TRANSITIONS
Designing Acceptance in a World of Change

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Rhode Island School of Design
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TRANSITIONS
Designing Acceptance in a World of Change
A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Industrial Design in the Department of Industrial Design of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

by Hanna L. McLaughlin

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THANK YOU

Kemper, Mom, Dad, Kelly and Jamie for supporting me through my many transitions.

And all the people who have generously helped to shape my thinking and work over the past two years.
INTRODUCTION
As a creative discipline, design works to instigate change. Often, a design’s success hinges on effecting a change in a user’s life, whether that be prompting the user to accept a new way to communicate, provide care, or share resources. A well-designed product can be offered to a user, and even acquired by a user, yet never be integrated into their daily life. This abandonment may be due to a flaw in the product’s function; however, it can also be due to a lacking system of support for the user while they are integrating the product into their life. In the case of a new product or service, a lack of integration means that the user leaves the offered solutions behind.

With the goal of understanding how to bridge the gap from change to acceptance, I set out to learn from people who are navigating extreme moments of life transition. I looked across three examples of pivotal life changes: adolescent immigrants starting at a new high school, young parents returning to work, and older adults moving to a new community. After identifying an opportunity for impact, I focused on designing for families navigating the transition of integrating parenthood into their professional lives. I chose this transition because it is multifaceted. Changes in child care create adjustments for both care providers and children.

This thesis presents a model that designers can consider when creating tools to support people through a transition. It then demonstrates how to apply this approach by designing to support parents transitioning back into professional roles.
DEFINING THE MODEL

VOCABULARY

**change**

noun

Change is the situational experience of something becoming different. Change that occurs without internal acceptance becomes an unstable platform for future development.

**transition**

noun

Transition is the psychological incorporation of change which involves an internal reorientation and self redefinition.

**guidance**

noun

Guidance is information or advice shared to help navigate a transition. Guidance can come in the form of step-by-step direction, a description of what to expect, or suggestions of where to focus.

**control**

noun

Control is the power to make decisions or influence one’s circumstance during a change. A sense of control can be created with explicit choices as well as confirmation that progress is being made.

**respite**

noun

A moment of relief from a recent change that feels more “old” than “new”. These moments can be created through connecting with people or experiences that are familiar.
This thesis focuses on how design can help people accept and internalize change. By offering a method for designing for life transitions, this thesis gives designers the tools to: 1 / help users effectively navigate change and 2 / prompt users’ long-term adoption of new products during periods of transition.

1 / Moments of life change often create personal vulnerability that can have a profound impact on a person’s process of re-establishing a foundation for future growth. Instead of powering through new experiences, there is an opportunity to enhance the process of accepting new circumstances to build a solid foundation for future growth.

2 / As an industry, designers work to bring new concepts, behaviors, and technologies into the world. This requires users to adopt new products into their lives, and to associate, identify, and engage with them. By studying extreme life changes, I synthesized a sequential method that designers can apply to assist people in transition through new products and systems.

The first half of this book walks through the steps I used to learn how to talk about transitions and then discover how to design for transitions. I investigated how three groups of people navigate major life transitions: high school students who recently immigrated to Rhode Island, parents with young children, and older adults who recently moved into retirement communities. My insights from this work informed the design model presented in this thesis, which is that designs that help people navigate transition provide them with guidance, respite, and control.

The second half of this book demonstrates how I applied this design model to support new parents who are transitioning back into professional roles. Through secondary research, I found that sharing child care among several adults has a powerful effect on increasing professional equality for primary care givers. Building on that learning, this thesis focuses on how to help parents distribute child care across a network of adults. Through primary research, I observed that primary caregivers’ successful transition back into professional roles are inhibited by children’s anxiety with new care routines and their own anxiety about effective administration of care. The output of my application of this design model focuses on creating child care routines that facilitate parents’ adoption of new child care systems and children’s acceptance of new child care systems.

Finally, this thesis evaluates the effectiveness of the design model by assessing the value of the products created through its application to new parents transitioning back to professional roles.
Having lived in six countries by sixth grade, I developed several habits for establishing comfort while remaining responsive to change. Inner reorientation was continuous while adapting to new environments, but each transition required intensive energy and time.

Looking back on our moving rituals, my family and I developed many tools to ensure the successful internalization of our new experiences. My mom worked tirelessly to re-create consistency in our extracurricular activities; we would make paper chains to break daunting new school years into smaller more achievable chunks of time; and I would spend countless hours outside with the dog tending to my “inner home.” These procedures developed out of trial and error, with plenty of research, confusion, and many mishandled moments.

Gradually, my interest in developing tools to lessen the discomforts of change extended beyond my childhood experiences. I studied developmental psychology in college, focusing on perception and learning. After graduating, I designed accessories at Coach to carry both possessions and personality while away from home. In graduate school, I set out to understand the role that design could play in navigating catalyzing moments of life change. The subject is rich and expansive. People are usually uncomfortable in states of uncertainty or ambiguity and yet, in life, “nothing endures but change.”\(^1\) This universal truth highlights a macro opportunity to build a more adaptive and resilient understanding of how to design for transitions.

Understanding states of change has fascinated academics across fields, from anthropologists who study rites of passage to data scientists who optimize marketing to future parents. Over the course of my investigation, I made connections between my insights from primary research and the findings in cross-disciplinary academic studies. My goal has been to understand how design can foster an internal openness to, and ultimate acceptance of, major life changes.

\(^{11}\) Kahn, The Art and thought of Heraclitus.
Life transition is a personal and delicate topic. To understand how design might facilitate accepting changes, I had to develop methods to engage with people in a way that would recognize their sensitivities. What follows is a record of the prompts and language I developed to encourage insight-rich sharing.

