Designing Technology for Major Life Events

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Abstract
Technology has become increasingly prominent in the ways that we orient towards major life events, yet there remains a focus on designing for "everyday" use that is generally agnostic towards, but inspired by, these events. This one-day workshop proposes to collect and explore research and design work that is focusing on technology during major life events such as births, weddings, deaths, divorces, residential moves, retirement, and so on. The outcomes of the workshop will include an edited collection of work that places various life events and their associated technologies in conversation with one another.

Author Keywords
Major life events; design; birth; weddings; death; divorce; moving.

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Introduction
In recent years, interest in the intersection of technology and major life events has grown within the CHI community and HCI more broadly. This has been partially fueled by more access to consumer technologies such as mobile phones and computers,

and partially due to the continued presence of these devices over longer and longer periods of time. No longer relegated to the workplace or to niche application areas, one might say there is a sense that we are growing and living alongside a new class of technologies. A consequence of this is that these same "everyday" technologies are also being employed during major life-changing events in the personal sphere, such as a birth, death, divorce, retirement, wedding, and so on.

While no two people experience a life event in the same way, and what one even considers to be a defining life event can vary from person to person, HCI researchers have begun to explore a series of life events that might be considered "major." We very briefly identify just a few of these below.

Births and Parenthood
Recent research has identified opportunities for technology to play a role in the lives of new mothers [3], and the ways that their social media use changes following a birth [1].

Break-ups, divorce, partner abuse
A range of work has begun to examine how technology is used when there are breakdowns in romantic couples. Sas and Whittaker report how people dispose of digital objects following a break-up [10]. Other work has focused on how technology is taken up in the context of a divorced couple's arrangements, especially with respect to shared custody and raising children among multiple households [9, 13] When break-ups aren't amicable -- or are even abusive -- technology creates unusual situations where those who were once

connected with technology find needs to create separation, distance, and safety [2].

End of life
Research has focused on the end of life from the standpoint of the lived bereavement experience – that is, how people manage the death of a loved one [5], and has additionally explored how people might pass down data or other "technology heirlooms" following a death [9].

Weddings and marriages
Recent work has outlined the ways that weddings, engagements, and marriages are all times where technology plays a pivotal role from the planning process to documenting the special occasion [6].

Changing residential landscapes
Moving house - whether for personal, professional, or financial reasons - can be a time when people disconnect from some technologies, and rely upon others more heavily. Shklovski, Kraut, and Cummings discuss differences between phone calls and emails in terms to maintaining friendships following a move [11]. Smith et al. examine how students transition from home to college and technology's role in managing relationships with their parents [13]. Le Dantec et al. have investigated how technology can be deployed into shelters for mothers experiencing a bout of periodic homelessness as a means for them to forge connections to community resources.

We invite contributions that relate to one (or more) of these major life events, or others that have not been addressed in published work to date (e.g., graduations, coming of age rites, career milestones). We also invite

submissions that address these types of life events from a complementary perspective; for example, many studies of health technologies examine how to design technologies to support recovery following a major health event [7].

Workshop Goals

This workshop aims to bring together researchers and designers who are working across different major life events in order to determine what might be learned from one another, and how to develop systems for these exceptional circumstances.

- Identify a set of commonalities across various life events that could serve as a potential design resource. Critical to this is establishing a set of terms and frameworks for discussing this topic.

- Identify aspects that are unique or limited to specific life events, and discuss how design might be adapted to tailor towards each of these events separately.

- Help participants advance their own research by learning from the challenges or opportunities that others have had in pursuing work on major life events.

- Discuss common methodological approaches. Are there instruments or toolkits (e.g., existing questionnaires or scales) that we can all use? Is there a way for us to share resources, such as protocols?

- Better articulate the differences between major life events and more "everyday" or mundane

uses of technology, and how technology could smoothly transition between these.

Issues to be Addressed

We suggest the following issues to begin discussion but encourage a range of topics on the day. First, we would like to question technology's role during major life events. Looking across life events we see that technology sometimes plays a particular role:

- *Technology as a constant despite change.* When life circumstances are shifting, technology can sometimes provide a "place" that remains consistent and familiar. This might be at times a comfort, and other times, a place that should be moved to arm's length. For example, an online gaming community might preserve a sense of friendship despite a residential move, but a person starting a new job might want to avoid their Facebook page.

- *Technology as resource for adaptation to a "new normal."* Technology can provide the resources and social connections needed to deal with the pressures, joys, or sorrows of a major life event. For example the internet may provide a resource for wedding planning and information regarding health conditions, or allow people to meet peers who have gone through similar life events.

- *Technology as harmful or problematic.* In some circumstances, technology's presence can be unwanted or even harmful. Using a mobile phone during a funeral or wedding might be inappropriate. Facebook might suggest to a victim of abuse that he or she befriends their

former abusive partner. Thinking through the ways that our lives change in the way that we design technology becomes increasingly important in these circumstances.

The workshop will also address methodological issues attendant to the design of technology for major life events. These include:

- *Ethics of dealing with sensitive situations*. Many major life events include heightened emotions and sensitivities that researchers and designers must bear in mind in order to recruit and work successfully with participants. The workshop will offer a place to exchange advice and best practices regarding these situations.

- *Methods for studying transitions.* Studying the long-term circumstances preceding, and ramifications following, a major life event can be difficult due to the longitudinal nature of the research. Methods for studying these transitions will be discussed.

- *Designing for transitions*. The workshop will provide a forum to discuss best practices and pitfalls in both the process of design and during exploratory deployments.

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