Technology to Address Work-Motherhood Role Conflicts

Sarah Clinch
School of Computer Science, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
sarah.clinch@manchester.ac.uk

SCENARIO

Ada is several months into her maternity leave and is often at home alone with her infant son. She does not have to work during these times, but feels that she would like to do some tasks in order to stay connected with her work and colleagues.

During the day, Ada spends much of her time engaging actively with her son: playing together, dressing, washing etc.. However, there are also frequent periods of time (often of half an hour or more) in which he is feeding or asleep on her lap. These times provide an opportunity to relax, but are also potential periods in which she may complete simple work tasks. Ada's main constraint during these times is that the work task must be achievable on her mobile phone – juggling a baby and a laptop is too impractical! When Ada does respond to email and other small work tasks on her mobile device, she can have difficulty communicating to colleagues the limitations imposed by her small screen, mobile input, and brief, often unpredictable, working opportunities. Ada would like to continue engaging when she can, but is frustrated by the expectations this can raise.

Ada accesses her laptop infrequently, perhaps once or twice a week when her son is asleep for the evening and there are no other urgent chores to be done (or sleep to catch up on!). When she does access the laptop, it can be difficult for Ada to remember which tasks she had struggled to complete on her mobile phone; her email inbox is full of irrelevant messages and low-priority tasks.

Tech4Motherhood 2019 @ ACM CHI 2019, May 2019, Glasgow, UK

KEYWORDS
Gender; motherhood; cross-device interaction; underrepresentation; self-identity; memory.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Sarah Clinch is a computer science researcher and lecturer (assistant professor) at the University of Manchester, UK, where she is a founding member of the School of Computer Science's new Ubiquitous Computing research theme. She has a Ph.D. from Lancaster University. Clinch sits on the editorial board of IEEE Pervasive Computing, PACM IMWUT, and is an inaugural member of the ACM Future of Computing Academy.

Clinch is internationally-recognized for her research in pervasive display technologies, with papers on the topic published at Mobisys, Ubicomp and CHI, as well as a co-authored synthesis lecture. Software developed during Clinch's research is in daily use as part of the world's largest research testbed for open displays and has been made available under an open source license (https://github.com/opendisplays/yarely). Clinch has recently begun to explore the role of technology in human cognition and mental health, with a particular interest in memory and forgetting.

Clinch became a mother in 2018 and continues to balance responsibilities of work and family. Her son attends pre-school three days a week, and she and/or her partner work from home two days in order to allow him to stay home the remainder of the week.

RELEVANT INTERESTS

The author has a long-standing interest in addressing the underrepresentation of women in computing and computer science. Although this is not a primary area of research, she has publications highlighting gender differences in children's learning of computer science concepts [2] and highlighting a need for the CHI community to address gender and other issues of underrepresentation [1]. Family commitments are a noted and important factor in women's participation in the workplace (more so than their male counterparts). Providing technology to support women as they transition into motherhood may help them to continue to engage in workplaces and careers, particularly in domains where they are underrepresented.

The author's current research centres on the role of technology in human memory. One important role of memory is that of shaping and maintaining self-identity. Equally, an individual's current self-identity has a significant role in shaping the way we remember. As individuals pass through major life transitions (including parenthood) their self-identity changes, often both quickly and substantially. One interesting future avenue of research is the role of memory-augmentation technologies (e.g. lifelogging devices and technology for experience review) in shaping self-identity – how do we develop memory technologies that respect and support changing self-identities? How can technology accommodate a human's tendency to reshape their memories to fit with a new self-identity?

REFERENCES

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