**Objective:**

Answer two questions guided this round of inquiry:

1. What is a transition?
2. How do I respectfully engage with people around this sensitive subject?

**Methods:**

To develop effective techniques to begin a conversation about transitions, I iterated through four research methods.

Each method built on lessons learned from the previous.
METHOD

I posted site-specific signs at three locations. I placed a verbal prompt at the top of each sign. At each location, I varied the prompt to see which ones solicited informative responses.

OBSERVATION

People spent more time contemplating what to write than digesting the advice that other people had already left in response to the prompts.

INSIGHTS:

01 / demonstrating mastery
Sharing general advice serves to solidify learnings for the giver, rather than impart a lesson to the receiver.

02 / focus on specific transition
Advice for a generalized audience became diluted.
METHOD

FOUR WORD RESPONSE

METHOD
Observing that people gave highly generalized advice when addressing an unknown audience, I next asked participants to provide four words of advice they would have given themselves five years ago.

OBSERVATIONS
After one participant shared her response she followed up with, “I don’t know if I would have heard it, but it would have saved some agony.”

INSIGHT: support information
Without experiential understanding, information is valuable, but incomplete.
Intrigued by the glimpses of insight generated from my first two experiments, I created a longer survey in a booklet that unfolded to allow participants to create a progressive timeline of a current transition.

Though the booklet generated rich information about each person’s progression through a transition, many participants found that reflecting on a transition they were still navigating was challenging and emotional.

**INSIGHT: learn from recent transitions (not current transitions)**
Discussing current life transitions is a sensitive and murky conversation.
I recently became an American Citizen. I started identify as someone from New Jersey way before feeling American.

I asked participants to complete the sentence: “I recently became ________.” I then asked them the question: “When did you start identifying as a ________?”

This prompt allowed participants to pinpoint specific moments of change, along with rich contextual understanding that was easier for participants to share. This line of questioning became a springboard into my ethnographic research.

Larger transitions are frequently made up of smaller incremental transitions.

04

METHOD

I RECENTLY BECAME

METHOD
I asked participants to complete the sentence: “I recently became ________.” I then asked them the question: “When did you start identifying as a ________?”

OBSERVATIONS
This prompt allowed participants to pinpoint specific moments of change, along with rich contextual understanding that was easier for participants to share. This line of questioning became a springboard into my ethnographic research.

INSIGHT: progress confirmation
Demonstrating mastery of something new allows many participants to recognize change and complete their transition.

Method applied on p.38

e.g. “I started identifying as a coder when I could adapt my classroom knowledge to projects outside of class.”
ORIENTATION

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

01 / support information
Information is valuable when navigating a transition, yet incomplete and hard to adopt without emotional or experiential support.

02 / progress confirmation
The opportunity to demonstrate mastery of something new allows people to recognize their change and complete their transition. Progress confirmation can be: imparting wisdom to others, making an accomplishment independently, or receiving recognition from others.

03 / incremental transitions
Larger transitions are frequently made up of smaller incremental transitions.

04 / four categories of transitions
There are four common types of transitions: purpose, identity, home, and relationship.

Responses sorted into transition categories.
Though people described navigating different types of change, there were overlaps in the experiences that helped people move toward acceptance. I began to consider the many ways design lends a hand in the face of change, and I moved into my next round of research aiming to understand when different types of assistance are desired.

"Take a break from paddling."

"A reminder of your relationship."

"A reminder of your previous success!"

"Let's start with the basics."

"This way!"

"Let's find the important parts to focus on."

"I can amplify your efforts!"

"You are not alone."

"I will remind you of the past and never change."

"This way you can try it on first."

"Let's check it out!"

"Let's think through your options."
I set out to understand how objects can empower people who are navigating change. In the hope of finding universal needs during transitions, I looked across three life changes: young parents returning to work, adolescent immigrants starting at a new high school, and older adults moving into a new community.

**Objective:**
Find commonalities in how objects help people navigate life changes across three demographics.

**Methods:**
- Co-Creation Workshop
- Daily Diary
- Task Specific Contextual Inquiry
- Focus Group & Survey
- Individual Interviews
Name tags created in transition workshop with high school seniors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juan G</td>
<td>Recently became a nineteen years old man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>Recently became a soccer player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Recently became a aunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lut</td>
<td>Recently became a step-daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>Recently became a senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>Recently became a new student in this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan M</td>
<td>Recently became a baseball player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delwyce</td>
<td>Recently became a senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night-Jean</td>
<td>Recently became a senior in high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Aldan</td>
<td>Recently became a senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amadeo O.</td>
<td>Recently became a senior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One Saturday, I chatted with an Uber driver about my interest in designing for life transitions. He was a high school English teacher for students who recently immigrated to Rhode Island. He invited me to host a workshop with his students.

**OBJECTIVE**
Understand how objects could have helped these students navigate their immigration experience.

**METHOD: Workshop**

01 / Fill out name tags.
Discuss: When did you realize this change had happened?

02 / Make a timeline of transition moments.
Discuss: What was the hardest transition?

03 / Create a magical tool that would have helped you through your hardest transition.
Discuss: What are some tools you use daily?

04 / Fill out the worksheet to create a video commercial for your tool.
Discuss: How is this tool able to help you?

05 / Camera Time! Share the commercial with the class and camera!

**Stages of the workshop**

Objects created in the workshop.

**PHOTOS TAKEN WITH PERMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOL / LAUGHLIN, 2016**
After the workshop, I took the objects the students created and grouped them by the type of support the tools provided each student during their transition. The categories began to give shape to the following model for designing tools of transition.

"When I became 19 years old. It was hard to be so far from my family. That is why I designed the DNA machine. It will help me to feel more close to my family..."

