond tracking and information sharing platforms.

Discussion

Engaging couples in the pregnancy related communications enhances the pregnancy experience for both parties. Adopted from parenting literature [3], pregnancy related communications could be viewed as communication that facilitates *routine* and *interactive* tasks. *Routine tasks* during pregnancy are reoccurring tasks – such as taking daily prenatal vitamins. *Interactive tasks* are unorganized tasks that may come up unexpectedly during pregnancy – such as experiencing “quickening,” the first time fetal movement is recognized by the birthing individual. Evidence suggests, partners involvement in pregnancy enhances the pregnancy

experience and outcome for the birthing person [4, 2]. Additionally, engaging the partners of the birthing individuals in pregnancy related communications enhances their sense of involvement in the pregnancy experience. By facilitating both routine and interactive pregnancy related communications between couples, social technologies have the opportunity to enhance involvement of the partner in the pregnancy experience and improve the pregnancy experience for both parties.

In addition to communications, pregnancy related technologies should acknowledge and facilitate interpersonal communications as well. Interpersonal communications often extend beyond the context of pregnancy and address the personal needs of couples and their relationships. Issues such as financial stability, intimacy, self-care, choosing healthcare providers, and appointment scheduling are some of the topics that could enhance or hinder the pregnancy experience. Engaging couples in conversations about their understanding of these issues allow couples to better align their expectations with those of their partners early on. While these topics may extend well beyond the context of pregnancy, the pregnancy period is often a crucial time for couples to (re)evaluate their stance on such issues.

Conclusion

Pregnancy related communications allow the birthing individual and their partners to take an active role in their pregnancy experience, identify communication opportunities for optimal support, and align their expectations. Consequently, improving communication among couples may lead to enhanced pregnancy outcomes and a better overall pregnancy experience. There exist an opportunity for social scientist to further investigate the communication needs of couple during pregnancy. By designing for opti-

mal communication during pregnancy, social technologies could expand their support for pregnancy beyond information sharing and pregnancy tracking platforms to platforms where couples could comfortably communicate with their partners.

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