"When I had to swim I felt scared. It was hard to concentrate on how to swim. That is why I designed a waterproof sofa to rest. It will help me to be calm down and take easy during swimming..."

"When I go play baseball it was hard to know the rules. That is why I designed this ball when you are at the bat the ball talk to you. It will help me to play more fun games..."

"When my mom got remarried, I got a new father and brother. It was hard to communicate with them because they were like strangers. That is why I designed the suggestion box. It will help me to get to know more about my new family members and communicate better with them..."
Students designed many of the magical transitional tools to provide either guidance through or respite from the “newness” of a change.

I discovered a third category of support after observing how the students were affected by writing and delivering their presentations. The students presented their work the day after the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, which held significance for many immigrants in the U.S. With tears in her eyes, the school principal told the students how proud she was of them for finding their voice and sharing their tools of transition in front of the class and camera in English. The principal’s recognition of their growth gave me a third critical step in the students’ process of transition: the ability to present ideas to others. The act of offering tools for people following in their footsteps gave the students confirmation of their personal progress and a sense of control.

### INSIGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>01 / steps towards acceptance</th>
<th>During the transition process the desired modes of support sequentially cycle through guidance, respite and control.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02 / levers to pull</td>
<td>There are options for designing support at each stage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This workshop gave me categories and examples to structure an initial transition model. I refined this diagram over the course of my thesis to reflect the diversity of transitions I learned from (p.72).
PHOTOS TAKEN WITH PERMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOL.

MC LAUGHLIN, 2016
Untangled + Enchanted Objects

Psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour presents a framework for understanding the threads of adolescent development in her book *Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls through the Seven Transitions into Adulthood*. Her study of a rapid yet uneven development cycle is applicable to many other types of life changes. The seven lenses she identifies serve as a metric for measuring the progress along the complex transition from child to adult. The complex steps and internal reorientations needed to achieve adulthood stand in contrast to using age to define becoming an adult.

One of these transitions includes learning to harness emotional distress. Damour discusses strategies for supporting teenagers as they develop personal coping methods. Yet, she is quick to remind daughters and parents that words are not the only way to harness feelings or offer support. For example, she suggests that bringing the family dog or favorite childhood snack to pick up a child after a new event, such as a first job interview, can bring a level of comfort beyond that of a conversation.

Dr. Damour’s work relates to David Rose’s work as a technology visionary at the MIT MediaLab where he thinks about how technology can allow ordinary objects to intuitively communicate with users. In his book *Enchanted Objects*, Rose writes that this form of communication must often move beyond screen displays that are usually reliant on verbal communication and user attention. Instead, Rose argues that integrated forms of communication using light, sound, and haptic feedback allow users to effortlessly intuit information. Damour’s push for wordless gestures is reminiscent of Rose’s sentiment that tools can communicate with their users in simpler and more unified ways.

Connecting ideas from these leaders in their respective fields of psychology and technical science, I began to understand the necessity of rethinking the relationships between emotional support and technological tools. I sensed an opportunity to focus on aspects of support that appeal to our faster, automatic intuition. This stands in contrast to more deliberate verbal methods of showing support that require engagement from our more conscious brains.

These books prompted me to investigate ways in which design tools can encourage intuitive acts of support during times of transition.

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1. Damour, *Untangled*.
2. Rose, *Enchanted Objects*.
During my first year in graduate school, I designed
for mothers facing the challenges of breast feeding.
During this research, I began to glimpse the rapidity of
changes parents must undergo. I wanted to investigate
how these transition experts adapt to change.

OBJECTIVE
Identify challenging transitions of early parenthood &
techniques used to navigate them.

METHOD
Ask three parents to share a picture of a transition,
daily, for two weeks.

PARTICIPANTS
Participants were chosen to span a range of:
- professional commitments
  (freelance / full-time / part-time)
- networks of care (nanny / day care / family)
- parenting experience (1st child / 2nd child)

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- parenting experience (1st child / 2nd child)
Daily transitions shared by three parents.

1. Family 01: Space, Clothes, Siblings, Space, Getting out the Door, Routines Tracking, Care Communication, Family + Work

2. Family 02: Preparation, Tracking, Supplies, Drop Off, Time Away, Checking In, Communication, Missing Kid with Care, Guilt (Sleeping), Family + Work, Space, Return to Work

3. Family 03: Pumping, Family + Work, Flexible Career Exploration, Getting Out the Door, Drop Off, Communicating with Care, Balancing Sibling Time, Communicating Pumping Neds, Missing Kids, Learning Kid's Language, Hauling Supplies
There were three common transitions that fell under the larger transition of learning to balance family and work.

1. Both child and adult adjust to saying goodbye at day care / school drop-off.

2. Parents learn to communicate with all members in a child care network to coordinate care.

3. Parents reach out through the child care network when they miss their child.

Next Step
Delve into one transition more deeply in order to unpack the emotional and behavioral experience. I focused on the “drop-off” transition because it involved adjustments for both parent and child.

Observing Drop-off

Objective
Unpack the emotional and behavioral experiences of adjusting to drop-off in a new environment.

Method
To understand the drop-off process, I spent the morning with two families, both of which were adjusting to the routine of day care drop-off.

I observed their routines and asked questions as they got ready for their days and went through the drop-off process.

Participants: Family 1
- Mom (full time designer)
- Dad (full time banker)
- Georgie (2.5 years old)
- Olive (8 months old)
- Care Network: grandmother 1, grandmother 2, nanny, school, day care
OSERVATIONS

01 / mirroring security objects
Georgie brings objects to day care that mirror the objects that her parents bring to work, yet these impersonating objects (toy phone / toy keys / purse) do not provide her with the same security that the functional objects provide her parents.

02 / security in ‘ride’ home
Instead, Georgie sees the care provider who will pick her up from school as her guarantee of getting home safely. She spends the morning reciting who will pick her up and announces it to her teachers upon arriving at school.

03 / physical memory
Objects are a consistent memorable language for Georgie, and they easily become associated with specific people, times of day, or rituals.

04 / consistency is comfort
Georgie finds consistency in her routines across different care providers to be comforting and inconsistencies create anxiety for her.

Confirmation continuity as another way to design people from a transition.

PHOTOS TAKEN WITH PERMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANTS & GUARDIAN/MC LAUGHLIN, 2017

Objects used to establish comfort during a toddler’s transition to day care.

These objects take on symbolic meaning in association with people and locations.
EXPERIMENT 03

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

01 / Focus on Changes in Routine
Challenging transition moments in day care journey include:

1. leaving the house
2. drop-off at care setting
3. rest time
4. wondering about child / checking in through networks of care.

02 / Address the Primary Anxiety
Difficulties in day care transitions ripple through Georgie’s network of care. Her mom’s anxieties are rooted in Georgie’s anxieties (1, 2, 3).

The root of the “drop-off” challenge began at home when Georgie wanted to understand who would pick her up from school.

03 / Shifts in care amplify unknowns
The impact of these transition moments becomes amplified when the care provider facilitating the new day care drop-off changed and might require revisiting types of transition support.

The stages of transition are not linear and may need revisiting before the transition is complete.

Insights applied in testing on p.84.
During his career, pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott studied children's reliance on transitional objects as important phase adjusters for children, helping to facilitate their movement from parental dependency to uncertain external experiences. For example, plush objects are used to blur and bridge a child's inner and outer worlds, allowing her to test and control influences from the exterior world. The qualities of transitional objects, as detailed by Winnicott, can be fruitfully applied to other stages of life transition. For example, he observes that transitional objects must be durable enough to survive both positive and negative emotions. The emotional complexity of the transitional process requires the transitional object to be a sturdy and forgiving physical anchor accompanying individuals (young or old) through the unsettled, disorienting emotions of resistance. He also states that transitional objects, “must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own.” This speaks to the intricate role that form and product affordances can play in creating objects that are perceived to be spirited enough to do the complex work of bridging inner and outer worlds. The final attribute Winnicott attaches to the transitional object is that over time it loses meaning as one's inner and outer worlds begin to match in actuality and perception. The objects that Winnicott studies represent something that is time/age relevant such as attachment to the mother. However, as we know, transitions are common events in life. Design can create objects that guide individuals through a diversity of challenges and that function as bridges on the journey of aligning one's internal world with their external reality. This is exciting because one of the psychological tools to successfully making a transition is a record, or memory, of transitions one has previously and successfully navigated and mastered. Tactics can be repeated, yet most importantly, transitioners can remember that they have previously been successful in navigating the murky waters of the limbo state between two worlds.

Winnicott, Playing and Reality.
It was helpful to think about what is being gained with the change - not just what is lost.

... just little reminders that I am being remembered and still belong to that community.

Dinner is served at 5:30pm! That is only a few hours after I eat lunch ... it doesn’t feel like my home.

Collaboration with MIT AgeLab & Alyssa Mayo

I reached out to the MIT AgeLab to learn about life stage transitions from experts in the field. After observing one of their “Lifestyle Leaders” gatherings, which are bimonthly research conversations among adults 85 and older, I was invited to propose a conversation topic for the next gathering. A classmate, Alyssa Mayo, and I defined an overlapping area of interest about an evolving sense of “home” and collaborated with the Age Lab to develop the next “Lifestyle Leaders” session.

OBJECTIVE
Learn from attendees’ experiences with recent lifestyle changes.

METHOD
01 / Survey the Lifestyle Leaders before the event (electronic and paper survey formats).
Responses: 18
Age Range: 86-93

02 / Alyssa and I shared our respective past research findings to get feedback on our current hypotheses.

03 / Focus group conversations with Lifestyle Leaders to learn about the role of objects in helping them adapt to an evolving sense of home.

LIFESTYLE LEADERS

OBSERVATIONS

What are lifestyle changes you made in the last year?

- giving up an activity or routine
- downsizing
- using a new form of transportation
- starting a new activity or routine
- using social media

“... just little reminders that I am being remembered and still belong to that community.”

More people gave up a routine or habit when they moved to an assisted living facility than started a new one - seeing endings but not new beginning.

What is helpful during a transition?

- people who care about me
- feeling in control of my decisions
- maintaining routines
- guidance from others

“Dinner is served at 5:30pm! That is only a few hours after I eat lunch ... it doesn’t feel like my home.”

“Connection and control tends to be appreciated over guidance.”

Alyssa and me presenting our work to the Lifestyle Leaders.

Data and quotes generated from the MIT AgeLab Lifestyle Leaders gathering on “An Evolving Sense of Home.”
ADAPTING TO A NEW HOME

OBJECTIVE
A contextual understanding of the multifaceted transition of moving into a retirement community (topic identified with the Lifestyle Leaders).

METHOD
Observation and inquiry regarding routines older adults adopt after moving into retirement communities.

OBSERVATIONS
01 / Fellow Rustling
“If I can’t sleep I will come over to the window to see if my neighbor’s light is on.”

02 / Secondary Non-verbal Cues
“There is an echo when she gets to the gym that lets me know it is time to get off the phone.”

03 / On My Own Schedule
“Dinner is early but I enjoy picking up food and eating it when my show is on.”

04 / Recommendations
“When I first moved here a friend was moving away. She called all of her doctors and transferred her ‘spot’ to me.”

When mapping these observed tools to the transition model, there are tools for navigating change that can fit into more than one transition phase category though, there tends to be a dominate category each tool is serving.

01 / connection
02 / direction, then connection
03 / choice, then continuity
04 / focus

DISCOVERY

EXPERIMENT

IMAGES CREDITED TO: UNSPLASHED.COM

2nd reference to the value of secondary intuitive cues.

(p.45)

(p.72)
"I use these heart stickers to pick one day a week to see my daughter. This way I have control over the best timing to break up my week."

**DISCOVERY**

**ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS**

01 / new beginnings
For many, the focus is on what is “ending” more than the opportunity for new beginnings. There is an opportunity to focus on and celebrate new beginnings.

02 / emotional support
A feeling of ambient connection and support is important, especially across distances. This is different from direct verbal communication, as it is purely an emotional undertone of support.

In moments of change, three things are more consciously valued than guidance: control, routine and community.

03 / control before acceptance
Control over decisions and routines go a long way to create a sense of home and acceptance.

04 / transitions ripples
Moving to a retirement community brings about ripples of change that affect one’s sense of identity, relationships, and possessions.

A system that provides control and connection for both the participants and her daughter.
Responses at the MIT Age Lab and conversations with retirement community residents drew many parallels to Alyssa’s and my current living situations. We both attend school in Providence, RI while our significant others live a few hours away in Brooklyn, NY. The older adults’ desires for “little reminders” of community, ambient connections and the comfort of routine resonated with us. We reflected on the phone calls with our partners which lack the customary little reminders of our partners’ physical presences, such as a light coming on in another room.

To address this need for a physical embodiment of an absent person’s presence, Alyssa and I created an LED light fixture with a motion sensor. When motion is detected in one home, the light in the other home turns on. Typically I don’t go to bed before my husband, so he placed the motion detector in his bedroom in Brooklyn while I kept the LED light near the sofa where I worked before bed in Providence. This arrangement eliminated the need for him call and verbally tell me he was heading to bed. Instead, when he entered his bedroom at night, the light automatically came on next to my sofa in Providence. When the light came on, I received a hint of his routine, just like when I am with him in Brooklyn, and was reminded that I should go to bed.

This tool offers continuity and connection, both ways of providing respite during a transition.
This model builds on the insights from the Magical Tools of Transition Workshop (p.42) and incorporates learning from all the experiments and cross-disciplinary research.

MODEL FOR DESIGNING TRANSITIONS
The outcome of my research was this model for designing transitions on the left. The type of assistance people need during their transition process rotates through guidance, respite and control.

The model assists designers to create products for people in transition that provide an introduction (guidance), offer a moment to pause from the new experience (respite), and finally give options for ownership (control). Products that meet these needs facilitate acceptance of the transition.

TYPES OF SUPPORT AT EACH PHASE
There are options for how to design can offer support at each phase of the model.

When designing for each mode of support, there are different approaches for designers to choose from.
The transition model represents the order of behavioral needs designers should consider when designing for a life transition. These insights were generated by observing how people accomplished a range of life transitions. My next objective was to apply this design method to one area of need.

Objective:
Specify a transitional need that could have a positive social impact if designed for.

Method:
Secondary research to identify an impactful population and behavior to design for.

Frame clear opportunity statements.

Distill previous insights into ‘how might we’ statements to design against.
SECONDARY RESEARCH

USA vs. OECD COUNTRIES

WOMEN’S PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

EMPLOYED WOMEN
25-54 Years Old

Parental leave and part-time work contributed to an increase in the percentage of women working in many OECD countries, at the same time that the percentage of women working in the USA decreased. [7]

75% of American women who leave the workforce do so for child care. [8]

PERCENTAGE OF MANAGERS BY GENDER

However, these policies do not fully facilitate equality. Though a lower percentage of women continue working in the USA, those who do continue working are more likely than women in other OECD countries to see a professional trajectory similar to that of their male counterparts. [9]

Part-time work and traditional parental leave keep more women in the workplace but do not facilitate equal professional opportunity.
CASE STUDY

SWEDEN

THE VALUE OF DISTRIBUTING CARE

1974  Sweden was one of the first countries to switch from offering maternity leave to offering parental leave, however, only 6% of men took a leave. Women continued to take leave often due to tradition and earning lower pay than male partners (perpetuating the pay difference).

1995  Policy was enacted that families lost one month of government subsidies if the father did not take parental leave. Soon, 80% of men took a leave.

2010  Research has found that a mother’s future earnings increase an average of 7% each month the father takes of parental leave.*

* One explanation states that the care confidence the father gains during parental leave naturally increases the abilities to share parental responsibility. [10]

OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPACT

This research points to an opportunity to create tools to help networks distribute child care and simultaneously distribute professional opportunity.

Please note that opportunity statements will be written using the 'how might we' convention abbreviated as 'HMW'.

Distributing child care across a network also helps to distribute professional opportunity.

HMW ... distribute child care across a network in order to create professional opportunity for the primary broker of care.
One person’s transition distress can ripple throughout a network. A change in environment often causes subsequent change in routine. A feeling of ambient connection and emotional support is as important as guidance. Distributing care and confirming execution can be just as taxing as providing the care.

Design for the source rather than the ripples (e.g., the child’s drop-off concerns vs. the parents’ anticipation of the meltdown).

Design to preserve routine during the change in environment.

Design an intuitive method for sharing support beyond verbal communication.

Design a low effort system to confirm child is safe.

Having identified the potential for impact of focusing on new parents’ transitions back into the workforce by distributing childcare across a network, I used insights from experiments 2 to break the larger design opportunity into more specific HMW statements.

HMW ... distribute child care across a network in order to create professional opportunity for the primary broker of care.

01 / HMW ... establish a consistent drop-off routine across a network of child care?

02 / HMW ... allow parents and children to feel directly connected without going through the network of child care?

03 / HMW ... reliably share and confirm information across a network of child care?
TESTING

Having framed three distinct opportunity areas, I designed and tested concepts to begin observing how users respond to objects meant to assist their transitions.

Objective:
Uncover insights specific to users behavior that go beyond their verbal awareness.

Method:
Quickly put concepts in the hands of my intended users to get their feedback and observe their behavior.
ROUND TRIP NECKLACES

01 / HMW... establish a consistent drop-off routine across a network of child care?

This inquiry focused on Georgie’s difficulty with day care drop-off, which stemmed from her uncertainty as to who was going to pick her up (p. 55). Working with her mom, we created a morning ritual to help Georgie remember who is picking her up. We designed in response to two observations: 1. Georgie’s recognition of her mother’s necklaces symbolizing ‘work’ 2. Georgie’s association of gifts with the gift giver (p. 49).

INTERVENTION

Each member of Georgie’s child care network gifted her a uniquely colored necklace. Before leaving for day care, Georgie and her mom discussed who would pick her up that afternoon and Georgie wore the corresponding necklace to day care as a reminder. For the first two weeks, she was excited to use the necklaces in this way. After two weeks there was a shift; Georgie only wanted to wear the ‘mom’ or ‘dad’ necklace regardless of who was picking her up. Georgie had learned that someone would always be there to pick her up. Once that safety was established, she was more interested in feeling connected with her primary grown-ups.

Initially the necklaces were worn and valued for guidance.

Once Georgie developed trust in her care network, she was more interested using the necklaces for connection (respite).
Referencing objects helped Georgie understand and remember who would pick her up each day. Initially, this was important information.

The lasting value of the necklaces was to console Georgie that she was on someone’s mind during the day.

Guidance was important at the beginning. The need for guidance diminished, but the need for personal connection remained.
**02 TESTING**

**PERSONAL POCKETS**

02 / HMW... allow parents and children to feel connected without going through networks of care?

To investigate how kids and adults communicate, I shadowed day care routines. This investigation uncovered two insightful workarounds:

1. Parents putting notes in their kids’ lunch boxes so they would have a reminder of connection before nap time at school.
2. Kids shuttling a small ‘treasure’ between school and home to create a sense of home and share their experiences with their adults (p.51).

**INTERVENTION**

To amplify these moments of connection that involve “shuttling”, I added hidden pockets in stuffed animals and shared them with two families. One family was going through a divorce. The son was curious about where he would sleep each night, and the pocket inside the stuffed animal allowed him to securely carry his favorite Lego character with him to either home, and also bring home origami to show to his mom. One day, he forgot his Lego character, so his mom put three gummy bears in the pocket. The son was intentional about the moment that he ate each gummy bear and then reported each moment to his mom the next time he saw her (one at play time, one at nap time, and one at dad’s house).

The note in the lunch box allowed for a “time release” on the moment of connection – an ideal criteria for a connection lasting over extended time apart.

Limitations create landmarks!

*(top) Observations from doing field research about notes in lunch boxes and the shuttling of treasures to share with grown-ups. (bottom) Personal pockets added into stuffed animals.*
01 / Limits create landmarks
Limiting the quantity of “treasures” made each moment meaningful; the consumption of each gummy bear became a landmark moment to share.

02 / Secret stash makes familiarity
Adding a pocket to the stuffed animal amplified its ability to make unfamiliar environments feel more familiar.

03 / Shuttling to share
Bringing objects back and forth between school and home gives kids a way to share their experiences with adults, which offers an extension to the child’s memory and verbal abilities.

04 / Time release
Communication that happens during the school day, such as the lunchbox note, has extra impact.
To unpack this opportunity area, I needed to understand 1. the type of information being shared across the child care network and 2. the ‘categories’ of care information providers needed.

INTERVENTION
I first asked three parents to map their networks of child care. We then took their key care providers and sorted them across ‘categories’ of care to understand what information they all needed and which information only specific groups of care providers needed. Initially, we conducted this sort in linear columns with care providers needing the most information at the far left and those needing more tailored information at the far right. It quickly became apparent that a Venn diagram structure would better illustrate how information is shared across a network of child care. A familiar pattern emerged that consisted of primary care, secondary care, and care centers (school, day care, camp).
ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

1 / Three network circles
Three core circles of information: primary care, secondary care, and care centers (e.g. school, day care.)

2 / Sharing information to share care
Sharing information across a network of care alleviates the primary care provider from being the only responder to a change in plans.

In moments of routine disruption (e.g. child gets sick, snow day, etc.) the primary care provider often becomes the default backup plan because “it is just easier, I know how to handle it and who to call.” There is an opportunity to share information with all care providers to equalize their ability to respond to a disruption.

3 / Pick up confirmation
The simple act of confirming a pick up reduces the cognitive load on the primary care provider. By contrast, the need to seek out the confirmation is a daily distraction.

A common point of tension is the primary care provider’s desire to confirm that the child has been safely picked up. Without confirmation, this moment in the day is distracting for many primary care providers. This is often an exciting time for the adult on pick-up duty and sending the confirmation of pick-up gets forgotten.
## Child Care Network Personas

### Caitlyn is ...
- Age: 33
- Occupation: Fashion Designer
- Relationship: Married
- Children: 2 y old; 6 m old
- Nanny, grandparents, babysitter, school, husband
- Technology: Iphone, ipad, desktop
- City: Brooklyn, NY

**She wants to:**
- Balance a strong return to work & family duties
- Let her son know she is thinking about him when she is traveling
- Confirm that the network of care is caring for her son

**He wants to:**
- Feel connected with his kids when they are staying with their mother
- Not feel reliant on mother for information about children

### Curt is ...
- Age: 38
- Occupation: Marketing Manager
- Relationship: Divorced
- Children: 6 y old; 2.5 y old
- Ex-wife, babysitter, daycare
- Technology: Iphone, laptop
- City: Providence, RI

### Nana is ...
- Age: 82
- Occupation: Retired
- Relationship: Married
- Grandchildren: 4 (5y, 4, 2y, 6m)
- Iphone, gmail
- City: Providence, RI

**She wants to:**
- Enjoy spending time with her grandson
- Allow her daughter in law to know she is responsible yet not let all of the check-ins get in the way of her time with her grandson

**She wants to:**
- Be able to care for the kids she baby-sits with limited disruption of their parents.
- Have a simple way of finding information for each family she cares for without being inundated with the logistics she is not involved in.
- Share updates about the kids with both parents equally.

### Juliet is ...
- Age: 23
- Occupation: Actress + babysitter
- Relationship: Dating
- Children: 2
- Technology: Iphone, ipad
- City: New York, NY

**She wants to:**
- Balance a strong return to work & family duties
- Let her son know she is thinking about him when she is traveling
- Confirm that the network of care is caring for her son

**She wants to:**
- Feel connected with his kids when they are staying with their mother
- Not feel reliant on mother for information about children
Each opportunity statement inspired a solution. Additionally, I designed an over-arching system for sharing information and distributing child care across a network.

**Objective:**
Design to address each of the HMW statements while using the mode of support suggested in the transition design model (p.70).

**Method:**
Ideate around insights and user feedback in order to develop a useful product.
The following pages detail four outcomes inspired by the opportunity areas. This page offers an overview of the three products I designed and the larger Care Share system they work within. You will see that each component offers a unique mode of support and that they collectively create a system that offers a full range of transition tools.

As I brought the products through the design process, it became apparent that each object could offer a secondary mode of support. This finding is discussed in more detail on p.122.
When I get dropped off …

Testing Round Trip Necklaces suggested there is a need for a tool to explain the child care network to the child up front and to provide the child with a long term reminder of their connection to care givers.

During a site visit, I observed a ritual of a mother drawing smiling faces on her own and her child’s hands. They “kissed” faces goodbye, which left them with visual reminders of each other throughout the day. This effective ritual is intangible and not easily shared across the child care network, making it difficult for less frequent care providers to replicate it. Infrequent care providers’ inability to replicate normal rituals is the very scenario that causes drop-offs to become most challenging (p.57).

OUTCOME
In response, I designed two nesting bird stamps (one adult, one child) to be kept at day care entrances so that all adults in a child care network can equally participate in the ritual.

The stamps provide drop-off guidance for less frequent care providers.
TESTING

I shared the stamps with Tamara Nolte, the Director of Curriculum Development at Kidville, and Katie Fairhead, the Afterschool Manager at Montessori Community School of RI.

Tamara appreciated having a visual reminder of the support network and a prompt to discuss with children that their care providers always return at the end of the day. Similarly, Katie emphasized the value of having the stamps in adult/child pairs. Her goal is to teach kids a healthy internal monologue. Having the stamps in pairs allows adults to model how they use the stamps to remember their children throughout the day.

APPLICABLE FEEDBACK

01 / Internal Monologue
The child/adult pairing encourages adults to model a healthy internal monologue.

02 / Accompanying Story
Stories are a memorable friendly way to communicate the intended internal monologue ...

03 / Bird as Metaphor
Birds facilitate a convenient discussion about returning to the nest at the end of the day.

OUTCOME
Illustrated children’s book describing the product features and suggested internal monologue.

I say my hellos, put away my things.

and before we say goodbye there is stamp for me and a stamp for you.

When I get dropped off I always have a reminder that I am loved.
When we are apart ...

Testing Personal Pocket, and mapping the current ways parents and kids connect throughout the day suggested a need for parents and kids to be able to connect directly over an extended period of time and distance. Additionally, insights about the value of non-verbal support, along with a practical desire to minimize disruption when communicating from care centers, influenced the designed interaction (p.46, 70).

The adult user most familiar with this mode of communication does not see their child daily due to lifestyle limitations such as business trips or divorce (p.94).

**OUTCOME**

Bird Calls is a direct communication system between primary care givers and children which allows kids to send a pre-set number of hugs daily and allows parents to return hugs. Additionally there is a secret pocket for sharing treasures.
HOW IT WORKS
The child’s component is a stuffed animal bird with an insert in the wing comprising a pressure sensor (hug sender), LED display (hug counter), and vibrating motor (hug receiver).

The parent’s component is either a glance-able bird key chain or iphone application. The key chain wing glows when a hug has been received and hugs back when the wing is pressed. iPhone notifications perform the same functions and also allow for settings to always return a hug within a certain window of time. The parent will still be alerted, but comforted to know the child will never be waiting too long for a return hug. Additionally, parents have the ability to customize the number of hugs children can send each day.

TESTING
The prototypes were shared with a four year old accustomed to his primary care provider traveling one night a week for work. He was excited about the idea of connecting with his mom during her night away and emphasized the value of receiving the response hug. His mother expressed the value in “being able to remind him that I am thinking of him, even though we are far apart.” Additionally, the hidden pocket for treasures was a hit.
When we are apart, I can send you hugs and I feel you hug me back.

We hide treasures in a secret pocket to share with each other.

When we are apart, I know we are connected.
When I am away from home ...

Circles of Care demonstrated that sharing information is one of the most critical steps in sharing child care. Pick-up confirmation is a small piece of information with a high impact for freeing up the primary child care broker’s cognitive load. Right now, confirmation requires substantial effort on the part of the person performing the pick-up because of the distraction inherent in the moment. Any product to reduce the effort required for pick-up confirmation would be desirable and impactful. (p.117)

**OUTCOME**

Birds of a feather is a simple system that places a Bluetooth key chain on a child’s backpack. Each adult in the network of care has a corresponding key chain or phone application so that when a care provider is within a few meters of the child, blue tooth passively alerts the network that the child has been picked up.

Outcomes:

1. Share information to share care
2. Pick-up confirmation
3. Three network circles

(p.95)

**OUTCOME**

The automatic nature of the messaging is reminiscent of the lighthouse (p.69) and non-verbal communication, advocated by Damour and Rose (p.44).
When I am away from home...

my flock of grown-ups stays connected

and they know when I have been picked up.

When I am away from home my grown-ups make sure I get home safely.
when I am away from home ...

Circles of Care also demonstrated that sharing information is one of the most critical steps in sharing child care. After pick-up confirmation, the next highest impact and lowest effort interventions involve the ability to share information about child care providers and their shifts. There was an opportunity to create a digital system that supported the app features from Bird Calls and Birds of a Feather as well as to build out more robust scheduling features for the whole network.

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A website for the Care Share system highlighting the value of each individual product.

PRODUCT IMAGES: MC LAUGHLIN, 2017

PROFILE PICTURE CREDITS: BLACKISONLINE.COM; MYTIMEINPARIS.COM; MOMMENTUM.ORG; BROOKLYNBORNHOME.COM

Care Share app screens.

Brokering Care Across Networks

- streamlines referrals and encourages care to be shared
- eliminates the priority of the order in care
- facilitates direct connected with children

Components

The system works by going over what the opportunity is across networks, and determining what works.

Distributing Care

ensuring that each task is covered

Continued Child Connection

Confirmation of Child Safety

A website for the Care Share system highlighting the value of each individual product.
CONCLUSION
SUCCESSFUL CO-CREATION ENGAGES A PARTICIPANT’S CURIOSITY FOR SELF-DISCOVERY.

I have always believed in participatory design and this investigation further solidified the value of the approach for me. Navigating transitions is ambiguous, which makes it difficult for people to describe and predict their experiences. Designing openly with participants over a period of time kept them generative and engaged long after formal “sessions” were over. Informative insights, such as limiting the number of gummy bears in the Personal Pockets (p.86), came from participants who curiously continued to observe their experiences and motivations.

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION ALLOWS FOR VALIDATION BEYOND CONVERSATION.

It is hard to have full awareness of an experience while one is in the middle of it (p.24), so it is important to observe behaviors in addition to discussing them. I observed this in “discovery” while learning from new parents (p.51) and older adults (p.66). The parenthood daily diaries and Lifestyle Leader focus groups helped me identify important scenarios to focus on. However, I needed to perform ethnographic studies of day care drop-off and site visits to retirement communities to tease out behavioral details that were not consciously available to participants. While surveys and workshops can help designers get a high-level understanding of a scenario, insight comes from drilling-down into contextual observation.

DESIGNERS BENEFIT FROM REMAINING SOLUTION AGNOSTIC.

As designers, we get to interact with problems that have no current solution. Because we work to unearth new approaches and opportunities, an effective solution is most likely going to be an unfamiliar one. For this reason, we must act as open observers rather than focused validators. We do generate and test ideas, but we do so while holding them lightly. When I started “testing,” I had preconceived thoughts about the distractions of keeping parents and children connected throughout the day. After hearing a divorced parent describe maneuvering tense personal relationships in order to connect with their children (p.92), after observing the impact of the lunch time notes at day care (p.88), and after seeing the rich interpersonal exchanges sparked by bring treasures home (p.54, 89), I was able to see that participant-based insights were grounded in experiences in a way that my personal opinions were not. Hypotheses are necessary, but being hypothesis-driven is deadly.

LEARN LATERALLY.

To create a broadly applicable model of how objects can support transitioners, I categorized common behaviors that I observed across three different life transitions. Studying a range of experiences helped me see past circumstantial details and identify larger umbrella categories. Helping primary child care providers return to work by applying techniques learned from recent immigrants adapting to life in an American high school helped me to approach the problem with a fresh perspective. With more time, I would like to continue this approach and to continue learning from other systems of care distribution, such as hospitals.
In its conception, the transition model was intended to capture people's sequential need for guidance, respite, and control during their life transitions and enable designers to address those needs through objects. However, I learned that the transition process can cycle between these separate phases (guidance, respite, and control) multiple times before reaching acceptance. Hence, the loop.

Having now applied using this model in my own design process, I am convinced that the ordering of the modes of support is accurate and useful for understanding what a person is looking for during a transition. I initially thought that transition objects could support only one mode of support: either guidance, respite, or control. However, I learned that although objects of transition often tend to favor one capability, an effective tool offers all three forms of support. Every tool must be a micro version of the full loop, even if it favors one mode. This is because, for the tool to be accepted by the user, it needs to introduce itself (guidance), allow for a moment of pause (respite), and provide the user with an option to make an independent decision (control) to allow people to complete their transition.

As an example, the Bird Calls communication tool primarily provides respite in the form of connection. However, its introductory story book and structure of only letting parents respond to hugs, and not initiate them, provides guidance and helps users engage with the tool. The user’s ability to customize the number of hugs sent and received, and the secret treasure pocket, provide control. These features allow users to feel a sense of ownership that will build their confidence during their transition.

I hope designers can learn from and build on this investigation of how to design acceptance of change. There is an endless supply of difficult transitions to help people navigate to stable ground and positive changes to be instigated in the world.
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INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

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END NOTES


